



## INTRO:

Welcome everyone. If you're joining us for the first time or first time in a while, we're really glad you're here. We're in a series entitled, **"That You Believe,"** going through the Gospel of John, or as my friend calls it, *"The weird Gospel."* Cuz John - unlike Matthew, Mark or Luke - doesn't tell the same stories, doesn't give things in the same order, AND is FULL of theologically charged concepts like "the Word," "light," "life," "the lamb of God." Really it's a book that, if you let it, will challenge you to take an honest look at Jesus, in a way that leads you to really trust IN Jesus. Cuz make no bones about it; THAT'S John's intent. He wants you to see Jesus as what you need for every area of your life! Which is WHY, if you've been with us the last two weeks, you know he's used the first 18 verses of chapter 1 to give you a kind of wide-angle "REVELATION" of who Jesus is as "the word"!

TODAY, we're moving from "Revelation" to **"Publicity"** - John beginning to detail the **public** ministry of Jesus, by introducing us to a guy named/go figure - John. I have to imagine that in Jesus' time there were like 3 names parents recycled for their kids. *"Oh you had a girl, what'd you name her? 'Mary!' Like Mary Magdalene, No! Oh, like Mary the mother of Jesus. No! Like Mary!"* And if it was a boy, "John," since John the Gospel writer here is gonna tell us about John the Baptist - which just so we're clear - John was most definitely NOT a Baptist, or a Presbyterian, or a Lutheran, or a Catholic, or any of it. Rather, he got his name from all the BAPTISMS he did, as a way of preparing people to receive the messiah when he came. And let me tell ya, it was IMMENSELY popular in doing it!...And so what's great about John is that he's a kind of prototype for something about which you and I/certainly our culture is VERY interested. And that is: **"How To Be Attractive."** John is a case study in **attractiveness**, BUT not in the shallow, physical sense of the word, but rather in the sense of having a kind of magnetism of demeanor that He developed BECAUSE and ONLY because of Jesus!

So...**Pray with me** and then we'll unpack **John 1:19-34** and what it says about **How To Be Attractive**... *"Father, give us eyes this morning to behold your Son/our Savior. To pick up our eyes off ourselves and fix them on Jesus. Give ME, Father, ability of speech to highlight the glories OF Jesus, so that what remains long after we've gathered is nothing ABOUT this gathering, but rather a new and fresh desire to trust and rest in Christ for every area of our lives. I'd be so pleased if you'd do that Father. And so we pray this in Jesus' name! Amen!"*

## TEXT:<sup>1</sup>

So we're talking about **attractiveness**, and that's BECAUSE ya notice, right off the bat in **v.19**, that John is recording, it says, *"the testimony of John the Baptist when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'"* The religious establishment has sent their "interns" to learn about John, because it's not an exaggeration to say, John had become a

<sup>1</sup> Message aided by insights from numerous sermons including:

- "The Gospel of John (John 1:19-28)" - Adam Mabry, Aletheia Church: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/aletheia-sermon-audio/id393747812?i=1000375046518>
- "Christ Provides New Identity Papers: Gospel of John, Part 1" - October 28, 1990 - John 1:19-31 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- "The Lamb: Seeing Jesus" - January 12, 2014 - John 1:19-34 - Timothy J. Keller, "The Lamb," in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2014-2015* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2014), