

The Lamb of God

January 16, 2021

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 1:5-13

Session Outline

1. The Witness (John 1:5-8)
2. The Light (John 1:9-10)
3. The Hope (John 1:11-13)

Theological Theme

John the Baptist was commissioned to prepare the way of the Lord by preaching a message of repentance and expectation. His ministry pointed to One who was coming. The message John preached is the key to unlocking the joys of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Leader Guide

The Lamb of God

Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever tried to tell time using a sundial?
- ❓ Can you explain how a sundial works?

An important thing to remember about sundials is that they don't work on cloudy days. Thank goodness we have easier ways to tell the time. All we have to do is look at our watches or pull out our phones. We no longer depend on the sun to figure out what time it is. But sundials used to be a common way to tell the time. When correctly used sun dials can accurately measure the hours of the day, but conditions must be right for them to work. The most critical element of the sundial isn't the dial itself, but the sun. Only when the sun shines upon the sundial can it give a reading. A sundial works by casting a shadow on a dial that gives an indication of the hour. The angle of the sun will change the sundial's shadow and indicate the time. However, if clouds block the sun, then the sundial is useless. A sundial doesn't work at night either.

John the Baptist was like a sundial. He was mightily used of God to point people to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But John the Baptist's usefulness and effectiveness were wholly dependent upon the fact that he was pointing toward something greater than himself. His calling was to point people to the Messiah. His purpose was to glorify someone other than himself. He did not fulfill his purpose on his own.

All Christians should look to John the Baptist as an example. They should follow his humility and not seek glory for themselves. They should also follow his methodology, preaching the truth to all who will listen in order to point them to Jesus Christ, the only One who can save people from their sins.

Session Summary

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, but he was also the forerunner of Christians, because he was the first person to bear witness of Christ. So, his example is helpful for Christians today. Followers of Christ don't try to recreate the events of the New Testament.

This practice is misguided and fails to recognize the fact that Christ's work on earth and the time of the apostles was unique and meant to build the foundation of the church. Now that this foundation has been laid, it is not necessary to put down a new foundation. John's example can give believers guidance for carrying out Jesus's commission to His disciples (see Matthew 28:18-20).

1. The Witness (John 1:5-8)

John the Baptist was unique. He was different than the religious authorities of the day and people flocked to see him. He spoke with authority and didn't bend to curry favor with the religious upper echelon. John unflinchingly preached the truth, and it seemed to the people that he feared God alone. Despite his strange manner of living and his bold message, he gained a large following. Through John, God was preparing to unveil His plan for the redemption of His people. John's work was to point people to Christ, and those who responded with faith and repentance to John's message would look to Christ for the salvation of their souls.



Why might some have believed John the Baptist might be the promised Messiah? How did he deal with this idea? How might he have been tempted to do otherwise?

People did wonder whether John might be the Christ. It was only natural for people to begin to think this man may be the one who had been promised in the garden. They were hoping for Messiah's arrival, and the baptizer seemed like a good candidate. Those who loved and feared God groaned under sin and were longing for the One who would come to crush the head of Satan. But John knew his ministry was meant to be eclipsed by Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. John knew he was the sundial and Jesus Christ was the sun.


John lived as a disposable man bent on fulfilling his mission by magnifying Christ and then dying. All of the testimonies about John the Baptist agree that he was faithful.

John walked humbly before God. He said, "one who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals" (Luke 3:16). John saw himself as less than a common household servant in comparison with Jesus. He also said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John actively labored to make less people follow him and more people follow Christ. He used his platform to shrink his following and grow that of Jesus.

Light and Darkness


The references to life ... light, and darkness continue to draw on Genesis themes (cp. Gn 1:3-5, 14-18, 20-31; 2:7; 3:20). Light symbolism is also found in later OT messianic passages (Is 9:2; 42:6-7; 49:6; 60:1-5; Mal 4:2; cp. Lk 1:78-79).

