

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 3-11-18

March 11 we will study John 1:19-31. Discussion questions are:

1. How would you respond to this observation about Christianity: *“Christianity has had its day. It was for a simpler time when people had a simpler view of life. They didn't understand the complexities of life the way we do.”*
2. Typically the first stage of Christianity overtaking a person or a city is the quality of life of the Christians. The Romans were particularly impressed with 2 traits of Christians:
  - a. Christians were morally, sexually chaste.
  - b. Christians were extravagantly generous with their resources.
    - i. What evidence is there that Christians today are morally, sexually chaste?
    - ii. What evidence is there that Christians today are extravagantly generous with their resources?
3. Agree/disagree: *“Christianity is not about a better lifestyle. It is not about a better code of ethics. It is about a person called Jesus.”*
  - a. What is the significance of that statement?
  - b. What changes does it call for in your thinking?
4. When John said *“I am unworthy.”* was he showing signs of low self-esteem?
5. John wanted people to quit looking at him and start looking at Jesus. What are some of the ways you do that when you are in similar circumstances?
6. How would you describe Paul's self-esteem in I Cor. 4:3-4?
7. What does it mean to be *“driven by what God in Christ thinks of you”*?
8. Of all the animals sacrificed in the Old Testament why is a lamb the one that best represents Jesus?
9. How would you describe what has happened to a person when he begins to see Jesus as *“my lamb”*?
10. Agree/disagree: *One test for knowing if a person is a Christian is to walk up to them and ask, “Are you a Christian?” If they say, “I'm trying.” you know they know nothing about what real Christianity is about.*
  - a. Why does *“I'm trying.”* indicate the person does not understand Christianity?

### Sermon: *Behold The Lamb*

"Why are so many churches in decline? Why is Christianity seemingly at a low ebb?" The answer of conventional wisdom goes something like this: "We live in a secular society. People don't want to be dictated to. They want to explore their potential. Christianity has had its day. It was for a simpler time when people had a simpler view of life. They didn't understand the complexities of life the way we do." That answer fails to explain why Christianity swept through ancient Rome. Rome was a city far more sophisticated and violent and pagan than any city in America but the gospel swept through it and people became Christians faster than they could send them to the lions. It is inaccurate to say Christianity was for a simpler time. Those early Christians were slaves, former prostitutes, wealthy people and world class scholars all gathered together in close fellowship because of the effect of Jesus on their lives. Those people risked everything to be a part of the church and it was not by any stretch of the imagination a simple

time to be a Christian. At the end of the day Christianity swept through the city of Rome and the entire Roman Empire in the most successful evangelism the church has ever seen.

When Christianity overtakes a person or a city it does so in 2 stages. In the first stage the people who are on the outside are attracted by the quality of life of the Christians. When Christians are really Christ-like they are attractive to the community. But they are attractive in ways that don't fit the mold. The Romans were particularly impressed with 2 traits of Christians: (1) Christians were morally, sexually chaste. They had a high commitment to monogamy and to sexual purity and to no sex outside of marriage. (2) Christians were extravagantly generous with their resources. They gave to the poor. They gave to each other with eagerness and a proportion that shocked the Romans. That breaks the mold. It doesn't fit in with Roman culture. Today the liberals are very concerned about the poor but they laugh at monogamy and sexual purity. The conservatives uphold traditional family values but often do not care for the poor. The early Christians were not liberals and they were not conservatives. They were a people who broke stereotypes.

When people begin to check out the church today they are drawn first to the way Christians live. But upon closer inspection they should discover that Christianity is not about a better lifestyle. It is not about a better code of ethics. It is about a person called Jesus. This second stage of Christianity overtaking a person or a city is critical if Christianity is to flourish. John the Baptist is a case study of this very concept. He upset the religious establishment of his day because he was so incredibly popular. What you see in John the Baptist is a unique self-image that every Christian should begin developing the day they are baptized. John the Baptist's self-image consisted of 2 things: (1) A particular view of himself. (2) A particular view of Jesus Christ. When both of those components entered John he became an incredible leader of God's people.

The way John looked at himself is described in vs. 27, "*I am unworthy.*" The way he looks at Christ is, "*Behold the lamb of God.*" He expresses his view of himself quietly. He expresses his view of Jesus triumphantly. When he describes himself he says quietly, "*I am unworthy.*" but when he describes Jesus he is yelling, "*Behold the lamb of God!*" He does not ask people to look at him but at Jesus. He does not look at himself either. He looks at Jesus like he wants others to do. He doesn't illustrate his unworthiness or comment on it. He just accepts the fact that it is true and then moves on to say, "I want you to look at Jesus."

Because John sees himself realistically and because he sees Jesus realistically he is empowered to confess Christ repeatedly. He is not afraid. Fear comes into your heart when you walk into a room full of yourself - full of your own goodness or your own hypocrisy. This morning we want to see 3 things:

John the Baptist's view of himself.

John the Baptist's view of Jesus.

The character that results from those 2 views.

