

Look and Listen Part 2

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This is a strange sermon that connects many dots that I didn't set out to connect, but my brain was like this looks like a fun puzzle and I'm up for the challenge. Can I connect our upcoming water baptism service on January 30th, the Bible reading plan, epiphany, looking and listening, and Jesus? Give me 25 minutes. Last Sunday we started a series called Look and Listen and we will continue that this morning. However, Thursday, was also Epiphany. A day when many Christians celebrate the arrival of the wise men, some nationalities refer to this as Three Kings Day. For some Christians Epiphany celebrates the day Jesus was baptized in water by John the Baptist. Then there are Christians like us, and in our tradition, we just call it Thursday. But, a couple of things happened – one was the passage we happened to be studying Wednesday night in our conversation on the book of Acts which reminded me of John the Baptist's importance as a preacher of repentance and his ministry of baptism in water, and the other thing was that Pastor Phil got a crazy infection in his face and has been in excruciating pain all week and was unable to preach today. So all of this was swirling around in my head and the result is this sermon. I've spent the week thinking of why many churches around the world celebrate the event of Jesus being baptized in water and beginning His earthly ministry and why I've only ever thought of it as a passing story. Then I remembered that in Acts 1 after Jesus has ascended into heaven and the disciples have gone back to Jerusalem and they've gathered with the many women who also followed Jesus and His earthly family they decide they need to choose another man to take the place of Judas. Specifically, they needed **To choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. Acts 1:21-22** What made this event – His baptism – of such significance that it is listed in the same categories as ascension and resurrection? And, if it was that important to the first disciples should it still be important to us? And, if so, then perhaps we should look at this event with fresh eyes and listen to what this story has to say. In the process, I pray we find yet another way to look and listen to Jesus this year.

John the Baptist, was Jesus' cousin, and you can read his birth story in Luke 1. Luke correctly identifies him as the forerunner of Christ – the one the prophet Malachi had said would come before the day of the Lord to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. John is also the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's words, "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" John did in fact live in the desert and ate wild honey and locusts and wore a lot of leather and camel hair. But, he was singularly focused on his role to prepare people for the coming Messiah. He called the people to repent, to confess their sins, to make themselves ready for the day of the Lord's appearing.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, the disciple, he tells us something important about John the Baptist – that he was sent from God to testify to others about Jesus. He was not the Christ, he was not the Light of the World, he was just the one who was telling everyone that the Christ, the Messiah, the Light had come into the world. People then asked him – who are you? Are you a prophet? Are you Elijah come back from the dead? John the Baptist said no I'm just the one telling people to get ready because while I'm baptizing with water there is one coming who will baptize with fire and I'm not even worthy to touch his sandals that's how much greater than me the Messiah will be. So get ready.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." John 1:29-31 Later John would say that his goal was for Jesus to increase and himself to decrease and so like a self-fulfilling prophecy that is exactly what happens. John fades even now in a story where he is present because all the focus is on Jesus. In the midst of a crowd, while doing his God-appointed job, fulfilling his life's purpose he catches sight of Jesus and doesn't look away. Instead, John the Baptist recognizes the most important person has arrived and his attention is captured.

For those reading with us on the Bible plan we read the baptism story in Mark this week, but Matthew's account gives us a clearer picture of what happened next. **Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now;**

it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:13-17

It begs the questions – why did Jesus need to be baptized? It wasn't that Jesus needed to repent because remember Jesus is fully God and is without sin. But, in some way the act of baptism for Jesus is still similar to all of us when we publicly state that we are no longer in control of our lives, but have surrendered everything to the Lord in obedience. Baptism for Jesus was fulfilling all righteousness, and it was also Him humbling Himself. For those of you reading along with us we also read this this week, **Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Philippians 2:5-8** We say that baptism symbolizes us dying to our sins as we go down into the water and then coming back up a new creature, resurrected in Christ. In the same way, Jesus foreshadows His own willingness to be obedient to His coming death and showing us from the beginning of His ministry that resurrection and new life was always the plan and purpose of God. Jesus was testifying of His death and resurrection from the beginning – even at His baptism.

Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Because it set the example that Jesus would tell His disciples at the end of His earthly ministry – **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20** Side note – if you've given your life to Jesus, repented of your sins, and you've not yet been baptized in water you have an opportunity to do so at the end of this month. It's a big deal – because Jesus said it was and it was part of what He said was commanded of His followers. It's also a big deal because for Jesus and for us it's an act of obedience. Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Because it was about obedience to the Father. Over and over again we see this lived out in the life of Jesus – not my will but Yours be done. From the

beginning, at His baptism, and all the way through to the garden the night before He died on the cross this was how Jesus lived – in total and complete obedience to His Father. But here’s where it gets really good. Jesus goes down into the water, in obedience, and as He comes out the heavens open. Now, during the time of the exile – a time of great stillness and quietness and difficulty the prophet Ezekiel said he had seen the heavens open and he saw visions of God. God began to speak to the prophet and show him all sorts of strange and interesting things. Here at Jesus baptism we have the same picture - the heavens open and for the first time in hundreds of years God speaks – not through an angel, not through a prophet, not through a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes – the word appearing in flesh – but the voice of God had still not been heard in so long. Now, at this moment, God’s voice broke through the years of quiet and stillness, the times of unbelief, doubt, and wondering and announces that the promise has been fulfilled. The Messiah has arrived, He is here, this is my Son. Now for those reading the whole Bible plan you read Psalm 2 this week, which is a Messianic Psalm – **I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill...He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” Psalm 2:6-7** The King in this Psalm is being addressed as God’s son. Plenty of kings had been born since the time of King David – some good, most were evil, but all of them a bit disappointing and none of them brought lasting peace or ruled with justice and righteousness that the prophets described. But, now, here over the Jordan River is God announcing – this is my Son, the messianic Son of David, the King of all Kings who will have my spirit and rule with justice and righteousness forever.

Isaiah the prophet had said, **Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. Isaiah 42:1-4**

This is the Son, both rightful King and suffering servant, both fully man and fully God, who has gone into the water in obedience, and who has been raised up out of the water shattering the darkness and quiet and has been announced as the Son of God, who has been

chosen since before the creation of the world, on whom all of God's love rests, and in whom God the Father is well pleased.

Not only has God's voice broken through but His Spirit has descended. Here in this passage the Holy Spirit takes the form of a dove, but it's at this moment that the Holy Spirit – who had overshadowed Jesus' birth now comes to rest on Him in power. The Holy Spirit is anointing Him for ministry. **This is why the baptism of Jesus is significant: because in this one act the hope of Israel is revealed, the identity of Jesus is announced, His death and resurrection is foreshadowed, His obedience to the Father is on full display, His inaugural event as the King of all Kings is taking place, a new kingdom is being established, and He is anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit for ministry.** And, also happening at this exact same moment silence has been shattered, promises have been fulfilled, long awaited desire has become reality, and all things are being made new. This is quite the moment! An event like no other. It is good news! This is the Jesus we serve. This is the Jesus the Scripture reveals and the Holy Spirit points us too. Jesus, the Lamb of God, the one chosen to bring restoration, the Righteous, obedient King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Mighty God. The one worthy of our praise, our adoration, our worship, our lives.

Here are the dots left to connect: what does this have to do with looking and listening? Look closely – this Jesus, the one we just described – that's the Jesus to keep your eyes fixed on this year.

Look at Jesus John declared – Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the book of Revelation John, the writer, has a similar experience. He's weeping thinking there is no one worthy to open the books, and then he hears an elder say, **“Don't weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”** Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne. **Revelation 5:5-6** What John the Apostle saw in Revelation is what John the Baptist saw by faith at his baptism. A sacrificial lamb who won victory through His death.

The danger is to remake Jesus into someone who thinks like us, acts like us, triumphs in the way we want Him too. We look for the roaring, victorious lion and are confused when we see a lamb. The reminder here is to keep looking at Jesus – the one who died for us –

because His death and resurrection is what makes it possible for Him to win the victory, to rule forever, to defeat death and hell and the grave. N. T Wright wrote, **“The lion is the symbol both of ultimate power and of supreme royalty, while the lamb symbolizes both gentle vulnerability and, through its sacrifice, the ultimate weakness of death. But the two are now to be fused together, completely and for ever. From this moment on, John, and we as his careful readers, are to understand that the victory won by the lion is accomplished through the sacrifice of the lamb, and in no other way. But we are also to understand that what has been accomplished by the lamb’s sacrifice is not merely the wiping away of sin for a few people here and there. The victory won by the lamb is God’s lion-like victory, through his faithful Israel-in-person, through his obedient humanity-in-person, over all the forces of corruption and death, over everything that would destroy and obliterate God’s good, powerful and lovely creation...Think of the lion, yes, but gaze at the lamb.”** – N. T. Wright

The lamb reminds us of humility, obedience, suffering, victory, unconditional love, mercy, and forgiveness. This is what is on offer – this is what we must keep in mind – this is the Jesus we look at this year. Not the Jesus of facebook, or the Jesus of American politics, but the Jesus that John the Baptist and John the writer both rightly identified as the Lamb of God.

