

John 1:29-37 "What Do You Say about Jesus?"**

Main Idea: In John 1:29-37 we see two kinds of testimony that should convince us to follow Jesus and encourage others to do the same.

I. We ought to follow Jesus because of the testimony of John's words (29-34).

A. John said that Jesus is the Lamb of God (29).

1. The title reveals His humility.
2. The title reveals the nature of His mission.
3. The title reveals the necessity of His death.
4. The title reveals His divine authorization.
5. The title reveals the worldwide effect of His work.

B. John said that Jesus was identified by the Spirit of God (30-33).

1. John baptized in order to reveal Jesus to Israel (30-31).
2. When John baptized Jesus, he saw the Trinity at work (32-33).
 - a. He baptized Jesus.
 - b. He saw the Spirit.
 - c. He heard the Father.

C. John said that Jesus is the Son of God (34).

II. We ought to follow Jesus because of the testimony of John's actions (35-37).

A. John made disciples (35).

1. He spent time with them.
2. He taught them to repent and obey God's Word.

B. John made sure his disciples followed Jesus (36-37).

Response: Some questions to consider...

1. Do you believe John's testimony?
2. Are you doing what John did?
3. Are you helping people follow Jesus?

I want you to think about the importance of *testimony*. Testimony is valuable in determining truth,

whether in a courtroom, or sorting out things in a fight between siblings, or in a conflict at work. We use *testimony* all the time. In the text before us we're going to hear the testimony of John the Baptist regarding Jesus. "Now this was John's *testimony*," says John 1:19. "Then John gave this *testimony*," says John 1:32.

What do you do with testimony? Testimony invites examination, right? Let me illustrate.

Have you ever watched *SpongeBob SquarePants*? For those who haven't, it's an interesting (there are other words I could use but I'll leave it at that) cartoon whose main character is a sponge-shaped naïve sort of fellow named SpongeBob who lives at the bottom of the sea. Some words that come to mind are goofy and insult your intelligence. Let me put it this way. You won't find the show on *The Learning Chanel*.

That's why I couldn't believe my eyes last week when I was reading the news and saw the following headline: "**SpongeBob' episode aids choking girl.**" According to the report, two seventh graders in Long Beach, New York, were in music class when the teacher told a joke that caused them both to erupt in laughter. Here's what happened next, according to the testimony of the two girls:

"Allyson was chewing gum, which she shouldn't have been," Miriam recalled Friday in a mock tattletale voice during an interview in the principal's office. "We were laughing and then the gum gets lodged in Ally's throat. And she stopped laughing, which was weird because Ally laughs a lot."

That's when Miriam says she recalled an episode of the popular Nickelodeon cartoon, where she believes she saw SpongeBob use the Heimlich maneuver to retrieve a clarinet lodged in the throat of another character, Squidward.

"And I get her up and I do the Heimlich and the gum goes flying out of her mouth," she said.

Allyson, who pleads guilty to chewing a wad of Trident Original Flavor, realized almost immediately what her friend had done. "I gave her the biggest hug and I was like, 'Miriam you just saved my life. I owe you big time.' And she's just, 'Oh, no, it was no big deal.'"

Interesting, huh? Can anything good come out of *SpongeBob SquarePants*? Hold on. Before you put the show on your recommended list, you might want to test this testimony. That's what the reporter did and discovered the following...

One little hiccup in the heartwarming story is that a Nickelodeon spokeswoman says there was never an actual episode of SpongeBob performing the Heimlich.

"Not that we can find," said spokeswoman Maria Poulos.

She said there was an episode where Squidward swallows a clarinet, but SpongeBob reaches down his throat to pull it out. In another episode, SpongeBob's pal Patrick tries to perform a "slimelick" maneuver by reaching around a clam, "but it didn't work," she said.

Neither Miriam nor Allyson were concerned with such technicalities.

"It didn't exactly show the Heimlich maneuver, per se, but SpongeBob kicked Squidward in the stomach the same way you would put pressure with your hands," Allyson said. [\[1\]](#)

There you have a couple of examples of *testimony*. Allyson gave a testimony about how her friend Miriam saved her life. Miriam gave a testimony about how *SpongeBob* showed her how to save her friend's life, which according to examination was based more on the teen's imagination than reality.

