

THE BAPTIST'S MESSAGE

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:29

JOHN was the herald of Christ. He came to bear witness to Him and to prepare the way for Him. In olden times when kings traveled, they were accustomed to send heralds before them to announce their coming, and to prepare the way for them. And I have read that on several occasions the herald wore such gorgeous apparel—adorned with gold and lace—that when he went into some of the towns and villages, the people thought that he must be the king, himself! So they made ready to receive him with royal honors. When he said, "No, I am not the king, I have merely come to sound the trumpet and to say that he is coming," they wondered what the king, himself, must be like if his herald was so resplendent—and it is said that in several instances they refused to receive the king when he came, for they said, "The man who told us that he was only your servant was a far finer looking man than you are, and much more grandly dressed." So, when the king arrived and they saw that he was but plainly dressed, as kings usually are when not wearing their state robes, they would not receive him.

Something like that happens with some of Christ's heralds, but it did not occur in the case of John the Baptist. He was not arrayed in soft raiment or rich apparel. He came straight up from the wilderness clothed in a garment of camel's hair and with leather trousers about his loins—and his food was locusts and wild honey. Nor was there anything at all about John's mode of speech which was likely to attract attention to himself and make men think less of his Master when He should come. I wish that all of us, when we go forth as Christ's heralds, crying, "Behold the Lamb of God"—and that is our main business here below—would take care that we were never so grand in our style of thought or language that when the Master, Himself, comes in all His wondrous simplicity, men would begin to despise Him because they remembered the fine tones of His pretended herald! No, let us be simple and plain whenever we have to speak of Christ and when our King, Himself, comes, let us step back and get out of sight, that He, alone, may be seen, and that all the people's hearts may be won to Him.

I have plunged into the middle of my subject at the very beginning of my sermon, for that is the theme on which I want to speak to you. First, I am going to describe the true messenger, John the Baptist, or anyone else who is like he. Then, secondly, I hope to talk about the true message—"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." And then, thirdly, I must say a little upon the true reception of this message, telling what they do who really hear and believe the true messenger of God.

1. First, then, let us think of THE TRUE MESSENGER and, as I know that there are many here who try to do good by speaking for the Lord to their fellow men, let this first part of my subject be a lesson in self-examination—not by way of discouragement, but rather of encouragement, I hope, to those whom I am addressing. Who are they who will be acknowledged by Christ, at the Last Great Day, as the true messengers of God? What are the special characteristics by which they may be known?

Well, first, the true messenger is one who sees the Lord Jesus for himself. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him." To be His herald and witness, John must see Jesus and he must see Jesus coming to him. Those Prophets who lived a long while before the coming of Christ were but dim seers compared with John the Baptist. He was like the morning star which is so near the sun that it is the brightest of the stars. We see it shining almost like a little sun and then, when the sun rises in all its brightness, the star disappears. John was "a burning and a shining light" and all who came before him were, in Christ's judgment, inferior to him. He said to the multitudes

concerning John, "What did you go out to see? A Prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a Prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who shall prepare Your way before You. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." This was the difference between John and the Prophets—his sight of Christ was clearer than theirs because he was nearer to Christ. And his view of Christ was brighter, fuller and clearer than that of all who had gone before.

Yet they were also true witnesses to Christ, according to the light they had. Our Savior said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: he saw it and was glad." And if he had not seen Christ by faith, he could not have been one of the witnesses who testified beforehand concerning Him. All the Prophets looked through the haze of the ages and, by faith, perceived their Lord. And then they wrote of Him and spoke of Him to the people. The ancient name for a Prophet was a very instructive one—he was called a seer—Christ or else we cannot bear witness to Him. As the Prophets saw Christ by faith and as John actually looked upon Him and then bore witness to Him, so must you and I see Him. Not with these eyes—that sight is reserved until the Resurrection—but with the eyes of our spirit, with the eyes of our mind and heart we must see Jesus before we can rightly speak of Him.

