



SERMON TITLE: John the Baptist and the Enneagram
SCRIPTURE: John 1:19-34

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust Him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow Him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

It's pretty safe to say that our culture is obsessed with personality tests, self-esteem, and self-awareness. There are multiple tests that can help you understand who you are, how you're gifted, and how you best relate to others. You can take the Myers-Briggs, the DiSC personality test, StrengthsFinders, and others. But the latest and freshest means to the end of considering Socrates' "know thyself" is The Enneagram. It's gaining steam, but also seems to be helping people think well about themselves.

But, as Christians, at what point does the pursuit of self-awareness evolve into idolatry? Of course, these things can be good and practical. But when do they become harmful? John Calvin maintained that true knowledge of self and true knowledge of God go hand-in-hand. So, how can we know ourselves in order to know God more? Or, how do we balance knowing ourselves and knowing God so that people pay attention to God and not us? Enter John the Baptist. He serves as an excellent example of someone whose self-awareness led to divine-awareness.

In John 1, John the Baptist was being interrogated by some Jews who were wanting to know who he was. John's identity was in question. They asked him, "Who are you?" (1:19). "Are you Elijah? Are you the Prophet?" (1:21). And when John finally responded, he cited the prophet Isaiah. He said, "I am a voice crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" (1:23). This is basically John saying, "Get ready, God is about to act!" Or simply put,

John defines his own identity around two realities: the message of Scripture and the person of Jesus.

When John quoted Isaiah, it wasn't an arbitrary Old Testament passage. He was citing a pivotal moment in the Old Testament. Meaning, John had so meditated on Scripture and God's faithfulness that he not only had an awareness of who he was – he was "a voice crying out" – but he also knew that God was about to act to bring Jesus as Messiah. For John, when he talks about who he is and what he is doing, he is likewise compelled to talk about God and what God is up to. Is the same true of us? Does our thinking about self lead to thinking about God? Do our lives lead other people to think about God?

Then, as John was baptizing, he saw Jesus coming his way. And, to all those gathered, John declared, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). John the gospel-writer wants us to pay attention to this phrase because he goes on to repeat it in 1:36. But what does John the Baptist mean? Jesus had not yet been crucified as a sacrifice for sin? So, in what way was he God's Lamb?

It's likely that John the Baptist had exodus-imagery in mind. Not just the exodus from Egypt, but also the "new exodus" that the prophets looked forward to. And in both of these instances, a lamb led the way. How did God set Israel free *from* slavery and oppression? A lamb. How did God set Israel free *for* obeying him and entering the land of promise? A lamb. How did the prophet Isaiah say that God was going to bring about another exodus? A lamb, one who would bear

our griefs, carry our sorrows and bring us peace (Isaiah 53). These are the things that are likely behind John's declaration, "Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!"

And when we see Jesus as the worthy Lamb of God, we will also our great need - our sin that he came to take away. The world in which we live is broken, and we are both victims of and contributors to sin in the world. And we need sin to be taken away, and Jesus is the only one worthy to do it. Self-awareness can't do it. Self-esteem can't do it. Politics can't do it. Instagram followers can't do it. None of these things are evil, but none of these things can take away sin. Only Jesus is fit for the task.

So, how do we balance knowing ourselves and knowing God so that people pay attention to God and not us? If we see Jesus as God's Lamb, that will cause us to see our need, and run to him for our identity. Trusting him is the only way to real life, and if we're dependent on him, that will make others pay attention to him. The gospel of Jesus as the Lamb is the way that we can rightly know ourselves, but far more importantly, it's *the way* people can rightly know God. Or, as John the Baptizer would say, "Behold! Pay attention! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Discussion Starters:

- What are the primary ways that you seek to gain a specific identity?
- How did John the Baptist think about who he was and what he was called to?
- Who is someone you know who has appropriate, gospel-informed self-awareness? Why?
- Why is it sometimes hard to trust God for your personal identity?
- In what way can you be an additional "voice crying out" like John the Baptist?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the Lamb of God?
- How do we balance knowing ourselves and knowing God so that people pay attention to God and not us?