But that's the way it is with testimony. You don't establish truth on the basis of one person's testimony, for there's a subjective side to a testimony. Yet when multiple testimonies agree, you can draw reliable conclusions.

One of the most important words in the gospel of John is *testimony* (the noun appears 14 times). John makes no bones about his intent. He wants his reader to believe that Jesus is the Christ, so that believing he or she may have eternal life (see John 20:31). And to give weight to his aim, he gives testimony, indeed multiple testimonies.

As you read through John you see the testimony of the *Father* (5:37). There's the testimony of *Jesus Himself* (8:14). There's the testimony of the *Holy Spirit* (15:26). John also mentions the testimony of *Jesus' works* (5:36), the testimony of the *Scriptures* (5:39, 46), the testimony of *those with whom Jesus came into contact* (like the woman of Samaria in 4:39, and the man born blind in 9:25, 38, and the disciples in 15:27). And it all begins in John 1 with the testimony of John the Baptist.

Let me give you the big idea of today's message first, and then we'll develop it verse by verse. In John 1:29-37 we see *two kinds of testimony that should convince us to follow Jesus* and encourage others to do the same. One is verbal testimony, and the other is action testimony, and John the Baptist exhibited both.

I. We ought to follow Jesus because of the testimony of John's words (29-34).

Verse 29 begins, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him." Let's stop there and sketch a timeline of events. God sent John the Baptist to prepare Israel for the Messiah. He began preaching and baptizing out in the wilderness, and crowds came to him. Then one day Jesus came to him and he baptized the Lord. Immediately (acc. to Mark 1:12-13) the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. During those forty days of temptation John the Baptist continued his ministry of preaching and baptizing.

As we saw last time in verses 19-28, an inspection committee came to check out John. They arrived on what apparently was Jesus' last day of temptation in the wilderness. Today's story begins on the very next day, the day after the inspection committee came.

Verse 29 says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him." So right after His temptation experience, Jesus went back to John at Bethany in order to launch His public ministry.

When John saw Jesus, notice what he did. Verse 29 says he saw Him coming "*and said.*" Notice the verbal activity. In verses 29-34 John said three things about Jesus.

A. John said that Jesus is the Lamb of God (29). "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The gospel of John uses several titles to identify Jesus, including Rabbi (38, 49), Messiah (41), Son of God (34, 49), King of Israel (49), Son of man (51), and of course, the Word (1, 14). But here's the first one that came from the lips of John the Baptist. "Look, *the Lamb of God.*"

That's interesting. The title "Lamb of God" appears only twice in the Bible, both right here in our passage, and both coming from John's lips.

Why did John call Jesus *the Lamb of God*? Bible scholars aren't sure. Commentator Leon Morris offers nine different suggestions as to why John chose this title.

But think about it. What did this title mean to John the Baptist? Remember his background. John was the son of a priest, and he knew what priests did with lambs for his father told him and showed him. Every evening and morning the priests sacrificed a lamb as a sin offering for the people (Ex. 29:38-42). In fact, even when Jerusalem was under siege during war and the people were starving, the priests continued the daily sacrifices of lambs in the temple.^[2]

John knew that. He also knew that every year a lamb was sacrificed at Passover (Ex. 12:1-36; Mark 14:12). And since he knew his Bible, John also knew what the prophets had said. He knew what Jeremiah

said in Jeremiah 11:19, "I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter." And he knew that Isaiah 53:7 prophesied that the Messiah would be "led as a lamb to the slaughter."

I think John had all that in mind when he gave this verbal testimony. "Look (*Behold*, in the KJV), *the Lamb of God*." As we ponder this title carefully, we learn five things about Jesus.

