

John 1:19-34 Jesus our Passover Lamb and the Son of God

After John the Baptist pointed to the One who was coming, Jesus walks onto centre stage: John saw Jesus coming towards him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John 1:19-34 is all about Jesus, who for the first time in the gospel is mentioned by name, as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and the Son of God (John 1:34), and by implication the King of Israel.

The passage references Jesus' baptism, although as usual John is scant on the details the Synoptic gospels fill us in on (see Matthew 3:13-17). John simply says, *And John bore witness: I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him* (John 1:32). When Jesus came towards John, John immediately recognises Him as the One he had been preaching about (John 1:30 cf John 1:15).

1. Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

John's gospel portrays Jesus as the Passover Lamb. In Jesus' day there were three pilgrim feasts when hundreds of thousands of devotees went up to Jerusalem. They were,

- Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Pesach)
- The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (Shavout)
- The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (Sukkot)

Passover, which more or less coincides with our Easter was the most important of these feasts. It was commanded by God 1500 years earlier, even before the Israelites left Egypt. God sent 10 judgments or plagues on Egypt. God said that after the last plague, the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh would finally let His people go. The angel of death would 'pass over' the homes of the believing Israelites if they put a special sign on their doorposts. The special sign was to be the shed blood of a lamb. The lamb was to be slaughtered on the eve of Passover the day before the Exodus. The lamb was to be male, one year old and without blemish or disease. It was to be eaten at the Passover meal, but the blood was to be daubed on the doorframes of the homes of the Israelite families. Symbolically the blood of the lamb covered their sins and would save them from God's judgment. So really, their salvation didn't depend on being Abraham's descendants (ethnicity), but it depended on the blood of the lamb. This in turn depended on obedient faith to God's word.

There was nothing magic in the blood. The book of Hebrews tells us that the blood of an animal can't save us (Hebrews 10:4). But the blood of the lamb was a prophetic picture pointing to the real Agent of salvation, God's own firstborn Son, and it was on this basis that God saved them. It's the blood of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, that saves us, and covers our sins so that we will not come under the judgment of God we deserve.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God (1Peter 3:18). He died in our place: this is called substitutionary atonement. Jesus promised, *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day* (John 6:40). The Last Supper was a Passover meal; Jesus died, was buried and raised to life at Passover; Jesus is our Passover Lamb who has been sacrificed for us (1Corinthians 5:7).

It is interesting that even to this day it is traditional for a child to open the door after the Passover supper. Why? To see if Elijah might be standing there! (Malachi 4:5). Jewish people have always believed God would send redemption at Passover. So when John proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of

God he would certainly have got the people's attention. Now we know the background it should get our attention as well. The problem is that often we don't understand that we are in need of redemption. We need the work of the Spirit to convict us of sin, to reveal the eternal consequences of our sin, and to reveal to us the righteousness of God (John 16:8).

2. Jesus the Son of God

John testifies that Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:34). He says twice, *I myself did not know Him* (John 1:31,33), and in the context I understand this to mean that John could not know Jesus except by revelation from God (cf Matthew 16:17). But the Lord revealed to John that Messiah, who baptises in the Holy Spirit, was the one on whom he would see the Spirit descend and remain (John 1:33). This happened at Jesus' baptism, and John bears witness, *I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him* (John 1:32).

When we think of the dove we are most probably reminded of the story of Noah. The dry ground on which the Spirit came to rest was a symbol of hope, peace and safety for the future. The Spirit *like a dove* came to rest on Jesus, who is the ultimate symbol of hope, peace and safety for the future (John 14:27).

The Synoptic gospels tell us that at Jesus' baptism there was a voice from heaven: *You are my Son; with you I am well pleased* (Mark 1:11). The words '*You are my Son*' are from Psalm 2:7. Psalm 2 was a coronation Psalm. The king of Israel was the anointed one (Psalm 2:2), a son of God (Psalm 2:7) and king (Psalm 2:6). On even a cursory reading, it is clear that none of the kings of Israel fulfilled the description given. It is a Messianic Psalm and points to an Anointed One, the Son of God and King of Israel who is also King of nations, yet to come. The New Testament identifies Jesus as this Messiah (e.g. Acts 13:33). The anointing of the Spirit on Jesus at His baptism was a clear sign to John that indeed Jesus was this Messiah.

The words '*with you I am well pleased*' are from Isaiah 42:1, *here is my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations*. In this prophecy Messiah is the servant of the Lord, anointed with the Spirit, and whose reach will extend to the Gentile nations.

So we can see how the coming of the Spirit like a dove on Jesus was for John a sign that Jesus was the promised Son of God and King of Israel. We might note that Nathanael comes to the same conclusion a few verses later (John 1:49).

The Westminster Catechism (17th century) asks: *How does Christ fulfil the office of King?* It answers: *Christ fulfils the office of a king, in subduing us to Himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies*. The most important function of a king is to defend and provide safety for his people (or sheep.) This is what King Jesus does for His people. He protects, defends, sustains and keeps us by his power (1Peter 1:5).

All Israel's kings failed to one extent or another, even the best ones like David. All human leadership will fail, but Jesus never fails. He is the sinless and eternal Son of God who became our Passover Lamb, giving up His life for us on the cross and rising again. In doing so he defeated sin the devil and death itself.

In John 11:25 Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

Do you believe?