Are you anxious, my Brother, to go and preach? Have you seen Jesus? If not, what can you say when people ask you, "What is He like? Who is He that we should believe in Him?" You must look unto Him before you can speak of Him and, the more steadfastly you gaze upon Him, His work, His offices, His humiliation, His glorification, the better will you be able to bear your witness concerning Him. You will then speak more surely and confidently for your God if you can testify concerning that which your heart knows to be true because you have perceived and enjoyed it yourself!

Yes, and if you have seen Him in the past, try to see Him, again, and to be continually "looking unto Jesus." Let not any of us go and talk to our Sunday school class, or preach from the pulpit, or write a letter about our Lord until we have had a fresh glimpse of Him. It is wonderful how nimbly the pen or the tongue moves when the eye has just feasted itself upon Christ! The Psalmist said, "My heart is overflowing with a good theme: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer." When you have, yourself, been with Christ. When you have just come forth from the ivory palaces of communion and fellowship with the Lord Jesus, all your garments will smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia! And your words will have some of the precious savor clinging to them. So again I say that we must see Christ or else we cannot be witnesses to Him.

And, therefore, let us fix our hearts, our thoughts and our meditations so completely upon Christ that when we cry to other men, "Behold the Lamb of God," it will be because we have just beheld Him ourselves! If a man who is blind were to stand up in the street and cry, "Behold," people would be apt to ask, "What can a poor blind man bid us look at? He cannot see anything himself." If you say to the people, "Behold Christ," yet all the while your eyes are turned toward yourself and you are wondering whether you will get through the sermon all right—whether you will have a fine conclusion at the end and what the congregation will think of it when you have done—that will be like saying, "Behold!" while you, yourself, are looking the other way! And other people will look in the same direction! They will be sure to do as you do. And if you do not behold Christ, neither will they! Our inward thought, conviction and belief must be in strict accordance with our outward speech, or else we shall misrepresent ourselves—and our message will be poorly delivered and will fall without power upon our hearers.

I also remind you that we must preach Christ as coming! "I know that He has, but He is coming again. It is a blessed thing that, whereas the Prophets saw Him as coming, they only differed from us in this respect—that we can look back to His coming a second time, "without sin unto salvation"—and so we are to speak of Him as coming. It is grand preaching when the preacher can see Christ coming, when he can behold the Throne of Judgment set and can gaze upon the King in His beauty sitting upon it, and see Him reigning over all, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! It is glorious when he hears the hallelujahs of the approaching millennial age even while he is preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ! "Lo, He comes," he says, and he sees Him coming, for

he is not like the virgins who had fallen asleep and so did not watch for the bridegroom's appearing. Oh, for open eyes, expectant hearts and earnest tongues to see, and long for, and tell of our coming Lord! This is the way the faithful witness preaches Him to the people.

But, next, the true messenger

calls upon men to see Jesus. He calls them away from seeing other things and bids them

look, and, "behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" God-sent servants do not say, "Look to the priest! Look to the altar! Look to the sacraments! Look to yourself—come and confess your sins and I will give you absolution!" No, no, no, no! Forever and forever NO! They do nothing of that sort. The priests of Antichrist do that, but the servants of Christ cry, "Behold the Lamb of God." Our great difficulty is to get men's eyes off themselves, off their works, off their forms and ceremonies, off mere creed-religion and to get them to look at the living Christ who is still among us bearing the sin of all who truly seek His face!

O dear Hearers, I know that I am, in this respect, a faithful witness. Wherever else I fail in my testimony, for my soul's labor and travail, even unto anguish, is to get you away from depending even in the slightest degree upon anything else but what Christ has done! I would not wish you to have the shadow of a shade of a ghost of a pretense of a confidence anywhere out of Christ! Jesus is the only hope of sinners! Let Him be A to you, and Z, and all the letters between—the beginning and the end—and the middle and everything else! Take your eyes off all ministers, all books, all feelings and even all believing! Do not even fix your gaze on your own faith. You know that the eye cannot see itself. Did you ever see your own eye? In a mirror, perhaps, you may have done so, but that was only the reflection of it and you may, in likemanner, see the evidence of your faith, but you cannot look at the faith itself. Faith looks away from itself to the Object of faith, even to Christ! And this is what the true witness desires. He will, if he can, keep men from looking anywhere but on his Master!