1. *The title reveals His humility.* What did John call Jesus? A lion? No, although He is the lion of the tribe of Judah. He is a *lamb*. Hardly an intimidating creature, for sure. Weak, lowly, vulnerable—that's what a lamb is, and that's what's true of Jesus, says John. Oh, He's certainly no pushover, as you'll soon see, for He possesses power unlike any other. But He has packaged His power in the form of a humble lamb.

2. *The title reveals the nature of His mission.* What's Jesus going to do? Hear John: "Behold, the Lamb of God, *who takes away the sin* of the world." That's why Jesus came, not merely to give us a moral example to follow. He came to deal with the problem of sin, specifically to take away the sin of the world.

Notice that *sin* is singular, not the *sins* of the world, but the world's *sin*. That's what Jesus came to remove. Jesus came to solve the *sin problem* because that's the problem that has plagued this world ever since Adam went his own way and brought the world under God's curse. Ever since that fateful day every person has entered the world the same way, enslaved to sin by nature and by choice.

That's the mission He's going to accomplish, says John. Nothing short of getting rid of the problem that cut off man from God in the first place. And how will He accomplish this feat? This too we hear in John's testimony, for...

3. *The title reveals the necessity of His death.* Up until now man had offered lambs to God, hundreds and thousands of bloodied lambs, just as God prescribed. For instance, the Lord told His people in Exodus 12:13, "When I see the blood I will pass over you."

But this is different. Man had been bringing lambs to God for centuries, but now in the person of Jesus God had brought a lamb to man.^[3] And as with every previous lamb, this Lamb too would have to die.

Perhaps John had in mind what Abraham told Isaac when his son asked, "Father, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering (Gen. 22:7)?" Remember Abraham's answer? "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son (Gen. 22:8)."

And He did! says John. "Behold, the Lamb of God, *who takes away the sin of the world*." As Hendriksen observes, "This Lamb was taking away sin. He was doing this throughout his entire earthly sojourn, not only when he died on the cross. His entire life and death under the curse was an atonement which he rendered to God."^[4]

But there's more.

4. *The title reveals His divine authorization.* He is the *Lamb of God*, says John. The genitive can mean "provided *by* God," or "belonging *to* God," or perhaps in this case *both*.^[5]

5. *The title reveals the worldwide effect of His work.* "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the *sin of the world*." Not just the sin of Israel, for He's more than a Jewish Savior, but the *sin of the world*.

Don't misread this. This isn't teaching universalism. Universalism says that God is going to save everybody in the end, and some would use a text like this to suggest, "See, Jesus is the lamb that took away the sin of the whole world. There's no longer any sin that separates man from God." Yes, Jesus' death is sufficient to take away the sin of anyone and everyone in the world, but it's efficient to save only those who put their faith in Him, a point John makes very clear throughout his gospel (3:16; 5:24; 11:25-26).

Who is Jesus? Listen to John's testimony. He is *the Lamb of God*. The question is, have you agreed

with John's testimony? Have you admitted that the world's problem is *your* problem, that you are a sinner and cut off from God by your sin? And have you put your trust in the Lamb and what He did for sinners through His perfect life and substitutionary death and triumphant resurrection? If you have, your sin is gone, taken away by the Lamb! If not, your sin remains, and you need the Lamb.

John's testimony continues in verses 30-33. First, Jesus is the Lamb of God.

B. John said that Jesus was identified by the Spirit of God (30-33). And specifically by the fact that the Spirit of God came upon the Lamb of God at His baptism.

Let's listen as John continues his testimony in verse 30, "This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" His words "*when I said*" indicate he has talked about the Lamb in the past, although he doesn't identify a particular sermon here. I've been telling you that He's coming, that One far greater than me is coming. Well, He's here!

Verse 31—"I myself did not know him." That's interesting. Jesus, of course, grew up in Nazareth in Galilee. John was raised down south in Judea. So it's possible they hadn't met until Jesus' baptism. More likely, they had met (since they were blood relatives; Luke 1:36), but John didn't know Jesus in the sense of His true identity as Messiah.

John continues, "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." That too is interesting. When you read the other gospel accounts it seems that John's purpose for baptizing was to urge people to repent and get right with God. And that was certainly the case. But here he identifies the primary reason he baptized...