He did this because he knew Christ offered life. The best thing John could do was point people to that life. He said, “I baptize you with water ... He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11). Excitement was building around John the Baptist’s ministry. Word had spread and people were making their way into the wilderness to see him. But he had a strange message for them. He told them to look for the coming of another.

 How is John the Baptist an example for Christians today?


John the Baptist was concerned about one thing, namely magnifying Jesus Christ. His life was centered on pointing people to Christ. He understood his life to have meaning as a signpost pointing people to the One who was sent to rescue sinners from condemnation.

Christians can save no one, but they know who has the power to bring salvation to sinners. So, Christians witness about Jesus Christ by sharing the good news of the gospel with those who are willing to listen. As they share, their hope is to fade into the background so Jesus Christ might be magnified.

 Application: How do you seek to magnify Jesus Christ with your life? Does your life reflect the priorities of John the Baptist? What needs to change?

2. The Light (John 1:9-10)

John was not the light, but “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world” (v. 9). Jesus was the awaited Redeemer who had been promised from Genesis 3. The prophets spoke of Him, and the people of Israel anticipated His arrival. Jesus of Nazareth is God incarnate. He is the uncreated One who took on flesh to accomplish the redemption of God’s people. Jesus was in the beginning with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Without Him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). Jesus came to His own, taking on flesh to complete His mission of living a perfectly holy and righteous life in the place of sinners and dying a sinner’s death so they might be rescued.

 What was Jesus’s mission on earth, and what did He do to secure our hope? How is He the “light that gives light to everyone”?

Many people view Jesus’s work on earth as primarily humanitarian. They think of Jesus as a good man who came to feed the hungry, help the poor, clothe the naked, and free the oppressed. This view is false and dangerous. Jesus’s mission on earth wasn’t primarily to feed the hungry or heal the sick, although He did those things. Jesus came to be

an atoning sacrifice for sinners. His death on the cross wasn't an abrupt and unfortunate end to His work on earth; it was His work on earth. The miracles Jesus performed on behalf of those in need (raising the dead, healing the blind, multiplying food) were not His primary work, but were evidence of His true nature.

Jesus came to meet the profound spiritual need of sinners. 2 Corinthians 5:21 summarizes God's purpose in Jesus: "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." At the cross, the sin of Christians was placed on Christ, and the righteousness of Christ was given to God's people. The theological term for this is "double imputation." In the act of justification, sin of people was applied to Jesus's account at the cross, and Jesus's righteousness was applied to sinners. So, all who come to Christ with faith and repentance receive the benefits of this great work Christ accomplished.



How did Christ's work on the cross secure hope for sinful people?

Jesus's work on the cross gives people a secure hope because that hope was gained by Christ's work alone, not man's. If a person must do something to attain salvation, then surely they could do something to lose it. But salvation is accomplished by Christ alone, for God's glory alone. No man can boast that they contributed anything to their salvation beyond the sin that made it necessary. Jesus secured salvation for all whom the Father gives to Him.



Application: What does Jesus's work on the cross have to do with your eternity? What does it have to do with your life today?

3. The Hope (John 1:11-13)

One of the most jaw-dropping promises in all of Scripture is found here. The text says God makes those who place their faith in Christ His children. This is astounding!



How is it possible for God to adopt transgressors of His law into His own family?

The Bible is clear that everyone has transgressed the law of God. All have fallen short of God's glorious standard. There are none who are righteous. Given that fact, how could God possibly embrace these rebels as His own children? Does the justice of God not demand that sinners be condemned forever? Yes, it does.

Yet God can be both just and the justifier of the ungodly (see Romans 3:26). Those who trust in Christ are given the right to become children of God. This isn't something they earned (because they can't earn it). The reason God can give sinners this right is through Jesus's unique work as Mediator. He was both God and man. He wasn't half man and half God, rather He was fully God and fully man. Being both God and man, He is able to reconcile the two. Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life and died a sinner's death. His death was the payment for sin. So, those who come to the Father by the shed blood of Christ are counted guiltless. The Father no longer needs to punish their sin because their sin was punished on the cross of Christ.

