

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John 1:19-34

Kids Word: Voice

(*This account is also in Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20)

We've spent the past 4 weeks covering "*the Prologue*" of this Gospel of John. The first 18 verses set the stage for his remaining 20 ½ chapters, which John said were "*written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" Last time, I told you belief and faith have the same root word. Belief is about entrusting our lives to a God who keeps His promises, especially when things don't go our way. We come to His Word then, not just for good ideas or to feel better, but for truths that transform our identity and lifestyle. There are few better examples than John the Baptist. In a world where everyone sought status and power, John embodied "*upside down thinking and living.*" Instead of seeking to be the star of his own show, his life gave voice to another, his cousin, Jesus Christ. We'll see why as we ponder this...

BIG IDEA: To what does your life give voice?

Let's consider some key ideas and applications in our text.

19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John the Baptist prepared Israel for something new.

- The Apostle listed several titles and names, which means his original audience knew Israel's history and 1st century leadership structure. Since many of us don't, and such information is important when reading your Bible, I'll explain. The first set of titles John mentioned were *priests and Levites from Jerusalem* who *verse 19* says "*the Jews sent*" while *verse 24* says *the Pharisees sent* (When John said "*Jews*", he often meant the Jewish leaders). [Priests](#) oversaw the temple sacrifices and represented Israel before God. Typically, they hailed from the tribe of *Levi*, one of [Israel's 12 tribes](#) (or sons of Jacob). So, if *priests* were [Levites](#), why did John say *priests* AND *Levites*? It's because people from other tribes were commonly recruited as temple helpers and generally referred to as *Levites* (like how we call all believers "*ministers*"). [About 3 centuries before Jesus was born of a virgin](#), certain [scribes](#) of Israel, who interpreted the Law of Moses, spun off into a group called the [Pharisees](#) and sought to purify Israel and make her

ready for Messiah (Christ) through strict adherence to God's Laws. **Priests** spun off into a group called the [Sadducees](#) to oversee Israel's social and political standing.

- The second set of titles John mentioned were **the Christ, Elijah, and the Prophet**. **The Christ** referred to a King God promised to send from the lineage of David. He was the hidden figure of the Old Testament who Israel expected to rise, overthrow their enemies (like Rome), right all injustices, and establish a righteous kingdom (cf. Acts 1:6). **Elijah** was a prophet, who was taken into heaven without dying (cf. 2 Kings 2). A prophecy in Malachi 4:5 said, "*I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*" Israel thought this meant **Elijah** would return from heaven, but Jesus told them **John the Baptist** fulfilled that prophecy (cf. Mark 9:11-13). Finally, **the Prophet** is a title that comes from something Moses said in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, "*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen...And (God) will put words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them*" (cf. Acts 3, 7).
- Now that we know the players, here's the point...the **Pharisees, priests, and Levites** exercised tight control over Israel, so if someone came along **baptizing** people and claiming to have a message from **the Lord**, they wanted to know why (i.e., who authorized this guy to **baptize** Jews already in good religious standing?). These Old Testament experts knew God had never promised to send a **baptizing prophet**. Was God doing something new, and was John implying their holiness (purity) achieved through rituals was insufficient? Look at **verses 23-28**...

23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." 24 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (*see endnotes on Bethany)

The baptizer was bold, yet humble.

- Quoting from Isaiah 40, **the baptizer confessed** to being A **prophet**, but not THE **prophet**. A **prophet** of Israel was one who heard from God and became His **voice** to people. John said he **baptized** people to prepare them for someone greater, the Messiah, who was already **among** them. Obviously, that put him at odds with the **Pharisees** who felt this was their job! They were like, "*Why is this guy reinitiating people who WE have already made right with God?*"

Also, does it seem strange that *the baptizer* announced *the Lord* like a bigtime boxer? In those days, humble messengers (heralds) were sent into a city to announce when a king was coming. Here's the point...people in Israel had been expecting this moment, especially because their God had not sent them a *prophet* in nearly 400 years! Was their God finally speaking to them again and ready send their long-promised Messiah-King (Christ)?