1. *John baptized in order to reveal Jesus to Israel (30-31).* How so? What's the connection between John's activity of baptizing and Jesus being revealed to Israel? John says that baptism was the God-appointed means of making the Lamb's identity known to His chosen people.

Notice verse 32, "Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.'"

The apostle John doesn't give us the details of Jesus' baptism. He knows Matthew, Mark, and Luke have already done so in their gospel accounts. He focuses instead on one particular facet of that event, something that the Baptist saw.

I saw the Spirit come down from heaven and remain on him. He's talking about God the Holy Spirit. *He came as a dove.* Why did He take the form of a dove? The Bible doesn't say. Barclay points out that the dove was a sacred bird in Israel. It was not hunted nor eaten.^[6] Some commentators point to the purity and the gentleness of the dove, which may be why.^[7]

So up until that point, John didn't know the full story about Jesus. But when John saw the Spirit come, the lights came on in his head. *He's the One!* And how'd he know? He tells us in verse 33, "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"

That's how he knew. John was a prophet who had received a prior message from Almighty God. John reflects on that message: *When you see the Spirit come down on a man, you'll know that man is the Chosen One, the Messiah, the One who will baptize others with the same Holy Spirit.*

That's what I saw, says John. I saw the Spirit come down, and not just come down, but come and *remain* on Jesus. Don't miss that John mentions twice that the Spirit came from heaven and *remained on Jesus* (in verses 32 & 33). In Old Testament times the Spirit came for a season and then departed. But He *remained* on Jesus.

That's quite a testimony, wouldn't you say? According to John's own words...

2. *When John baptized Jesus, he saw the Trinity at work (32-33).* The Bible teaches that God is

one God, yet He exists as three distinct persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. John observed all three persons that day in the Jordan.

a. He baptized Jesus. It was God the Son John immersed in that river.

b. He saw the Spirit. It was God the Holy Spirit John saw come down.

c. He heard the Father. I think it was God the Father who sent John to baptize and told him, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." And I know it was God the Father who also said that day, in words recorded in Matthew 3:17, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."^[8]

Which brings us to the third element in John's testimony. First, He is the Lamb of God. Second, He was identified by the Spirit of God. And third...

C. John said that Jesus is the Son of God (34). "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

We've reached the climax of John's testimony. The Lamb of God who was identified by the Spirit of God indeed is the Son of God. That's also the climax of the entire gospel of John according to John 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Why should we believe in Jesus? Here's why. Because of the verbal testimony of eyewitnesses like John the Baptist. Examine their testimony and you find out that they were convinced that He indeed was and is the Son of God. But it's not just their verbal testimony that points us to Him.

II. We ought to follow Jesus because of the testimony of John's actions (35-37).

It's not just what he said, but what he did. His words point us to Jesus, but so do his actions. Notice two activities of John mentioned in the text.

A. John made disciples (35). "The next day John was there again with two of his disciples." A disciple, by definition, is a learner and a follower. It's a person who learns by following someone. I don't know how many disciples John had—he certainly wasn't in to empire building as we'll see. But people were coming to him right and left—and he certainly wasn't into being user-friendly by holding his meetings out in the desert.

Here we see John with two of his disciples. One was Andrew (according to verse 40). The other isn't named in the text, but it's likely the author of this gospel, Zebedee's son John.

How do you make a disciple? By doing what John the Baptist did.

1. He spent time with them. The text says he was "there again *WITH two of his disciples.*" It takes more than a 45 minute sermon on Sunday to make a disciple. It takes the investment of time, life on life, day after day. But not just time will do.

2. He taught them to repent and obey God's Word. Check out Luke 3:7-18 if you want to see a sampling of John's preaching. Luke 3:18 says, "And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them." So John didn't tell stories to entertain crowds. He preached the Word of God and called for repentance and obedience in order to make disciples.

But they weren't his disciples, and he made that perfectly clear in verses 36-37, "When he saw Jesus passing by^[9], he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus." Don't miss that...

