

Week 1: John 1:19-28

What can we learn about Christ through this passage, and how does that call us to worship and love him more?

John is no ordinary man. He's on a mission to make straight the way of the Lord, and later in the book of Matthew, Jesus himself declares "among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist." (Matt 11:11). But yet this mighty man of God, living in complete obedience to His will, recognizes that he is not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. This points us to the greatness and holiness of our Lord.

As John is answering the questions of the priest and Levites, he seems to be very clear about who he is and what his role is on earth. How would you answer the question - "who are you?"

Personal Reflection

What obstacles can we remove in our lives, or the lives of friends, to make straight the way of the Lord?

Personal Reflection.

John is humbling fulfilling God's calling in his life. Instead of pointing to himself, he always points toward Christ. How does humility bring God more glory? How can we grow in our humility?

Personal Reflection.

It's important to note that the humility possessed by John is not the best practice or the ideal situation. John's emphatic refocusing on Christ instead of himself is the only true way to live out our faith as believers. It's a counter cultural reality about Christianity - we must recognize that this life is not for us or about us. We must only ever point back to the one who deserves our worship and love - Jesus. That is the only way to live as Christians.

Do you think more people would believe in Jesus if a man like John the Baptist were to visit Orlando tomorrow? Why or why not?

Personal Reflection.

While more people will quickly respond that "yes, it would be easier to convert people," consider the truth that we've already learned in the introduction to John. "*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him*" (John 1:11). They had John the Baptist himself, they were studied in scripture, and yet they missed the Christ as he walked among them. Would another John today really make a difference? We're so quick to wish for miracles and prophets to speak to us, but as we learn in Luke 16:31 "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." The bible contains everything needed for faith in Christ.

Week 2: John 1:29-34

What can we learn about Jesus from this passage, and how can that help us point others to Him?

There is so much to point to here. Jesus being the Lamb of God refers to his ultimate sacrifice for sin. John points to the prophetic nature of Christ's arrival. The fact that John claims to have not known Him but recognized Him immediately points to the immediacy of our faith in Christ. John's immediate identification of the person and work of Jesus is followed by him immediately calling those around him to believe in the same truth. This leads us to the more interesting question - how this passage helps us point others to Him.

Of course there will be a vast array of answers from this question, but consider how everything in this passage can encourage our family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers into belief that Jesus is the Christ for whom John was preparing the way. Does this answer any fears, questions, or concerns about faith in Jesus Christ?

What does it mean for Jesus to be called the Lamb of God?

See the article in the beginning of our sermon guide entitled "The Lamb Of God" for more clarity.

Do you think that it was easier or harder for the people of the first century to see themselves as sinners in need of a savior?

Personal Reflection.

Though it's mainly a matter of opinion, it seems like the prevailing culture around us is becoming more and more difficult to preach truth to. How many times have we heard "well that's true to you, but not me" or "you're just not being tolerant of other lifestyles?" The western culture is no longer arguing that the ultimate truth is something other than Christianity - they are arguing that there is no ultimate truth. It's a deceitful and completely false stance to take, and it can make the need for a savior harder to reveal. Luckily for us, we're not called as Christians to convert people - that's God's work. We're called to be faithful to the truth which has been revealed to us through scripture.

John's job according to 1:7 is to enable all men to believe. How has his ministry impacted your life? Is there a connection between you and John the baptist?

On face value, it may be hard for you to make a connection between yourself and a man who lived 2,000 years ago. But consider his place in the order of public preaching. John is the first man to identify Jesus' person and purpose in the world. He called everyone around him to believe in the Messiah, and some did. They told others, who told others, etc. The good news of who Christ is starts with John identifying Him for us. All of our faiths could be traced back to this man. Who do we have in our lives that we can spread that good news to? Who can we turn to and say "come and see" what I have found.

Week 3: John 1:35-42

Why do you think John includes the accounts of the first disciples following Jesus? What are we supposed to learn from it?

Personal Reflection.

What we see playing out in these verses is something referred to as the common means of grace - the typical way that people come to know Jesus and find salvation. Men are hearing about Jesus, coming to faith, and then grabbing their friends and family to show them.

Do you think that the disciples knew what they were getting into when they followed Jesus? Did you?

Personal Reflection.

Though they did not know what the day to day would look like, they trusted in Jesus, and they trusted in the final destination he provided. The way your life will play out is not the focus of following Jesus. Following Him is simply what you do when you love Him.

Peter is brought to Christ through his brother, Andrew's, testimony; later Peter brings thousands to know and love Jesus, but Andrew never preached to large crowds. In what ways has God used your life to impact others around you?

Personal Reflection.