- The *baptizer's* humility was remarkable. On one hand, he claimed to be the fulfillment of a crucial Old Testament prophecy. On the other hand, he viewed himself as unworthy to *untie* Jesus' shoes. You see, Jewish disciples did everything for their master, except *untie* his sandals and wash his feet. That was an act performed by low-ranking, hired servants. *John the Baptist* exemplified what believers ought to be...we don't promote or point to ourselves, but rather we regularly humble and deny ourselves, so Jesus is always in the spotlight.

29 The next day he (the baptizer) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.' 32 And John bore witness: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'

Messiah came to deal with sin, but not just for Israel.

- *The baptizer* called Jesus *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*. From verses 11-13 we're sure he did NOT mean Jesus *took away* everyone's sin (universal salvation). His bold, risky words implied their long-awaited Messiah had come, not only to be a King, but to be a Savior to them and other nationalities (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 7:9). The term, "*Lamb of God*" would have evoked images of Israel's annual Passover Feast, which God had established back when He broke them out of Egyptian captivity (cf. Exodus 12:1-13; Isaiah 53). This Jewish audience would've realized *the baptizer* was blatantly implying God's "*new activity*" was some kind of "*new exodus*." It was also implying something the religious leaders refused to hear...Israel needed more than a king, their spiritual condition required a savior.
- What made *the baptizer* and others so sure Jesus was the Messiah? Was it the fact that he and Jesus were related through their mothers? It's true Jesus' mom, Mary, was related to [Elizabeth and her elderly priest husband, Zechariah](#), but that wasn't how John found out his cousin was

Israel's long-promised Messiah (Christ). **Verses 31-32** say he realized this while doing what God had called him to do! In fact, like other Old Testament prophets, God had told him what to do and what to look for. While **baptizing** Jesus, John **saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remain on Jesus**. Now, this does NOT mean the Holy Spirit is a bird. He was just describing the event with a word symbolizing purity, humility, and grace. You see, if people were too poor to afford a sacrificial **lamb**, God put a graceful provision in His Law for them to offer a **dove** (Leviticus 5:7). The point is...this event "*sealed the deal*" for John. Why? John realized Jesus' **baptism** was an anointing ceremony, which in Old Testament times was when God sent a **prophet** to anoint a king (e.g., Saul, David) to signify the **Spirit** had come to rest on and empower them. This makes sense, especially because the word Messiah (Grk. Christos) means "*the anointed one.*" (cf. Isaiah 11:1-2, 42:1, 61:1). While **John baptized with water** (a symbol for life), he said Jesus would **baptize with the Holy Spirit**. John Piper, a prolific pastor from Minneapolis wrote, "*Baptizing with the Spirit and baptizing with water is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug... between a person and a painting, between a marriage and a ring, between a birth and a birth certificate, between immersion in water and immersion in God.*" The **baptizer's** work and Christ's work were complementary, but radically different! He was basically saying, "*I can only go so far with you, but this guy will never leave you because His permanent Spirit anointing will remain on you and in you.*"

What's your role in giving voice to (promoting, announcing, making much of) Jesus?

- ***Are you a humble servant?*** John was the picture of humility. He was a voice, but he was not the Word. Oswald Sanders wrote, "*the successful person attaches the affection of his or her followers more to Christ than to self.*" Humility is not doubting ourselves or thinking we can't do significant things (that's really a form of pride). Humility is seeing ourselves as God sees us and knowing our role in God's story. John always made sure people knew Jesus was the star of the show. This reminds me of Jesus' words in Luke 17:10, "*When you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'*" Let's use our God-given **voices** to point others to the eternal Word! Next question...
- ***Are you a lifelong learner?*** It's interesting how **the baptizer** followed his calling for over 30 years without seeing the full picture. Friends, that's faith! Rarely do we get to see what God is up to, yet we can always be sure He keeps His promises. Christianity involves learning to be

comfortable with mystery and uncertainty. We can't know the future, but we can know the One who holds it. If you're unwilling to trust and obey God, you can't expect must enlightenment.