The hope sinners have in Christ is not just momentary forgiveness of sins without bearing on eternity—Christians look to Christ for forgiveness for sin and union with God through Christ starting now and forevermore. The Christian hope includes an eternity in the presence of God, worshipping Him and being loved by Him.



How should Christians' future hope of eternity with God affect their lives today? How does it affect the way they interact with others?

The Christian's confident expectation based on God's promises in Christ should touch every area of their lives on this side of eternity. The promise of everlasting life with God in heaven is so immense that it is impossible for it to not radically alter the way one views the world around them. However, if they don't appreciate the scope of what has been done for them, then they risk the danger of turning away from the truth of Scriptures unchanged.

Consider what Paul said about the profound hope of Christians in Colossians 1:21-23, "Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds as expressed in your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before him—if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it."

Christians should reflect on and rejoice in the secure hope they have in Christ. This sets the tone for daily living. It reorients priorities and warms their hearts to Christ. Some refer to this practice as preaching the gospel to yourself. When a believer makes this a practice, they warm themselves by the fire of the great truths of grace and mercy found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians should take refuge and find safety in Jesus's sacrifice.

They claim the gospel as their great hope. Christians should gather up in their souls the grand certainties, not of their emotions or experiences, but of their salvation: their Lord, His power, and His promise. They should daily grant to themselves the gospel of pardon, peace, and hope. The result of this kind of remembering and rejoicing is a heart that is more ready to flee from sin, love neighbor, be thankful, and forgive offenders. There is no better time to begin the practice of preaching the gospel to yourself than today.

- ❓ Application: What captivates your heart more, the hopes of this world or the precious promises of Scripture? How might you shift your hope from temporal desires toward eternity?

Conclusion

John the Baptist's ministry was critical because God intended for him to prepare the way for the Lord by preaching repentance and faith. His ministry was meant to point others to Christ. John the Baptist is a tremendous example of humility and evangelism for Christians today. His life serves as an example of what a faithful life looks like. Like John, Christians should seek to orient their lives completely around pointing people to Jesus.

- ❓ What are some ways your life points others to Jesus Christ?
- ❓ Who are the people in your life who do not believe in Christ? What are some ways that you can share the good news of Jesus with them?
- ❓ How should the common mission of the church unite us, even as we have disagreements in various areas?