B. John made sure his disciples followed Jesus (36-37). And he told them why they should follow Jesus, too. *He is the Lamb of God!* And the text says that once those two men heard that announcement, they left John and *followed* Jesus.

Leon Morris explains, "The verb 'followed' is in the tense appropriate to once-for-all action, which may be meant to indicate that they cast in their lot with Jesus. They did not mean to make a tentative inquiry but to give themselves to Him."^[10]

Every journey begins with a first step, and this was theirs. Andrew and John *followed*^[11] Jesus. They're not Jesus' disciples yet, not in the full-fledged sense of the word. That will come later when Jesus comes to them and calls them to leave their nets and become fishers of men (in Matt. 4:18-22). But on this day they've taken the first step, an important step. They obeyed John's instructions and *followed* Jesus.

The more I learn about John the more impressed I am with him. He was a great man. Jesus Himself said there was none greater (Matt. 11:11). But what made him great was because there was someone else great in his eyes, and he lived to exalt that person.

Concerning John's greatness Leon Morris writes, "It is not particularly easy to attach disciples firmly to oneself when one is calling for a strenuous following of the right. But when this has been done it is the mark of a truly great man that he can gently, but firmly, detach them, so that they may go after a greater."^[12]

Parents, are you doing that with your children? Are you raising them so they'll leave you and follow Jesus wherever He wants to take them?

I need this reminder as a pastor. So do you as a church member. You don't belong to me. We belong to Christ, and we're in trouble when we start looking at the church as though it were ours. No, we don't like to see people leave us, to move away and go to other local churches. We love enjoying each other's fellowship and the blessing of our gifts in action. But beloved, when the Head of the church says it's time to move, please follow Him. Indeed, let's pray that He will send laborers from this church out into the harvest field. And let's get behind them and support them.

Response: Some questions to consider...

1. *Do you believe John's testimony?* Hear John again: "He is the Lamb of God!" Do you believe that? Have you put your trust in the Lamb and what He accomplished while on earth? He came to take away sin. Has He taken away your sin?

I mentioned that the title "the Lamb of God" appears only twice in the Bible. But we do see the abbreviated title "The Lamb" elsewhere, twice in the epistles and nearly thirty times in the book of Revelation. That's interesting. Who wrote Revelation? The apostle John did, the one who heard John the Baptist proclaim, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

He took the testimony to heart, didn't he? Have you?

2. *Are you doing what John did?* John the Baptist gave testimony to Jesus, a powerful testimony, with his words and his actions. He let the world know what he thought of Jesus.

The question for us is this. Are we doing what John did? My friend, what do you say about Jesus? What's your testimony? There's two parts to that question. First, what do you say about *Jesus*? Who do you think He is? And second, what do you say about Him? Some people agree, at least mentally, that He is the Son of God, but they don't say anything about their belief. It's private. They keep it (and Him) to themselves.

Let's do what John did. Let's give a clear testimony for Jesus this week! Perhaps you're thinking, "If I

told people how great Jesus was, they wouldn't believe me...because my life isn't what it should be." Then come to the Lamb today. He came to take sin away. He'll clean up your life if you'll come to Him.

3. *Are you helping people follow Jesus? Are you investing your life as a disciple-maker? And are you pointing people under your influence to Jesus?*

Next time we'll see what happened with those two men John sent to Jesus, and others that followed.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/36735214/ns/today-entertainment/#storyContinued>

[2] Observation by William Barclay, p. 81.

[3] See Warren Wiersbe, p. 287.

[4] William Hendriksen, p. 101.

[5] Leon Morris, p. 144.

[6] Barclay, p. 83.

[7] Observation by Hendriksen, p. 100.

[8] I should point out that we see the members of the Trinity fulfilling similar roles in our salvation. The Father designed it, the Son accomplished it, and the Spirit applies the benefit of it to our lives (see Eph 1:3-14).

[9] The previous day John saw Jesus coming *toward* him (29). On this day he saw Jesus *passing by*.

[10] Leon Morris, p. 156.

[11] The biblical word "follow" can be used in two ways, one general and the other more intense.

[12] Leon Morris, p. 156.