- ***Are you helping others know and follow Jesus?*** The next section shows how *the baptizer's* work helped others follow Jesus, specifically the 12 Apostles! How cool would it have been to pave the way for those who planted the first-ever local churches? I hope you've trusted Jesus as Savior and King, that Jesus is helping you deal with sin, and that you're coming to know Him better. But most of all, I hope you come to realize there's more to being a Christian than being blessed and getting all your questions answered. Like *the baptizer* and the Apostle, we all have a part to play in making much of Jesus. God not only wants to change us, but He wants our changed lives to prove the worth of His powerful anointing to the world. Changed people are God's plan to reach the world, so the question is not just, "*Are you a follower of Jesus?*" but "*Who is following Jesus because of you?*".

Let's pray...Father, the baptizer's story is compelling and inspiring. May we, as your people, learn to take a posture of purposeful humility. Form in us the heart of John the Baptist which says, "I must decrease, and Jesus must increase." May our lives spotlight the true star of the show, Jesus Christ, so the world sees His beauty and worth. Amen.

Please stand and sing with us a song to help us through trouble and confusion, "God is our Refuge."

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes/Additional thoughts:

- **Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, "***Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***" Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **The rise of the Pharisees:** "The history of old covenant Israel shows us that despite God's patience with His people and His sending them many prophets to call them to repentance, the Lord finally grew tired of the people's impenitence and visited the worst of the covenant curses upon them—exile. In 722 BC, Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and took the Israelites from their land, and Babylon did the same thing to Judah and the Judahites in 586 BC

(2 Kings 17; 25). When the Jews came back to their land in 538 BC, sin was still a problem, as we see in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Over time, however, many Jews developed a new resolve to keep the Mosaic law and to avoid sin in order to prevent the exile from happening again. While those desires were commendable, many Jews crossed the line into legalism. They came up with many traditions and extra rules as a “fence around the Torah.” By keeping these extra rules, they reasoned, they would avoid breaking the actual commandments of the Mosaic law. And in time, these traditions came to be seen as part of the law itself. The chief party that took this approach was the Pharisees. Because of the Pharisees’ outward piety and concern for the law, the common people looked to them as exemplars of holiness.” Ligonier Devotionals

- **400 years of silence:** “Four hundred years or so passed between the end of the ministry of the prophet Malachi and the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea (Matt. 3:1). During those four centuries, there was no prophet in Israel, but the Jews knew that at least one more prophet would be sent by God before the day of the Lord. As Malachi 4:5 explains, God had promised to send Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers before the final judgment. Given this reality, it is no surprise that people took notice when John the Baptist arrived on the scene appearing much like the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:7–8; Mark 1:6).” Ligonier Devotionals
- **Old Testament Titles:** “In the Old Testament, the king of Israel was chosen by God. Then, in a public ceremony, a priest anointed the chosen one’s head with olive oil, thus making him the ‘anointed one.’ However, no king ever lived up to his calling—not even King David, with his terrible downfall (2 Sam. 11:1–12:15). For centuries, prophets proclaimed the eventual rise of a larger-than-life figure known as ‘the Anointed One,’ a king who would please God perfectly, lead the nation to claim all of the covenant promises, and even rule over the whole world (Ps. 2). By the first century, the Jews expected him to be an impressive political powerhouse and military genius who would rid them of Roman rule and then usher them into an unprecedented time of prosperity...they wanted to know if John the Baptizer was the same Old Testament prophet who, instead of dying, was carried off to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kgs. 2:11-12). The prophet Malachi later predicted that an Elijah-like figure would announce the imminent arrival of the Messiah (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6). Many took the prophet’s words literally and expected the return of the actual man...Although John the Baptizer was indeed the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy (see Matt. 11:14), he was not the revered seer of old himself...When the religious leaders asked the Baptizer if he were ‘the Prophet,’ they had the prophecy of Moses in mind (Deut. 18:15-19)...The wilderness preacher was indeed a genuine prophet; however, he was not the Prophet...John the Baptizer’s self-description was drawn from a well-known prophecy (Isa. 40:3), which in turn drew upon a familiar image. When a monarch traveled to a particular region, it was rarely unplanned. A forerunner would first go and announce the imminent arrival of the king. The city would then be prepared and the route cleared of anything that would slow the king’s chariot or make the journey unpleasant. The forerunner was simply a voice, having no authority of his own. If people chose to heed his message, it would be because they revered the coming king.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Priests:** “(b) of Jewish ‘priests,’ e.g., Mat 8:4; 12:4, 5; Luk 1:5, where allusion is made to the 24 courses of ‘priests’ appointed for service in the Temple (cp. 1Ch 24:4 ff.); Jhn 1:19; Hbr 8:4; (c) of believers, Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. Israel was primarily designed as a nation to be a