Let's start with John's view of himself: "I am unworthy to untie the thongs of his sandals." There were laws that said only slaves could be required to untie the sandal thong of a person. You remove a person's sandals to wash their dirty, smelly feet. That action was so demeaning that only slaves could be required to do it. And John the Baptist says, "I am below that." I am below the level of a slave. Lots of folks in our society would say that is a terrible way to view yourself. They would say, "Isn't low self-esteem one of our main problems today?" There are 2 ways you can say, "I am unworthy." You can mean, "I despise and dislike myself." Or you can mean "I am free from and I forget myself." One is destructive; the other is humility and is mentally healthy. Paul is a great illustration of being free from yourself and forgetting yourself. He is doing the same thing John the Baptist was doing when he said, "I am unworthy." Here is what Paul says, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me." - I Corinthians 4:3-4 How do you get that kind of self-image where you are not bothered by what people think about you? Conventional wisdom says, "Get in touch with your own standards. Get in touch with your own needs. Find out who you are. Figure out what you think." How many times have you seen a situation on T.V. where a teen is being challenged to do something by a parent and the parent advises, "Don't do this for me. Don't do it for your schoolteacher. Do it for yourself." On the surface that sounds like good advice, but do you hear what it really means? It means life is about you. You are in the me generation so you should do what makes you feel good because life is all about you. Look again at what Paul says. Does he say, "I don't care what you think. I only care what I think."? No. He says, "I only care what the Lord thinks. My self-image comes from doing what the Lord wants me to do." So the wise parental advise to a teen is not "Do it for yourself." but "Do it for the Lord." There are only 3 ways to be driven. You can be driven by what others think of you. You can be driven by what you think of yourself. Or you can be driven by what God in Christ thinks of you. Only Christians can think that way.

So when John the Baptist says, "I am unworthy." he means, "I am unworthy of all this attention. I want to redirect your focus." So he quickly says, "Behold the lamb of God." The secret of John's boldness is that every time he sees Jesus he sees him as the lamb of God. He didn't see Jesus as this person you see on a crucifix. He didn't see him as a nice fellow to hang around with. He didn't see him as a teacher who really had a great message. He saw him as the lamb of God. Every time he saw him, John saw the same thing – the lamb of God.

Jesus as the lamb of God means 2 things. It means he is a substitute and he is a voluntary substitute. Do you remember the very first time a lamb shows up in the Bible? It's when Abraham is told, "You have to go and kill your son as a sacrifice to God." A nervous Isaac asks, "Father, I see the wood and I see the fire but where is the sacrifice." Abraham says to his son, "God will provide a lamb." which means, "Son if it's a lamb that is slain then you don't have to die. If God accepts a substitute in your place, you don't have to die." Hundreds of years later when the Israelites are slaves in Egypt, God tells the Israelites He is going to kill the firstborn in every household except for those who kill a lamb and smear the blood around the doorway to your house. If you sacrifice a lamb your son won't have to die. Centuries later Isaiah predicted that oneday someone would come and die for people and that person would die like a lamb, without protest.

So that whole Jewish culture knew about lambs being slain. They did it all the time. At Passover the sewage drains of Jerusalem ran red with the blood of thousands of lambs. But John says this person Jesus is *the* lamb of God.

Did you ever wonder why God called Jesus a lamb? There were other things sacrificed like bulls and goats. The difference is lambs do not buck their slaughterers. They don't scratch, kick or run away. They just stand there and let you kill them.

Remember what Jesus said in Gethsemane as he wrestled with the agony of his impending death. He said, "*Father, not my will but thine be done.*" He was saying, "Father, I'll be a lamb."

I'll tell you something about people who find their self-esteem in the Lord rather than in themselves – criticism doesn't bother them. Here's why – when someone criticizes them they think, "You are wrong about what you are criticizing me for but if you only knew what I was really like you would really have something to criticize. You just accidentally are wrong about this criticism but I have all kinds of things wrong with me. Jesus knows and he loves me anyway. He knows things about me I've never admitted to myself and he has covered them all because **he is my lamb.**"

Let me give you a test for knowing if a person is a Christian. Walk up to them and ask, "Are you a Christian?" If they say, "I'm trying." you know they know nothing about what real Christianity is about because they are looking at themselves instead of the lamb.

If you go anywhere there are lots of sheep, sooner or later you're going to see a very unusual sight. You'll see a little lamb running around the field, and you'll notice this lamb has what looks like an extra fleece tied around its back. In fact, you'll see there are little holes in the fleece for its four legs and a hole for its head. If you see a little lamb running around like that, that usually means its mother has died. And without the protection and nourishment of a mother, any orphaned lamb will die. If you take the orphaned lamb and try to introduce it to another mother, the new mother will butt it away. She won't recognize the lamb's scent and will know the new baby is not one of her own lambs. But thankfully, most flocks are large enough that there is an ewe that has recently lost a lamb. The shepherd will skin the dead lamb and make its fleece into a covering for the orphaned lamb, then he'll take the orphaned lamb to the mother whose baby just died. Now, when she sniffs the orphaned lamb, she will smell the fleece of her own lamb. Instead of butting the lamb away, she will accept it as one of her own. In a similar way, we have become acceptable to God by being clothed with Christ.

No wonder when Paul writes about the effect of baptism he calls it "*putting on Christ.*" As we close our worship service today we are going to give you an opportunity to put on Christ, to, as it were, begin wearing the covering of the lamb of God.