Sometimes we are quick to think that unless we are preaching to large crowds of people, we are not helping to spread the Gospel. This is simply not true. God does not create us all to be mouth's in the body of Christ. Jesus did not love Peter more than Andrew because he preached sermons to crowds and Andrew didn't. They both performed in faith what they were called to - administer the gospel to those whom God put in their path. That may be 1000s, that may mean the girl in the cubicle next to you.

At face value, it may seem strange that Jesus abruptly changes Simon Peter's name. What does this highlight about Jesus' character, and how can that cause us to love Him more?

Jesus, being King of all creation, has the power and authority to change anything he wants. When he enters Peter's life, he doesn't see fit to leave Peter the same man he met - he utterly transformed him into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). This new creation was so different, Jesus gave it a new name.

Jesus does this for us, too. When he enters our lives, he completely renews our hearts and shapes them into an image of Him. Praise God that He doesn't see fit to leave us in the sin and brokenness He finds us in, but rather, out of love for us, He uses his authority in heaven and earth to take a wretch and make us a treasure.

Week 4: John 1:43-51

Make a list of the 8-10 people you come in contact with regularly who don't know Jesus as their savior. Make it a priority to pray for them every day through the rest of this series.

Personal Reflection.

It's often difficult to turn ordinary conversation into spiritual ones. What are some effective ways to do that?

Personal Reflection.

What can we learn about evangelism through this passage? Is there a rule of thumb to follow on how aggressive we should be in sharing our faith?

Personal Reflection.

What is the biggest obstacle you face when it comes to sharing your faith with others? What steps can you take to overcome these obstacles? How can your Grace Community help?

Personal Reflection.

Week 5: John 2:1-11

Have you ever asked Jesus to perform a miracle in your life? How did your request compare and contrast Mary's request to Jesus?

Personal Reflection.

After the miracle, it says that the disciples believed in Him. Does this mean they didn't believe before? How does this action produce faith?

Let's not lose sight that the disciples already declared belief in Jesus before the wedding at Cana. Nathanael had already stated that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel. Andrew found Simon Peter and claimed that they had "found the Messiah." They already believed - the miracle only enhanced their belief. Just as we grow in our trust and relationship with Jesus over time, the disciples are growing in their trust that Jesus really is who they know him to be.

List out some of the significant images we see in Jesus' first public miracle. Is there any foreshadowing?

How does the first sign of Jesus' ministry impact the study we've done through chapter one of the gospel?

The sign reaffirms what we learned through the first chapter of John. He is the all-powerful, Son of God. He came to his own people and they did not recognize him. He is performing miracles much more mighty than seeing Nathanael under the fig tree. He's the one the disciples and John the Baptist were claiming him to be.

The Christian faith is not one of intellect and study alone; it's one of action. What do you feel God is calling you to do through this lesson?

Personal Reflection

Week 6: John 2:12-22

Why do you think John records this story?

Personal Reflection.

Does this image of Jesus swinging a whip contradict your image of Jesus? Why is it important to base our view of Jesus in all of scripture and not just our favorite parts?

Personal Reflection.

When we focus in on our favorite attributes of Jesus, ignoring all the other parts that make us uncomfortable, we are reshaping Jesus into something he's not. More often than not, we're focusing in on the parts that remind us of ourselves. We need to be careful to see Jesus as He has revealed Himself - full of grace and truth.

How does this story relate to the miracle at the wedding?

The previous week we reflected on Jesus' first public miracle at the wedding feast. In both stories we can see that there is a boldness in Jesus. He was not one to patiently wait on the sidelines - he's a man of plan and purpose that results in actions.

But the timing of his action was key... The wedding feast of Cana was not the first time Jesus saw wine run out at a party, nor was this the first time Jesus saw money changers and animal sellers in the temple. He would have seen this every time he went to the temple. So why is he acting now? His time for public ministry has come.

We also see that his actions in the temple produced faith in the disciples, much like when he turned water into wine. There's a connection here that we should not overlook. John's entire purpose for this gospel is found in John 20:30-31 - that through these writings we might believe and have eternal life in his name.

In what ways does this image of a zealous Jesus cause you to believe and trust in Jesus more?

Personal Reflection.

Your friend, an unbeliever hears this story for the first time. How do you explain Jesus' reaction in the temple in a way he/she can understand?

Personal Reflection.

It may help to focus on verse 17. Why would Jesus have zeal for the Father's house of worship? How can we explain that to our friends in a way they could relate?

Week 7: John 2:23-25

It seems that Jesus is responding to a superficial faith in this section. How can we define a faith that is superficial?