kingdom of ‘priests,’ offering service to God, e.g., Exd 19:6; the Israelites having renounced their obligations, Exd 20:19, the Aaronic priesthood was selected for the purpose, till Christ came to fulfil His ministry in offering up Himself; since then the Jewish priesthood has been abrogated, to be resumed nationally, on behalf of Gentiles, in the Millennial Kingdom, Isa 61:6; 66:21. Meanwhile all believers, from Jews and Gentiles, are constituted ‘a kingdom of priests,’ Rev 1:6 (see above), ‘a holy priesthood,’ 1Pe 2:5, and ‘royal,’ 1Pe 2:9. The NT knows nothing of a sacerdotal class in contrast to the laity; all believers are commanded to offer the sacrifices mentioned in Rom 12:1; Phl 2:17; 4:18; Hbr 13:15, 16; 1Pe 2:5.” Vines Expository Dictionary

- **Levites:** “a. one of Levi's posterity. b. in a narrower sense those were called Levites (Hebrew לְוִיִּם, לְוִי בְנֵי, לְוִי) who, not being of the race of Aaron for whom alone the priesthood was reserved, served as assistants of the priests. It was their duty to keep the sacred utensils and the temple clean, to provide the sacred loaves, to open and shut the gates of the temple, to sing sacred hymns in the temple, and do many other things; so Luke 10:32; John 1:19; Acts 4:36;” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon
- **The 3 offices of Jesus:** “Not many people know this, but Jesus has three offices: prophet, priest, and king. Jesus is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6; 6:20). But you cannot be a priest if you’re not a man (Num. 4:1-3). Remember, Jesus was born under the Old Testament covenant and was subject to the law (Galatians 4:4). Therefore, to enter into that priesthood, he had to be 30 years of age (Numbers 4:1-3), receive a verbal blessing (Exodus 39:43; Numbers 6:22-27; Matthew 3:17), anointed (Exodus 29:7; Leviticus 8:12; 1 John 2:20, 27; Matt. 3:16), and washed with water (Exodus 29:1-4; Leviticus 8:6-7; Matt. 3:16).” ([Matt Slick](#))
- **Two towns named Bethany:** Pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote, “Residents of Jerusalem knew Bethany as the town less than two miles east of the city wall. Bethany beyond the Jordan, on the other hand, lay 23 miles away on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley. This is where John the Baptizer called Jews to repent of their sins and submit to the rite of baptism.” Even though it’s not the same town, some have suggested the Apostle John may have mentioned Bethany to establish a connection with the chief miracle he will write about in chapter 11 (the resurrection of Lazarus). Readers might connect the prophecy of chapter 1 with the miracle of chapter 11.
- **Views of the Messiah:** “There was no single ruling view of the Messiah in Jesus’ day. Some thought he would bring peace, others stressed righteousness. Due to the Roman occupation many cast him in a military role and saw him as leading the overthrow of the Roman yoke and, beyond that, securing the world-wide prominence of the Jewish nation.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Not looking for a Savior:** “Now, by the way, they weren’t looking for a Savior, you have to understand that. They weren’t looking for a lamb; they weren’t looking for a sacrifice; they weren’t looking for someone to take the wrath of God. They were looking for a King because they thought they were okay. That was a modest commitment to repentance for the sake of John and for the sake of being ready for the Messiah. But there was no sense in which they were looking for a Savior.” Pastor John MacArthur
- **Jesus’ humanity:** “Up to that point John was saying, ‘I knew Him, but there was no way for me to be certain that this is the Messiah’, which by the way, is a footnote, is a clear declaration that Jesus’ humanity was real humanity. There was nothing about seeing the man Jesus that would tell you He was a heavenly person.” Pastor John MacArthur