Some look at their repentance, but if you cannot keep your eyes on Christ, then away with your repentance! Some are always looking to their faith, but if there is a faith that hides Christ, away with it! Some need feelings and right feelings we may wish to have—but as for those feelings which come between us and Christ, away with them! It is not fit that they should live. Our one business is to get men away from anything and from everything, however good it is, that they may look alone to Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God!

The third mark of a true witness is that he leads his own disciples to Jesus. It is generally thought to be a good thing to lead another man's disciples beyond their master, but it is not always so easy to lead our own disciples beyond ourselves. The preacher is often conscious that there are many weak persons who stop short at what he says. To them it is a great help to faith that their pastor or their minister says such-and-such. Well, for lame people, we do not object to crutches for a time, but we always anxiously pray that the faith of these poor cripples may not stand—at least, for any length of time—in the power of man, but in Christ alone! I would say to you what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, though I wish I could say something that would be worthy to be placed beneath what he said, and so be more suitable for one so much inferior to him. He says, "Though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." That is, "Let us, ourselves, be accursed if we ever dare to lead you away from Christ. It is an imprecation upon our own souls if we dare to make ourselves your masters instead of your servants for Jesus' sake!"

It was a beautiful trait in the character of John the Baptist that he was so ready to pass on to Christ his own disciples—he did not want to keep them merely to swell the number of his own followers, but only kept them with him until he could point them to his Master. When we try to win souls, if we find that people have confidence in us and affection for us, let us use that influence not to attach them to ourselves except with the earnest desire to pass them on to

Christ—that they may become disciples of the Savior for themselves and grow up from being babes who have to be nursed to become strong men in Christ Jesus.

One more thing about John the Baptist which is also a characteristic of the true witness for Christ is that he lost himself in his Master. Without a single atom of regret he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Oh, how grandly he witnessed for Christ by sinking himself until he was lost in Christ! And my Brother, it must be the same with you—if you would be a true witness for Christ, you must say that which glorifies Him, even though it dishonors yourself! Perhaps there is a very learned man sitting over yonder and the temptation to the preacher is to say something that shall make him feel that the minister to whom he is listening is not so ignorant as some people suppose. But if there is an unlearned, simple sinner anywhere in the place, the preacher’s business is just to chop his words down to that poor man’s condition and let the learned hearer receive the same message if he will!

Luther said, “When I am preaching, I see Dr. Jonas sitting there, and Oecolampadius, and Melancthon and I say to myself, “Those learned doctors know enough already, so I need not trouble about them. I shall fire at the poor people in the aisles.” That is the way Luther preached and God richly blessed his ministry because he did it. Though he was a truly learned man, he was willing to be reckoned as knowing nothing at all if by that means he could the better serve his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Dear Brothers and Sisters, when you are serving Christ, do not also seek to serve yourself in a sneaking kind of way. It is easily done—under the appearance of glorifying Christ, you may really be extolling yourself. You may even seek to win souls with the view of having the credit of doing it—and if you do, you will spoil the whole work! It must not be so with you. This royal crown must be touched by none but Christ. You and I cannot really put the crown on His head, though we may wish to do so. Christ is greater than that monarch who, when the Pope was about to crown him, took the crown out of his hands and said, “I won it myself, so I will put it on my own head.” And Christ must crown Himself! The words we sometimes sing—

*“Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all,”*

are very good and right, but, after all, Christ is His own Glory and the Holy Spirit truly glorifies Him. How can we be worthy to put the crown on His head when we are not worthy to unloose the laces of His shoes! Oh, what poor things we are! We are not fit to be the dust under His feet! Glory, glory, glory be unto Him and unto Him alone!

Thus I think I have said enough about the true messenger. Aim at being like John the Baptist in these respects, Brothers and Sisters, as God shall help you.