When I was younger, mine would have been declared a superficial faith. Raised in the church, I knew all the answers. The truth of who God was had been impressed upon me from a young age, but my life did not reflect one of worship and servanthood. There was no passion or love in my statement of faith, and my actions did not reflect those of someone who truly believes they are saved by grace through faith alone. I may have been tricking my Sunday school teachers into thinking I was a good Christian boy, but Jesus knew the truth of my life at the time. He didn't need them to bear witness about me; He himself knew what was in me. Glory be to God that he did not see fit to leave me there. Perhaps some of you can relate. I'd love to hear your story. - Ryan Williams

In week 5, we discussed whether or not you've asked Jesus for a miracle. When you asked Him for one, was it so that you could believe? What does this passage teach us about such a request?

Personal Reflection.

Here we see many people "believing in his name" when they saw the signs Jesus was performing. But Jesus did not entrust himself to them the way he had to his disciples. Believing that Jesus can perform miracles is not the same as believing that he is your savior.

In order for saving faith to occur, we need to both see Christ as the Lord and Savior truly is, and us as the sinners we truly are. Which view do you think is harder to see clearly? Why?

Personal Reflection.

Jesus Christ knows the hearts of men. Does this make you feel uncomfortable in any way? How can you change your feeling on this?

Personal Reflection.

Where are you in your walk with God? Is yours one of superficial faith? How can you grow beyond that?

Personal Reflection.

Week 8: John 3:1-8

Is there a difference between “making a decision to follow Christ” and being “born again?” If so, what is it?

Think about the specific imagery God uses here to describe our relationship in faith. Birth is not a request made by a child. It’s an action outside of their capacity to perform alone. To be born again spiritually would be the same.

Here we see Nicodemus, a follower of the law, a Pharisee, looking to Jesus for answers. He declares that Jesus must be sent from God because of His actions, and now Nicodemus is intentionally putting himself under the teachings of Jesus. He’s seeking Jesus’ wisdom and answers as a Rabbi. You could claim that he is making a decision to follow Christ. But Jesus clearly responds that this is not enough. He is not able to decide this alone - there must be a spiritual birth for true salvation.

Imagine you have a friend who was raised in the church but doesn’t believe they’ve been born again. How would you respond to that person?

Personal Reflection.

Imagine you’re talking to a friend who’s never been part of the church. How would you explain being born again to that friend?

Personal Reflection.

Look back at the list you made in week 4. 8-10 people you interact with regularly that don’t know Jesus. Who are you going to invite to hear the gospel on Easter in two weeks? Pray for them together in your Grace Community.

Personal Reflection.

Week 9: John 3:9-15

Nicodemus is a very trusted scholar and teacher in Israel. His whole life has been devoted to study, but he doesn't understand what Jesus is saying. In what way does this give you comfort and in what way do you find this unsettling?

Personal Reflection.

How can a person know if he/she has been born again?

This is not an easy questions to answer since we don't know people's hearts. We want to be sure not to make clear blanket statements about someone when we cannot see what's in their heart. What we can do is look at the evidence of faith in their life over time. Are they displaying conviction of sin; do they show fruits of the spirit; do they live their life for themselves, or are they sacrificing for God and others? If we see evidence of the Holy Spirit in their life, we can say they've been born again. He will only dwell in believers.

Can a person have a saving faith if there is no conviction of sin? Can the conviction come after knowing Jesus?

Yes and no.

There must be a conviction of sin to some degree in a saved person, but conviction of sin is descriptive of the believer, not prescriptive of salvation.

People who have been saved by faith in Jesus have the Holy Spirit indwelling in them. With the embodiment of a holy God inside us, we cannot live a life free from conviction. Sin should grieve our very souls because we know it is what separates us from God, and as believers our proximity to God is the deepest desire.

Now you may be thinking, "but I have not always felt convicted of sins in my life. Some felt right at times - or at least not that big of a deal." You're not alone in this feeling; in fact, if you can look back on your life and see previous sins you used to ignore that now you look at with conviction - praise God! That is sanctification (spiritual maturity) taking place. It's a sign of true faith, and it is a life long journey. So in some ways, yes - conviction of sin continues to reveal itself throughout the Christian walk. It can come after knowing Jesus and loving Him more.

If God gives us a new nature when we're born again, why do we sin? Why is sin such an ongoing battle for Christians?

In John MacArthur's Commentary on Romans 7, he says

In this life, Christians are somewhat like an unskilled artist who beholds a beautiful scene that he wants to paint. But his lack of talent prevents him from doing the scene justice. The fault is not in the scene, or in the canvas, the brushes, or the paint but in the painter. That is why we need to ask the master painter, Jesus Christ, to place His hand over ours in order to paint the strokes that, independent of Him, we could never produce. Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The only way we can live victoriously is to walk by Christ's own Spirit and in His power, in order not to "carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

How has this passage challenged you in your faith?

Personal Reflection.