- **The Jews:** “The term ‘the Jews’ is a term you will see seventy times in the gospel of John. It is never used ethnically. It is never used racially. It is always used in one sense: it is used to identify the enemies of Jesus. It’s John’s choice term. You don’t find it in the other gospels. You find it here in the gospel of John. It is the term that John uses for the religious establishment, the religious elite from the high priest all the way down to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, priests—everybody else who were the duly constituted leaders of apostate Judaism who resented, hated Christ and ultimately were responsible for handing Him over to the Romans to be executed.” Pastor John MacArthur
- **The Jewish inquiry:** “The reason for the inquiry was likely as political as it was religious, for during the first century, it was not uncommon for Jewish individuals to proclaim themselves the Messiah and attempt to lead an uprising against the occupying Roman Empire.” Ligonier Devotionals
- **Lamb of God:** “What did John the Baptist mean in giving Jesus this title? Some argue that John had in mind the warrior lamb of first-century Jewish apocalyptic writing, a figure of immense strength, who in Revelation 5:6 (cf. 17:14) is an image of the Lord Jesus Christ. This would accord with John’s anticipation of the Messiah’s function as judge (Mt. 3:7–12). Even if this be conceded, it is difficult to believe that the sacrificial aspects of the ‘Lamb’ title would have been absent from John’s mind...Readers of the gospel with even a rudimentary knowledge of the Old Testament would have a number of pictures readily brought to mind: the lamb provided by God for Abraham (Gn. 22:8, 13); the Lamb of Isaiah 53 who was led to the slaughter for the sins of God’s people; and perhaps most likely of all, the Passover Lamb of Exodus 12, which will be important for John the evangelist as he unveils the cross...the Lamb will ‘take away’ sin. In this connection the imagery of the scapegoat is particularly evocative. The priest laid his hands on the head of the hapless victim transferring the guilt of the people to the animal, and then the creature was released in the wilderness to proclaim the removal of guilt. Few aspects of the gospel need greater, or more frequent, reaffirmation than this one. How many people struggle for survival beneath crushing burdens of guilt!” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Lamb and Spirit:** “Only when the lamb has been killed for the world’s sins can the spirit of the living God be poured out on his people. Only when the Temple has been made clean and ready – the Temple of human hearts, polluted by sin and rebellion – can the presence of God come and live there. So, on the evening of the first Easter Day, Jesus breathes on his disciples, giving them his own spirit, his own breath, to be theirs (20:21–23).” Professor NT Wright
- **Son of God and Lamb:** “This title was given to Jesus at his baptism by the Father (Mt. 3:17; Lk. 3:22) ...At a time when there is increasing recognition of the critical importance of the child-parent relationship for the development of human personality, this gospel affords a wonderful, God-given model of what that special relationship can mean...He says to us today, ‘son [daughter], your sins are forgiven’ (Mk. 2:5). ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more’ (Heb. 10:17)...‘The sins of the world.’ Without any exception, every kind of sin and evil is covered. There is no sin too heinous, no wickedness too terrible, no habitual failure too often repeated, that it cannot be ‘taken away’ by Christ, our heavenly Lamb.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Sin of the world:** “The sin that the Lamb of God takes away is the sin of the world (John 1:29). Here the word “world” refers to all people without distinction, not all people without exception. That is, Jesus did not take away the sin of every person who has ever lived but only

those who trust in Him (vv. 11–13). He made no distinction regarding the kinds of people for whom He died. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, atoned for the sins of rich people, poor people, Africans, Asians, Americans, Europeans, rulers, servants, men, women—all kinds of people.”
Ligonier Devotionals

