

# The Voice – *John 1:19-34*

**Introduction** – Who do you listen to? Whose voice catches your ear and your soul most deeply? Are you listening for voices to affirm you, coddle you, validate you and your feelings? Or are you listening for voices that open your eyes and show you a way you never saw because you never knew where you really were and where you really needed to go? What happens to you when you hear, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*”?

**Voices in the Wilderness** (vv19-23) – The Evangelist takes us to the ministry of John the Baptist in a town east of the Jordan river (v28). From the other Gospels we can conclude that this envoy of priests and Levites have come to see John some six weeks after Jesus has already been baptized and went off into the wilderness to experience 40 days of fasting and temptations from the devil. Matthew tells us that “*Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him*” (Matt 3:5) and apparently this has gone on for some time. The priests and Levites from Jerusalem come to question John. They were probably sent by the Sanhedrin (“the Jews”), part of the high priest’s group and would include the temple “police,” overseeing the civic responsibilities of the nation. They also were the ones authorized to “cleanse” Israel and so John was on their turf.

Historians say that first century Jerusalem was rife with false Messiahs, and this may be why John begins by emphatically denying that he is the Christ (v20). There were also expectations that Elijah would return as a forerunner to the Messiah (Mal 4:4-6) and Moses had promised a Prophet like himself (Deut 18:18). This person would come with a renewal cleansing (Isaiah 52:15, Ezek 36:24-28, Zech 13:1). And here was John, in the place where Moses had ended his career and where Elijah had been taken up into heaven – just beyond the Jordan. Here was John, right at the place where the Jordan river was parted twice, once for the successor to Moses and once for the successor to Elijah. Yet, no, John was neither of those (v21).

And so, the delegation asks John to tell them who he is. His answer is to quote Isaiah 40:3, a passage where the Old Testament prophet is calling for a way to be cleared through the desert/wilderness for the return of the covenant people from exile. John had brought his ministry out into the wilderness beyond the Jordan because Jerusalem was spiritually in the wilderness, lost in a spiritual exile. Remember, “*This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe*” (1:7). John speaks obliquely to these Jewish leaders knowing that they weren’t searching for the truth. They, who knew the scriptures, were not listening to the voice of the scriptures.

**Voices Among You** (vv24-28) – And now those who were with the Pharisees jump in (v24). Where is his authorization then to baptize? These were of the group who zealously oversaw and grew the traditions of outward observance of the law who therefore needed no repentance. Baptisms were not new to them. Gentile converts were baptized. But why would John be baptizing Jews? John answers in such a way as to say, “*if you really want to know, the Voice the whole world will soon hear is just around the corner.*” He is coming after me even though He is really before me (v27, 1:15).

John goes on to describe how much greater Jesus is than himself. John baptizes with water, but the One “*who stands among you*” (could Jesus have been right there?), you don’t know. Jesus will later tell these teachers of the Scripture that although the search those scrolls, they refuse to see that they speak of Him (5:39). These things should all be coming together for them, but such are the ways of the prophets and those who refuse to listen to the prophets. Here they are concerned with John, but there is one coming whose sandal strap he was not even worthy to untie (there was a rabbinical teaching to curb the worship of rabbis. Rabbis could have their students serve them with many menial tasks, but never so slavish as to remove their sandals). John states that not only was it not beneath him to do so to Jesus, but that it was far above him. So great is the glory of Christ. But we have no record that any of these leaders hung around to see what happens the very next day.

**A Voice to the World** (vv29-34) – Only John’s gospel records these words of the Baptist. Jesus, having been baptized and sent into the wilderness, returns to John. John, having continued to bear witness of Jesus, now at last sees Him and proclaims, “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” He is the substitutionary lamb that Abraham told his son God would provide (Gen 22:7-8). He is the Passover Lamb whose bones were not broken, and whose blood was put over our doorposts so that the angel of death would Passover. He is the true lamb represented by every morning and evening sacrifice

(Ex 28:38-39). And He is that Lamb that satisfies the full and holy wrath of God for the whole world (1 John 2:2). He was (and is) everything they (and you) are looking for.

John baptized with water. But when he baptized Jesus, the Spirit descended and remained on Jesus, identifying Him as the anointed Son of God. God told John that this is the One Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (vv32-34). What does that mean? The baptism of the Spirit leads you out of the wilderness/exile life without God, through the waters of baptism and identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and into the new life, new heart, spiritual communion with the Father.

**A Voice of Confidence** - *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* Not an offer so much as a declaration of what Jesus would do. In fact, it is what He is doing. Of all the reasons that Jesus came into the world, became a Man to suffer and die, the first reason the Evangelist wants you to see and hear, is that He came to take care of your sin. He received the baptism of repentance, identifying with your repentance, perfecting your imperfect repentance. He went off into the wilderness to experience temptation and exile, that He might be the perfect mediator and intercessor for you. And then He returned to be the sacrificial and substitutionary Lamb to “take away” all of your sin.

**A Voice of Witness** - *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* How simple can a witness be, or at least begin to be. Sin-drenched people need to hear simple words, *“your sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ.”* *“Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

**A Voice to Repent Now** - *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* Christians, covenant people, sometimes get lost in the wilderness. It’s not that you need to be saved, but it is that you need to be saved again in a certain way. Jesus is that Way. Turn to Him (that’s repentance) and He will take away your sin. Only He can.

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