



Sermon

Revealing Jesus

John 1:29-42; Isaiah 49:1-7

15 January 2023

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The Old Testament reading today is one of the Isaiah's four Servant Songs. They are addressed to a servant who will act for God. We heard one last week from Isaiah 42, the second just now, while the others are found in Isaiah 50:4–11 and Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

There has been much debate about the identity of the servant. Is it the people of Israel? Some things do not fit. Is it a prophet? No, it is more like a king. Yet some parts seem to describe a priest and under Jewish law kings could not be priests. There is even explicit reference to the servant offering up his own life.

The identity of the servant only makes sense when you allow that Isaiah could be talking of a future person who is a Jew, a priest, a king, and an offering for sin. The person who fills all of these roles is Jesus Christ.

Both last week and today, we heard the servant called, "A Light to the Gentiles/nations."

We are in the season of Epiphany which focuses our attention on the revelation of Christ to the nations. There was a progressive revelation of Jesus.

There were prophetic statements preparing the people to expect him. Many of those also involve light – for example:

- *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...*¹
- *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.*²
- *... the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death...*³
- *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*

¹ Isaiah 9:1ff

² Isaiah 60:1

³ Luke 1:78-79

- *For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles ...⁴*

Last week, we focussed on the Magi being drawn to see the new-born Jesus - and so the revelation to the Gentiles started.

[Jesus was revealed by the Holy Spirit.](#)

Thirty years passed and in today's Gospel reading, Jesus appeared on the public scene when he was baptised by John at the River Jordan. John tells us that this was the reason that he came baptising with water – to reveal Jesus to Israel.

The following day John the Baptist gave testimony – he told the people what happened. He announced to the people who Jesus was. How did he name him? – as the Lamb of God. Why that title? Put 'lamb' and 'God' in the same sentence and first century Jews would think of sacrifice: lambs were sacrificed. That becomes even stronger when John added that Jesus would take away the sin of the world. Surely, it is a reference to the sin sacrifices of Israel.

John had the revelation that Jesus would be a sacrifice for the sin of the world. A sacrifice – we think of that as something that costs us a lot. But that is not the original sense. A sacrifice was not merely a gift of money or an offering.

It's like the pig and the hen considering a plate of bacon and eggs. For the hen an egg is an offering; for the pig the ham involves sacrifice!

A sacrifice is something killed and offered to a god. For the Jews, God had provided the sacrificial system as a model of what Christ was going to do. It represented the many facets of his offering of himself. There was a dying in place of the sinner. There was a punishment of sin, a dedication to God. All this was modelled in the various Old Testament sacrifices - all this Jesus would fulfil on the cross.

John named Jesus of Nazareth as the Lamb of God who would die for the sin of the world.

John testified that Jesus was the Son of God. He was not just a wandering Jewish rabbi who got killed – this was and is the Son of God.

In verse 30, John asserted, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." This is something of a riddle. John was six months older than Jesus. How could Jesus come before him? John means Jesus is eternal – he came existed before John did because he is eternal - God himself.

- Do you know him as the sinless offering who died in your place on that terrible cross? Do you know him?
- Do you know him as the Son of God?
- Do you know him as the eternal God?
- Do you know him?

God revealed to John that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit.⁵

It is the Spirit of God, who reveals to mankind Jesus and who he is. On the Alpha course, it is when we pray for the Holy Spirit to fill people that they deepen in relationship with God the Father and Jesus.

⁴ Luke 2:32

⁵ John 1:33

Do you know that filling with the Holy Spirit? Has he revealed Jesus to you? Do you know him?

Picking up again from verse 35, the next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

What is the response when you encounter the Lamb of God? These disciples of John the Baptist heard John saying, "Look do you see him over there – that is the Lamb of God!" And they followed Jesus. They wanted to know more about him.

Have you heard and chosen to follow? It is not enough to have information, "Oh, Jesus is the Son of God the saviour of the world that's interesting. (Yawn)" It is such an astounding statement that it ought to be embraced with all your being or rejected as totally false depending on whether it is true or false. If it is true, you have to follow him. Are you following him?

These men were disciples of John. A disciple is a student - a follower. The disciples of a Rabbi would literally walk in his footsteps. They would keep close to him. They would try to experience life as he did. There are stories of Jewish disciples following their Rabbi even into the bathroom to learn how he cleaned his teeth so they can be like him in everything.

Those two tag along behind Jesus and soon he turns to them and asks them what they want. Have you observed that God sometimes asks people what seem to be obvious questions? God never asks a question because he does not know the answer. His questions are to get us to state our position, intentions and wishes. What do you want as you follow Jesus?

What these two wanted was to know where he was staying. It was a way of asking if they might sit with him and they are invited to come and see and they remain with him. These words are all the language of discipleship: follow, come and see, remain.

Verse 40: Telling others

As soon as people realise who Jesus is, they tell others. John has a revelation and tells the crowd. The first two disciples no sooner start to follow Jesus, than they tell others. Andrew goes to find his brother, Simon, to bring him to Jesus.

The Apostle John is making sure we know disciples spread the word about Jesus. This is stupendously good news and it needs to be shared. John told Andrew; Andrew told Simon and so on. Who are you telling about Jesus?

Barnabas Fund is an organisation which supports persecuted Christians. I heard the New Zealand leader speak about Christians who are tortured to make them deny Christ. She said, they say, "You can do anything you like to me, you can kill me but I will not deny Christ." She went on to explain that this gives her courage to speak about Jesus in New Zealand because the cost, which is limited to embarrassment at most, is so small in comparison.

Who would you go to and say, "I want you to meet the most amazing person ever?"

What might you say about Jesus? Well John gives us a series of titles in this section. It is an amazing list:

- Jesus (29)
- Lamb of God (29)
- One who baptises with the Holy Spirit (33)
- Chosen son of God (34)
- Rabbi/teacher (38)

- Christ/ Messiah (41)

That surely gives you something to say about him!

I said there was a progressive revealing of Christ to more and more people. After Jesus' ministry, his death, resurrection and ascension, the knowledge of Jesus spread to the neighbouring nations and gentiles started to turn to Christ. And so is fulfilled the word we heard from Isaiah 49:6:

"I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

New Zealand is on the far side of the world from Jerusalem - the ends of the earth. Has the light of Christ reached you? Have you received his salvation?

Jesus said,

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."⁶

If we know him, we bear his light. And that light is to shine out for the world to see.

"God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."⁷

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⁶ Matthew 5:14-16

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:9