- **Jewish baptism:** “Jewish baptism was a rite in which a new Gentile convert to Judaism was ceremonially immersed in pure water as a symbolic, once-for-all cleansing from sin before entering the Hebrew covenant community. It was supposed to be administered by priests, not by a wild-eyed, locust-eating firebrand from the wilderness. It was intended for Gentile proselytes, not Jews already born into Abraham’s covenant with God. It was to be done in pure water in the temple or synagogue, not in the muddy Jordan River. But these were all man-made rules...John gave the rite of baptism a new application. He called Jews to a baptism of repentance, saying, in effect, ‘Because of your sin, you are outside of Abraham’s covenant with God. You must repent like a Gentile and come to God as if for the first time.’” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Baptism of repentance:** “When John baptized in the wilderness near the Jordan river, he caused an uproar because he preached a baptism for the remission of sins to Israel (Matt. 3). Before John, only Gentile converts to Judaism underwent a similar rite, because they were regarded as unclean. In baptizing Israelites, John was teaching that the chosen people were unclean, and that their Temple could not cleanse them, thereby scandalizing the priesthood (John 1:19–28).” Ligonier Devotionals
- **Our baptism:** *Baptism* is a sacred and tangible initiation rite which we can always look back on to confirm and assure us of our spiritual anointing and calling. Our *water baptism* identifies us with Jesus, who was also *water baptized*. It confirms that everything true of Jesus is now true of those who’ve been united with Jesus by grace through faith. During our *water baptism*, the Father tells us what He told His Son, “*I am pleased with you.*” Like Jesus, our kingdom work is not performed to gain God’s pleasure, it’s done because God is pleased with us in Christ. Because Jesus lived and died, we begin with a clean slate (*sin taken away*). Our *water baptism* also confirms we have been anointed by the Anointed One (Messiah) who *baptizes with the Holy Spirit*. We should note that Scripture does not teach the principle of “*multiple Spirit baptisms.*” The moment we unite with Jesus by grace through faith, we receive God’s full Spirit like Jesus received it.
- **Baptizer with the Spirit:** “We noted above John’s witness to Jesus as Messiah, the one whom the Spirit anoints. Here is the complementary truth (1:32–33)—Jesus also dispenses the Spirit to his people. With the single exception of 1 Corinthians 12:13, the New Testament usage of ‘baptism with/in the Spirit’ is in connection with John’s witness to Jesus...Baptism is an initiatory experience. In the case of John the Baptist, it initiated its recipients into a readiness for the coming of the Messiah; in the New Testament church, baptism initiated into the family of God...To entitle Jesus ‘the baptizer with the Spirit’ means primarily that he is the one through whom we are initiated into God’s kingdom through receiving the life of God the Holy Spirit. In this sense it is a synonym of Jesus as the regenerator, the one through whom we are ‘born again’ (so 1:13; 3:1f.)...Bearing in mind that John’s baptism was a public one and very likely by immersion, it was clearly a critical experience for those who underwent it.” Pastor Bruce Milne

