

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

March 1-7, 2020

Sermon Series: This Changes Everything

Week One: "From Jesus to Lord"

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week's Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday's sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Almighty God, who calls us to prayer, and who offers Yourself to all who seek You, pour out Your Holy Spirit on us today, and deliver us from coldness of heart, wandering minds, and wrongful desires. By the power of Your Spirit, place within us steadfast love and devotion, so that today we may worship and serve You with all of our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Throughout the Gospels we find that when people encountered Jesus they were changed, and for the better. That same transformation is available to you, a change for the better, when you encounter Christ in your life.

This Week's Sermon Theme:

John the Baptist points to Jesus as "The Lamb of God" and releases his own followers to become followers of Jesus. They call him "Lord" as He becomes their leader. What does it mean to follow Jesus as our Lord today?

Sunday Scripture Reading: John 1:29-34 (A group member should read the passage aloud.)

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

What name does John the Baptist apply to Jesus when he sees Him coming toward him? (1:29)

What does John the Baptist say Jesus will do? (1:29)

What is it about Jesus that causes John the Baptist to say Jesus surpasses him? (1:30)

Why does John the Baptist say he came baptizing with water? (1:31)

What does John the Baptist say he saw happen to Jesus? (1:32)

How does John the Baptist say he was able to recognize who Jesus was? (1:33)

With what will Jesus baptize people? (1:33)

What is John the Baptist's final testimony about who Jesus truly is? (1:34)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged. These are "I wonder" questions that the group might want to pursue together.

Why did John the Baptist use the particular phrase "Lamb of God"? How is being the "Lamb of God" connected to the idea of "taking away the sins of the world"?

John the Baptist says the reason he came baptizing with water was to reveal Jesus to Israel. But how does John's water baptism serve to reveal Jesus?

Why doesn't John (the gospel writer, not the Baptist) include the scene where Jesus is baptized by John and the Spirit comes upon Jesus? Why does he only have John the Baptist refer to it in the past... and without even mentioning Jesus' baptism? Where does this way of telling the story place the emphasis?

First John the Baptist calls Jesus "Lamb of God," but ends up calling Jesus "Son of God." How are those two names connected? Or are they? Do they mean the same thing or different things?

Didn't the Holy Spirit come on other people in the Old Testament? Why does the Holy Spirit coming on Jesus lead John the Baptist to the conclusion that this makes Jesus the Son of God?

What does all of this have to do with recognizing Jesus as Lord? Consider how John the Baptist has been preaching that Jesus "surpasses" him.

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

Read also: Revelation 5; Isaiah 53:7; Genesis 22:10-13; Isaiah 11:1-2; John 1:19-20; Mark 1:1; Exodus 4:21-23; 2 Samuel 7:14; John 1:35-42

Five books in the New Testament arise from what is commonly called the "Johannine circle" of early followers of Christ – the Gospel of John, the epistles 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation. Regardless of actual authorship or date of origin, it seems clear that these five books arose from the same community (or communities). The five books share certain themes and are distinct from other New Testament writings in the significance given to many of these themes. Among these themes are ideas of light versus darkness, life versus death, a strong emphasis on the pre-existence and divinity of Christ, and on the supremacy of Christ over all other philosophies or religions.

It is likely that the depiction of Christ as the Lamb of God also arose from the Johannine community of faith. In Revelation 5, a somewhat paradoxical parallel is drawn between Jesus as the powerful Lion of Judah as well as the Lamb who was slain. But even this Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, symbolizing perfect power and perfect knowledge. The apocalyptic presentation in Revelation conveys the Christian doctrine of salvation – the mighty and powerful Lion accomplishes salvation for the world through his sacrificial death as a Lamb. We see the same theology presented here in John 1:29 when John the Baptist identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” The image certainly has its roots in Isaiah 53:7, and in the lamb provided by God as a substitute for the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:10-13.

The depiction of the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven and resting on Jesus emphasizes that John the Baptist is the primary witness to the fulfillment in Jesus of the Messianic expectation arising from Isaiah 11:1-2. Not only is this Jesus the “Lamb of God,” but He is also the “Branch of Jesse” on whom “the Spirit of the LORD will rest.” Without reference specifically to Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist, but by emphasizing the resting of the Holy Spirit on Jesus, the Gospel writer adds further emphasis to the declaration that John the Baptist was not the Messiah (see John 1:19-20), but Jesus IS.

John the Baptist’s witness to Jesus ends with the proclamation that Jesus is “the Son of God.” This language, in reference to Jesus, is widespread in early Christian circles – see the opening of Mark’s Gospel in Mark 1:1, for example. This phrase also had deep roots in the Old Testament – Israel itself is called God’s first-born son (Exodus 4:21-23), David’s offspring is adopted as “God’s own son” (2 Samuel 7:14), and “the righteous” are often referred to as “sons of God” in non-biblical ancient Jewish writings from the time of Christ (such as Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Jubilees). The Christian proclamation, however, was not that Jesus was “a son of God” – that is, a righteous man – but “THE Son of God.” It is intriguing how a simple Greek grammatical article – “the” rather than “a” – carries such theological weight in the Gospels!

Looking a few verses beyond the end of the sermon text, we see the upshot of all this for both John (the writer of the Gospel) and for John the Baptist (the protagonist of this part of the narrative). When two of John the Baptist’s disciples (followers) heard John the Baptist call Jesus “the Lamb of God,” they stopped following John the Baptist, and followed Jesus (John 1:35-38). According to 1:40, one of these two followers of John the Baptist was none other than Andrew, the brother of Peter. It is no wonder Andrew is often referred to as “the first evangelist,” as John reports that it was Andrew who invited his brother Simon (whom Jesus renamed “Peter”) to come to meet Jesus.

John’s purpose in relating the story of John the Baptist’s disciples in this way is consistent with one of the emphases of the Johannine community – Jesus is supreme over all other teachers, philosophers, or religions. Whoever, or whatever you are following now, the only possible response to the coming of the Lamb of God is to leave them behind, to follow the Lamb who was slain.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

What do you think it was about John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus was "the Lamb of God," "the Branch of Jesse" (the one the Spirit rested upon), and/or "the Son of God" that encouraged his own followers to suddenly become followers of Jesus?

What background knowledge is required for understanding the titles John the Baptist uses for Jesus? Do you feel well-versed in that knowledge? Which of the titles for Jesus is most meaningful to you?

Who, or what, are people today following? Assuming unchurched people today do not have any context for understanding the names John the Baptist applies to Jesus, what language could be used today that would convince people that moving their allegiance to Jesus is worthwhile?

What else, or who else, are you following, besides Jesus? Have you fully surrendered your allegiance to others, to follow Jesus? How is this related to the simple declaration, "Jesus is my Lord"?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Loving God, we praise You for the gift of Jesus. Help us to surrender all other lords to follow Christ as Lord. Give us the courage and the power to invite others to follow Jesus as Lord. Guide us to fully embrace what it means for Jesus to be Your Lamb, Messiah, and Son. In the name of Christ, our Savior, Amen.