II. But now, secondly, we are to consider THE TRUE MESSAGE which is this—“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

In these few words we have the substance of the message to be delivered by God’s faithful ministers. First, John declared that God had sent His Son into the world that men might live through Him. He taught that Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son of God, appointed by Him to redeem mankind and that He came into the world on purpose that He might save His people from their sins. Oh, tell this wondrous story! Tell it till every wave bears onward the message and every wind moves it till all born of woman have heard the glad tidings that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” All our hopes spring from Christ and Him crucified! They begin with Him and they end with Him. And whoever believes on Him has everlasting life! But whoever rejects Him by not believing Him, there remains no hope for him—he must be lost forever! There is but one way to Heaven, and that one way is marked by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Further, in telling the true message, we must go on to explain that Jesus Christ is thus the Savior because He is the one Sacrifice for the sin of the world. “And in that rendering there is a great Truth of God which is not to be kept back. Christ Jesus did actually bear the sin of His people in

His own body on the tree. It was lifted bodily off those whom it would have crushed forever—and it was laid on Him. He was, indeed, the great Sin-Bearer—He who knew no sin was made sin for us, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Now here is a point at which some are always sticking. Robertson, of Brighton, with his magnificent genius, practically taught the Atonement in some such fashion as Dr. Duncan used to say, that Jesus Christ did something or other which, in some way or other, in some degree or other, made it possible for men to be forgiven! That was Robertson's notion of the Atonement, but we say not so! We say that He really took the sin of men upon Himself and who can read that marvelous 53rd Chapter of Isaiah without seeing that this is no figure, no metaphor, but literal Truth of God—"the Lord has made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all"! So says the Prophet. But what says the Apostle? "Who His own Self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." And I cannot preach the Gospel without proclaiming this great Truth of Christ's atoning Sacrifice and I do not mean to try to do so! I know of no way by which sin can be taken off us except by laying it on Him who was our Surety and our Substitute. And He did take it and He did bear it—and the true messenger, sent from God, tells you that—whatever else he may say or may not say.

And he tells you more than that, namely, what the text says in our Authorized Version. "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away" —! Where did He take it! I will tell you—"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." He took the sin of all Believers away so completely that it sank into the bottom of the sea! God has cast it behind His back and it shall not be mentioned against them any more forever. There is no such thing, now, as the sin of the saints, for Christ has utterly annihilated it. He came to finish transgression and to make an end of sins—and if He made an end of them, there is an end of them—they are gone forever and those who believe in Jesus are washed white as the driven snow and clothed in His matchless righteousness! This is what the true messenger has to tell, that Jesus bore the sin of His people and that He took it right away. Oh, what joyous work is ours!

This is to be our message—we are to set Christ forth as the Object of faith. We are to say to men, "Behold the Lamb of God." Is that all the sinner has to do? Yes, behold Him! Never was there another Savior like Christ Jesus our Lord. The mere looking at Him saves the soul! Whoever looks to Christ lives by that look and shall live forever. There is not a sinner in Hell who ever looked on Christ with the eyes of faith—and there never shall be such a soul! And all who are in Heaven entered there simply through beholding the slain Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Would you get there, young man? Then behold the Lamb of God and you shall get there! There is life in a look at the Lamb of God. Would you get there, poor sinner, driven and hunted about by the devil? Then behold the Lamb of God! Do but look out of the corner of your eye, if that is all that you can do. Look through your blinding tears. Look through the mists and clouds that surround you. Do but look unto Jesus and, as every bitten one who looked at the bronze serpent, lived, so every sick soul that looks to Christ shall live—and live forever!

That is the Gospel, and it is a blessed Gospel to have to preach! And blessed is the messenger who proclaims boldly and plainly, in the name of Jesus, saying on Christ's behalf, "Look unto Him, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth. Look and live." May many do so at this very moment!

III. Now I close by turning to the third head of my discourse which is THE TRUE RECEPTION OF THE MESSAGE. How can I truly receive this true message of the true messenger? Well, Brothers and Sisters, if we, by faith, "behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," observe what we shall do.