- The baptizer's upbringing:** “Clearly, he baptized people. Some know he lived in the desert and subsisted on a diet of locusts and honey. Those interested in theology know he was the forerunner of the Messiah. And...that is about all most people know. Yet Jesus said of him, ‘Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!’ (Matt. 11:11)...The lack of information serves an important purpose for John, which we will soon discover. We must look to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke for details...Dr. Luke, a physician by training, was interested in the humanity of the men and women surrounding Jesus. From him we learn that John was born the only child to an aging priest, Zacharias, and his post-menopausal wife, Elizabeth. His birth attracted the attention of everyone in the Judean hill country, not only because it was miraculous, but also because John was set aside from day one to be a Nazirite. He was not to cut his hair, or touch anything dead, or partake of anything from the grapevine—no wine, no grapes, no raisins (see Num. 6:2-6). He had been chosen by God, even before his conception, to be the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah (see Isa. 40:3-5; Luke 1:14-17)...Luke says, “The child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel” (Luke 1:80). Don’t misunderstand—this John grew up among dust and rock and scrub bushes and heat and the scarcity of everything, including food and water. However, in the silence and solitude, and in the simplicity of those difficult days, John communed with the Author of truth. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his earliest years (Luke 1:15)...When John came out of the wilderness to confront and convict the nation of Israel, how different he was from the religious leaders people were used to hearing! He ‘was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey’ (Mark 1:6)...John stood gaunt from ascetic living and leathery from the sun...Living in the wilderness...it taught him complete dependence upon God for every physical need.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- I myself did not know Him:** “This does not mean John had never met Jesus before; after all, they were relatives (see Luke 1:26–45). John the Baptist’s point was that his insight into Jesus’ identity was not due to personal acquaintance but by revelation from God...John the Baptist needed a special revelation from God to know who Jesus was, and this parallels the illumination that all sinners need if they are to see Jesus as Savior and believe in Him. While we must bear accurate witness to Christ, no one will believe our testimony, no matter how accurate it is, unless God opens the eyes of their hearts. Let us pray that He would do that for our loved ones who do not know Jesus as Savior.” Ligonier Devotionals
- How the baptizer overlooked the obvious:** “John’s honesty is startling. On the one hand, he freely talks of his receiving revelation directly from God—a privilege reserved for prophets—and on the other, he admits that he did not recognize his relative as the Messiah. According to Luke 1:36, their mothers were related, so their families must have mingled before. Undoubtedly, Elizabeth told her son the story of Mary’s visit many times throughout the years (cf. Luke 1:39-56)... Jesus Christ, though equal with God in every respect, did not appear on the surface to be an extraordinary man. He was a man among men, a Jewish son of a Jewish mother, reared in an obscure town far from the center of religious activity...He possessed none of the traits we expect from leaders: ...as He stood among His fellow humans, no one recognized Him. No one connected the dots. And let’s be honest: Truth often stares us in the face and we fail to acknowledge Him.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll

- **The lampstand, not the light:** “John the Baptizer said, in effect, ‘Christ is the light; I am merely the lampstand.’ The purpose of a lampstand is to hold up the light so that everything is illuminated. No matter how expensive or how beautiful a lampstand may be, it’s useless without a light. This is a crucial distinction when serving God in ministry, one the religious authorities in Jerusalem didn’t understand. John, however, never forgot his role and his purpose. He refused to allow anyone to overlook the message by focusing on the messenger. And that is what made him an exceptionally extraordinary man among men...John was extraordinary, but he was only human...This gives us hope. John had the Holy Spirit dwelling within him; those of us who are in Christ have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.”
- **Common, yet extraordinary:** “John was extraordinary, but he was only human: He renounced most of what his contemporaries would have considered reasonable comforts...He called Jews to approach their God as though they were Gentile converts, and he called the religious establishment to account for their hypocrisy and crimes...This gives us hope. John had the Holy Spirit dwelling within him; those of us who are in Christ have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. John was given an extraordinary, countercultural message from God; the gospel is an extraordinary, countercultural message from God. John stood apart from his world in order to reach it more effectively; we have been called to do the same (John 17:15-18). John spoke the truth boldly despite the risk of suffering persecution from the enemies of truth...we all have the opportunity to be uncommon men and women.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Useful, but not indispensable:** “John was useful, but he was not indispensable...Those who become ‘successful’ in ministry, specifically those who attract a great following, face a particular danger. If they are not careful, they begin to believe their own press...What about you? Are you serving on a committee and feel that it cannot function without you? Are you leading others and feel that the goals will not be met without your direct involvement? Must you have a hand in everything that occurs around you for fear that nothing will be done ‘right’ otherwise? Are you that controlling? How comfortable are you allowing subordinates to have a vision for your organization that is greater than your own? Let’s face it; cemeteries are full of people who thought they were indispensable.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **The baptizer’s season of doubt:** “First, John the Baptist proclaimed to the crowd, when he saw Jesus coming, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (v. 29). This statement raises some difficulties at first because this forthright proclamation of Jesus’ significance does not seem to be in line with John the Baptist’s later doubts concerning the work of Jesus when John suffered in prison under Herod (Matt. 11:2–3). On that occasion, John apparently found it hard to believe that his suffering could be reconciled with Jesus’ ministry if Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah. How could he, the Messianic forerunner, suffer if Jesus came to set things right in creation. Here we should make allowances for John’s human weaknesses. John was a fine man of God, but he was not sinless, and under great trial he found himself wondering about whether he had understood Jesus’ identity correctly. Kind Savior that He is, Jesus did not rebuke John for his doubts, but He replied by describing the works He was doing, works that the prophet Isaiah said would be the works of the Messiah (vv. 4–6; see Isa. 42:6–7; 61:1–2). Essentially, Jesus reassured John that he was correct about Jesus’ identity as the Messiah and the Lamb of God.” Ligonier Devotionals
- **Looking ahead:** “The death of Jesus takes place, in this gospel, on the afternoon when the Passover lambs were being killed in the Temple. Jesus is the true Passover lamb...John, like

many New Testament writers but in his own particular way, wants us to understand the events concerning Jesus as a new, and better, Exodus story. Just as God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, so God was now bringing a new people out of an even older and darker slavery...according to John, God's lamb is going to take away the sin of the world itself. This can only mean that God's rescue operation is moving out, wider than just Israel, to embrace the whole of creation...This has already been hinted in the Prologue (1.12-13). Everybody who receives the Word, who believes in his name, can become a newborn child of God. Everybody – not just those with a particular pedigree or certificate of achievement. Again and again in John's gospel we will see the ancient people of God, not least their rulers and self-appointed guardians of tradition, missing the meaning of what Jesus is doing, while people on the edges, outside the boundaries, get the point and find themselves forgiven, healed, brought in by God's transforming love." Professor NT Wright

Articles/Songs/Videos:

Helpful thoughts for discussion leaders:

1. Go for a single, not a home run...don't drag the night out; realize more people = less deep sharing.
2. Keep discussion around 30mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.

Challenge Questions

Review the BIG IDEA: To what does your life give voice?

-Simple questions...What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparation questions for John 1:19-34.

- What does John's use of Jewish history and titles reveal about his original target audience?
- Who were the priests, Levites, Pharisees? How about the Christ, Elijah, and the prophets?
- Who was John the Baptist, and what stands out to you about him?
- What did John the Baptist witness that changed His perspective on his cousin, Jesus?

Application questions from John 1:19-34.

- Why do sincere efforts to follow rules and rituals still fall short of God's standard for righteous and holiness? How can obedience be the result of salvation but not the means to earn it?
- Does your life elevate Jesus or are you a self-promotor? What do people think you're about (try asking them)? Confess any pride this passage uncovered, receive forgiveness, and ask God to help you have the baptizer's attitude and faithful fortitude.
- Are there certain groups of people or segments of society you tend to shy away from because you think they are beyond the gospel's reach? Ask for God's help, then consider what it would take for you to start getting the gospel to people who are not like you.
- What evidence have you seen of God's powerful Spirit working in your life? How is His Spirit changing you and inspiring you to help others know Jesus?

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://toddenstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://toddenstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>