

Pointing to Jesus

John 1:29-42

Although we're still a few weeks away from spring training, there have still been a few things for baseball fans to pay attention to while we look out the window and wait until spring. Trades and free agent signings were more plentiful this year, after several years of lower spending because of the pandemic and uncertainty of what the next labor contract would bring.

One of the best things I noticed about this, though, was how the sportswriters make sure to give credit to who broke the stories about different deals. The writers didn't want credit that wasn't due them. Instead, they made sure to give credit where credit was due. They wanted people pointed to the original source.

D.A Carson once said, "Humans discover their greatest importance in pointing to Jesus." We see this perhaps most starkly in the life of John the Baptist, a man whose life was set apart for preparing the way for Jesus to begin his ministry on earth. He had the unique privilege of pointing to Jesus physically, right there in front of him.

John's message and ministry attracted a lot of attention, but John was not the main show. John always knew that he was the opening act. John's whole life was focused on pointing others to Jesus. People thought John the Baptist might be the Messiah, but he constantly said that he was not the one, but someone much more significant than he was on His way.

The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) generally introduce John as the voice in the wilderness. The Gospel of John goes about it a little differently, but gets to a similar perspective. "There was a man sent from God,

whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him" (John 1:6-7). John the Baptist's mission is "to bear witness about the light." In fact, fourteen times in John's Gospel, the word witness is connected with John the Baptist. "He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:8-9).

John isn't the message; John is the messenger. Consider these verses, referring either to John or words spoken by him. "He was not the light" (John 1:8). "I am not the Christ" (John 1:20). "I am not [Elijah]" or "the prophet" (John 1:21). "I am not worthy to untie [His sandals]" (John 1:27). No wonder John the Baptist says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Even in the womb, when Mary comes to visit Elizabeth, John jumps for joy and prompts them to praise Jesus.

During his ministry calling all the repentance, John pointed others to Jesus as the one who was coming to clear the threshing floor, the one whose sandals John was unworthy of untying.

Although we hear from John mostly in Advent, we hear from him again today. After Jesus has been baptized by John, when he saw Jesus coming toward him, he declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John knew that his job was to point people to Jesus, to the Savior who would set the world to rights and make all things new by forgiving sins and giving eternal life to all who believed in Jesus. Not all who believed in John, not all who answered John's

call to repentance. It wasn't about John. It was about Jesus.

By calling Jesus the Lamb of God, John shows how everything that came before points to Jesus. A perfect, unblemished lamb was killed, and its blood caused the angel of death to pass over the houses of those who had trusted and followed God's directions. Lambs and bulls and doves were killed in the temple as sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people. And now, all of those sacrifices pointed to what John knew was to come. Jesus will die a sacrificial death for the world's sins.

And sure enough, the accounts of Jesus' death show many parallels between the sacrifices in the temple and what Jesus went through for us. All of those sacrifices pointed to Jesus. Jesus is the true Passover Lamb, and John wants us to understand these things about Jesus as a new and better Exodus story. Just as God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, God was now getting new people out of even older and darker slavery, slavery to sin.

Sometime later, when John's jealous disciples complained that Jesus was becoming more popular than his cousin, John humbly replied, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). John had pointed, had directed, the crowds that came to see him, to Jesus. He will go on to point all his own disciples at Jesus and encourage them to follow Jesus instead of him. For John knew that his life and ministry were never about John. They were always about Jesus.

The same is true for you and me. We are often tempted to believe that we are the directors of our own destiny and the architects of our plans. But our real reason to exist is to point people to Jesus. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and

to enjoy Him forever." We glorify God when we give him the glory for all the good things in our life—above all, our salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And we glorify God when we help our friends, family, and neighbors to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

We point to Jesus through our words, but not just our words. When we humble ourselves and point to Jesus through our actions, kindness, thoughts, prayers, and lives...others notice.

That's often one of the things that the international students who come here to learn English are most surprised about. They are surprised that the teachers are volunteers, and that they don't have to pay anything. Instead, they're told that the volunteers do what they do because of Jesus.

Like John the Baptist, we are here to point people to Jesus. We ourselves are not the light, but we bear witness about the Light: Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Our world can be a very dark place. The world is darkened by sin. And people tend to love darkness more than light (John 3:19). But the true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world (John 1:9). "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).

Our light doesn't come from inside us. Our light doesn't come from achieving enlightenment on our own. Our light is reflected. Our light is the light of Christ reflected outward into the lives of others.

The moon doesn't shine on its own – it reflects the light of the sun. That's what we are to do, as well. We don't have a light of our own. Instead, we reflect the light of the Son, Jesus, into the world.

All we need to do is light a lamp and keep the candle burning. “A city on a hill cannot be hidden.... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14b, 16).

It wasn't any easier for the early disciples to share Christ with their friends and neighbors as it is for us today. And we wouldn't be here today if they hadn't done so. Jesus gave his Church only one Great Commission and that was to “make disciples” (Mt 28:16-20). We just have to be ready, like John the Baptist, to do our part. Pointing to Jesus.

Pastor David Beagley
Memorial Lutheran Church and Student Center
Ames, IA
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