First, we shall follow Jesus. Read from the 35th —"Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God! The two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus." That is to say, they did behold the Lamb of God and, believing in Him, they followed Him. And if you have really believed in Christ, you will try to walk in His footprints. You will call Him Master and Lord. He will be your Leader and Commander and you will willingly follow where He leads and cheerfully do what He commands. Christ has not come to give you license to sin, but He has brought you to liberty from sin. Blessed liberty! If you do, indeed, thus look to Christ, follow Him at once! Become His disciple, do what He bids you, feeling that it is—

*"Yours not to reason why,
Yours not to make reply"*

but just to do as He commands—and believe what He teaches by the implicit faith which yields itself up entirely to Him. This is the test of real faith in Jesus, that the man is no more his own master, but takes Jesus to be his Master and follows wherever He leads.

The next thing that happens with those who give a true reception to the message is that they want to abide with Christ. The two disciples followed Jesus and, "They said unto Him, Master, where do You dwell?" He said unto them, "Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt and remained with Him that day." I do not know where He dwelt. I am sure that it was not a very luxurious mansion and, in later days, he had nowhere to lay His head. But as soon as ever these men had looked to Him and followed Him, they wanted to live with Him! Oh, that is the highest joy of a Christian, to live with Christ! A look of faith saves the soul because it is the beginning of a life of living with Christ forever and ever! I am afraid that some of God's people fail to realize this blessed living with Christ. They get a little joy and they seem very pleased with it, but in a little time they lose it. Why is that? Because they rejoiced merely in their own joy and when a man does that, he will soon lose it. It is as old Master Brooks says, "If a loving husband were to give his wife earrings, bracelets, jewels and then, instead of loving him for his gifts, she began to be in love with his presents and cared little for him, he would be inclined to take them away from her so as to have all her love for himself."

And surely it is so with Christ. He puts the earring of holy joy in His bride's ears and she begins to say, "Oh, how joyful I am!" No, no, do not talk like that! I heard one, the other day, bragging about his own holiness and I thought to myself, "That holiness which talks about itself is an unholy holiness." Do you think that holiness is a thing to be proclaimed about the streets, or set up for a show? Oh, no! As I think of the thrice-holy God, I lay my face in the very dust before Him. O Brothers and Sisters, true holiness is something very different from this tinsel stuff that men, in these days, boast about as they beat their drums! True holiness beats on its breast and gets away into its place of secret communion—and if it has any beauties, it shows them only to the Lord in secret, with many a blush and many a lament that it is not much more nearly what it ought to be. O Beloved, may God grant us Grace to follow Jesus and to live with Jesus!

I said that some of God's people do not seem to understand this living with Jesus, but why should not we? Why need we have doubts and fears? Why need we get away from Christ? Had we but the faith He deserves and believed in Him as He ought to be believed in, we might go from joy to joy and so ascend to Heaven as on a ladder of light! God give us this Grace of living with Christ! It is to be had by those who seek it aright.

Then, lastly, the proof which these people, who had seen Christ and followed Him, gave that they had really found Him was that they went and tried to bring others to Him. They said to their kinsfolk and acquaintances, "We have found the Messiah!" "We have found Jesus!" Ah, you have never truly found Jesus if you do not tell others about Him! You know how children act—we ought to be children in all things before God. If a little child, in its rambles, were to find honey and its brothers and sisters were all around, I feel certain that it would give such a cry after it had first sucked its own fingers, that all of them would soon be plunging their hands into the honey, too! You have never tasted its sweetness if it has not made you cry, "Come here! Was there ever such joy as this? Was there ever such delight, such rapture as this?" It is the instinct of true children of God to desire to fetch others in to taste and see that the Lord is good—to share the unspeakable bliss which is already their own!

Many of you are coming to the Lord's Table. As you come to it, I would whisper in your ear, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Never mind that bread and wine unless you can use them as poor old folks often use their spectacles. What do they use them for? To look at? No, to look through them. So, use the bread and wine as a pair of spectacles—look through them and do not be satisfied until you can say, "Yes, yes, I can see the Lamb of God, who

takes away the sin of the world!” Then shall the Communion be really what it ought to be to you.
God make it so, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.