Look for Jesus John the Baptist exclaimed to the crowd – look! It’s Jesus. Where? Over there. He directed their attention to Jesus. We have to keep looking for Him. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi – **I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:10-11** If we want to know Jesus then let’s look for Him. Look for Him to be revealed in Scripture, look for where He is calling you to repent or make changes, look for ways He’s inviting you to follow Him more closely, look for ways He’s asking you to emulate Him – the way He loves and has compassion, the way He is obedient to all the Father asks of Him, look for ways to daily attune your heart to Him – read with us either the whole Bible or the New Testament, spend time in the word, daily pray to have your eyes refocused on Jesus. Look for Jesus – He’s at work in your life and in the world around you. Look for Him this year.

Look to Jesus The Writer of Hebrews said **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:2-3** Following Jesus means daily making the choice to look to Him for the things we need, look to Him for guidance and wisdom, look to Him for direction, look to Him as we make choices about our lives and how we live. It's easy in the daily grind of life to grow weary and lose heart. No one said living for Jesus was easy – but it's so good. So that we don't lose heart we have to keep correcting our vision and keep looking to Jesus. Fix your eyes.

Pastor Brian and I were talking this week about how easy it can be to take our eyes off of Jesus just for a second because we see something shiny that grabs our attention. Oh, that looks fun and exciting! Ooo that looks pretty, that looks rewarding. The things or people or opportunities – the shiny thing – is different for each of us, but the point is it just takes a second to get distracted. If you've looked away – fix your eyes back on Jesus this morning. He's the only perfect one – there are mess ups in our future – but look to Jesus. Keep returning your gaze to Him. Fix your eyes on Him so that, as the song writer said, the distractions will grow fainter and more dim.

And, then, let's listen this year.

God's voice is still breaking through the silence in 2022. Perhaps it's been a difficult season or year or years for you full of more questions than answers, more doubts than assurances, with long stretches of seemingly silent heavens. But, just as the heavens opened to prophets and disciples and Jesus in scripture with revelations too mighty to truly explain God is still able to speak volumes into your heart this year. God is still speaking – through His word, through His Holy Spirit as that still small voice, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in this place – words of prophecy, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, tongues and interpretation. God is still speaking through nature as even the heavens declare His glory. It may feel eerily quiet in your heart, but I promise you God is still speaking. Tune your heart to hear from Him – listen in the silence – God's voice is still breaking through.

God's voice is still revealing the nature of Jesus in 2022. Just as His voice announced that long ago day at His baptism that Jesus was His Son and therefore was the long awaited Messiah so He continues to reveal Himself to us through Jesus. Jesus explained how this would work, **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. John 14:9-11** When you've seen Jesus you've seen the Father and the Father has revealed Himself to us in Jesus. The Holy Spirit also will reveal Jesus to us, **When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."** **John 16:13-15** Jesus is showing us the Father and the Father is revealed to us in His son, and Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit to say what the Son has told Him to say and the Son is only telling the Holy Spirit what the Father has given Jesus to say. Clear as mud?

Often we question ourselves – is this me or is this God speaking to me – well the Godhead are in relationship with one another and you can trust that nothing is going to contradict scripture or who Jesus is. The Father and the Holy Spirit are going to continue to make Jesus known not only this year but for all eternity.

Finally, **God's voice is still the voice that gives us our identity in 2022.** This could be an entire sermon, but let me just say this. Immediately after Jesus was baptized He is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be alone with God for 40 days. While there the enemy, the devil, came to Him and questioned the very thing God had just revealed. Twice the devil said to Jesus – If you are the Son of God. Sometimes in the quiet, in the stillness, in the waiting of our own lives we can begin to forget or question who we are in Christ. We can begin to wonder who we are and if any of it is really true? For Jesus, He could hold onto the words He'd heard from heaven – this is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. This morning I just want to remind you - hold on, friends, to what God has spoken to you in the past. You are dearly loved by God. He sees you and knows you and cares for you. Don't

let the voice of the enemy steal the truth of who God says you are. You are His. You belong to Jesus. You are His child.

This year – be on the lookout for Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible, the Jesus who died for you, who rose again, who intercedes on your behalf. Keep your eyes fixed on Him. If you've been distracted, look for Jesus this morning and fix your eyes on Him again. Listen for God's voice because He is still speaking truth to us from His word and from His heart. His word for us today is love – oh how He loves you.

Let's pray.