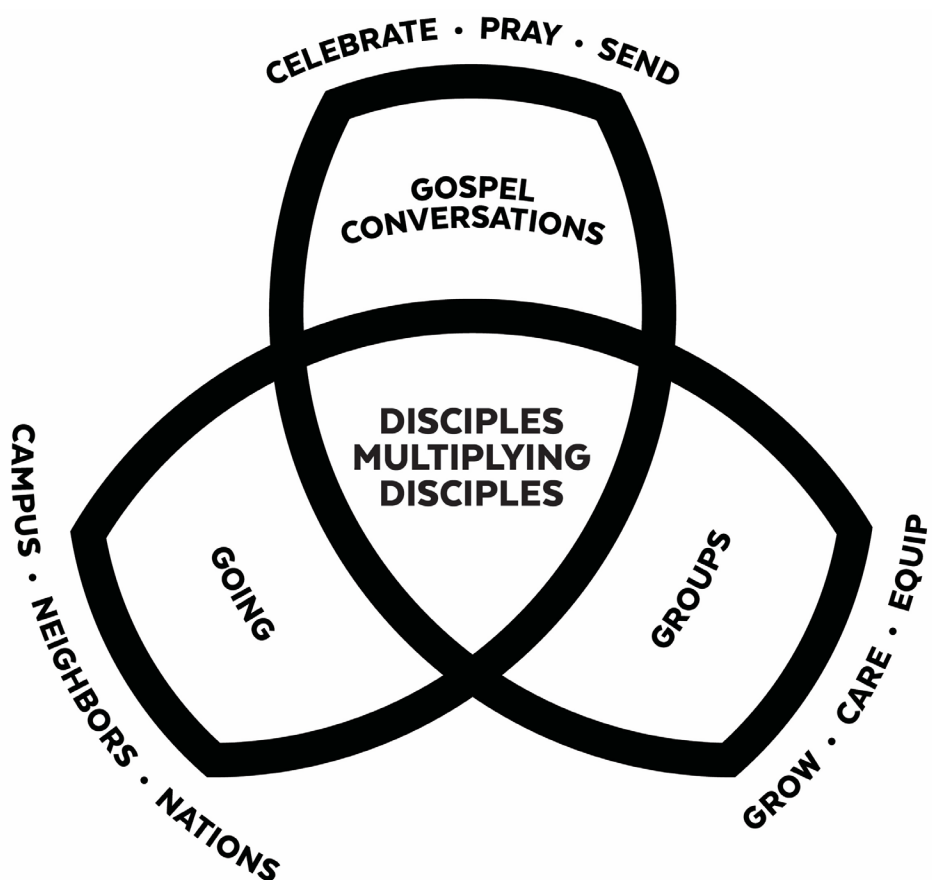
Prayer of Response

Take time to give thanks for the hope you have in the gospel. Reaffirm your faith in the person and finished work of Christ and rejoice in the great work God has accomplished for you in Christ.

Additional Resources

- *John 1-11* by John MacArthur
- *The Gospel According to John* by D.A. Carson
- *John* by Charles Swindoll

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Group Emphasis

From last week's challenge, are those you are inviting to our Group Christ-followers? How can we help you use God-language when you talk with them?

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Sign

Main Passages

- John 2:1-12

Session Outline

1. Our Efforts (John 2:1-4)
2. Christ's Work (John 2:5-8)
3. Our Reward (John 2:9-12)

Memorize

But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name,¹³ who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12-13

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 1:5-13

1:5. In this verse John picked up a common first-century theme, the symbols of light and darkness representing good and evil. The word understood might be rendered “overcome.” All the forces of Satan tried to prevent life and extinguish the light—but they could not.

These five verses tell us that Jesus came to the world with a message of hope, and he came from heaven where he had lived eternally with the Father. Often I find myself humming the theme of the television miniseries *Winds of War* which aired in the mid 1980s. Based on the Herman Wouk book, the series ran for a total of eighteen hours. This theme played over and over again—in the key of D minor. John’s key words are like that, especially “life” and “light.” The word rendered “understood” in the NIV is translated “seizes” in Mark 9:18 and “overtakes” in John 12:35. God sent his light into the world, but mankind did not understand it, could not grasp it. But the world will never be able to defeat it.

1:6–7. We’ve already noted the recurring themes of life and light; here is another—witness. In order for John the apostle to introduce the Son of God historically, he had to first introduce John the Baptist. We should notice, however, that John emphasized the function of the Baptist, not his identity. Luke tells us much more about John the Baptist’s birth and life; John focuses on why he came and who sent him.

A good witness does not attract attention to himself but to the person or facts which he represents. The Greek word for “witness” by John in this Gospel appears only three times in Mark and only once in Luke. The verb (usually rendered “testify”) shows up thirty-three times in John and only once each in Matthew and Luke. All this points up the uniqueness of each account and particularly the intensity with which John will seek to fulfill his purpose. As Tenney puts it, “Although vv. 6–8 seem alien to the general content of the text, they are not irrelevant. As the Word came to bring the heavenly light to humanity, so John came to speak from a human level and to awaken people to their need of God’s revelation” (Tenney, Merrill C. *The Gospel of John. Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Vol. 9. Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981., p. 31*).

How interesting that John the apostle should write about John the Baptist and tell us he was sent. He used a verb form upon which the word apostle is built. Actually, both men were apostles in the functional sense because they were sent from God with a message to people who needed to hear it.

As implied above, the words witness and testify are essentially the same word from which we get our English word martyr. John used it often, accounting for forty-seven out of seventy-six times the word appears in the New Testament.

1:8–9. John had no problem using repetition to make a point. Though John the Baptist’s message was enlightening, he was not the true light. We have created virtually every kind of artificial light possible for special effects on television and films. But nothing can compare with watching God’s

sunrise or sunset, or perhaps staring from the blackness of an Arizona desert into the night sky at stars and planets God has made. Jesus is the true light, not some imitation.

But what does it mean to say that Jesus gives light to every man . . . coming into the world? The intended contrast between the Master and the messenger strikes us dramatically: John was a man, Jesus is God; John was a witness, Jesus is the Word; John was a servant, Jesus is the Son. The last phrase of verse 9 surely refers to the incarnation of Jesus, though some have interpreted it to mean the conscience God provides every human being, or even the natural revelation everyone can see. The structure of the verse, however, favors a reference to Christ's birth even though the past tense seems awkward in this context. A major theme of this section is regeneration, and these first four verses provide its announcement.

1:10–11. Immediately after describing the announcement, John tells us about apathy toward the message of regeneration. The world (*kosmos*) is another of John's theme words; he used it seventy-seven times. With the device of repetition, John taught incarnation, creation, and rejection all in one verse (v. 10). Depravity and blindness thwarted God's efforts to reach out to his own creation—and still do. As Marcus Dods declared,

There He was, the Creator Himself, that mysterious Being who had hitherto kept Himself so hidden and remote while yet so influential and supreme; the wonderful and unsearchable Source and Fountain out of which had proceeded all that men saw, themselves included—there at last He was 'in the world' He Himself had made, apparent to the eyes of men, and intelligible through their understanding; a real person whom they could know as an individual, whom they could love, who could receive and return their expressions of affection and trust. He was in the world, and the world knew Him not (Dods, Marcus. *The Gospel of Saint John* (2 vols.). London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908., p. 25).

In verse 11, the first appearance of the word *own* appears in the neuter gender and the second is masculine. What significance could such a distinction have for interpretation? One possibility is that Jesus came to earth, the place he had created, and the second tells us that the people who lived there turned him away. He was not welcomed or accepted.

1:12–13. Early in his book, John established the heart of the gospel, still two chapters away from the famous John 3:16. From the announcement of regeneration followed by apathy the apostle introduces the acceptance of regeneration.

Like most things in life, there is a right way and a wrong way to respond to God. The right way (and the only meaningful way) is to believe the gospel, receive the Savior and accept new birth as a result. The wrong way somehow links a relationship to God with human qualities such as physical birth, self-determination, or the choice of another person. In John's theological vocabulary, believed and received are synonymous when it comes to the gospel. Patrick Henry once said, "The most cherished possession I wish I could leave you is my faith in Jesus Christ, for with Him and nothing else you can be happy, but without Him and with all else, you'll never be happy" (cited in Detzler, Wayne A. *New Testament Words in Today's Language*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1986., p. 39).¹

References

1. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, ed. Max E. Anders (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000).

Author Bio

Kenneth Gangel (John)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

John MacArthur (John 1-11)

John MacArthur has served as pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, since 1969. His ministry of expository preaching is unparalleled in its breadth and influence. In more than five decades of ministry from the same pulpit, he has preached verse by verse through the entire New Testament and several key sections of the Old Testament. He is Chancellor of the Master's University and Seminary, and can be heard daily on the Grace to You radio broadcast (carried on hundreds of radio stations worldwide). He has authored numerous bestselling books, including *Twelve Ordinary Men* and *One Perfect Life*.

D.A. Carson (The Gospel According to John)

D. A. Carson (PhD, University of Cambridge) is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and is the author or editor of more than fifty books, including *The God Who Is There* and *How Long, O Lord?* He is one of the founders of The Gospel Coalition and an active guest lecturer in academic and church settings around the world.

Charles Swindoll (John)

Charles R. Swindoll is the founder and senior pastor-teacher of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas. But Chuck's listening audience extends far beyond a local church body, as *Insight for Living* airs on major Christian radio markets around the world. Chuck's extensive writing ministry has also served the body of Christ worldwide, and his leadership as president and now chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary has helped prepare and equip a new generation of men and women for ministry. Chuck and his wife, Cynthia, his partner in life and ministry, have four grown children, ten grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.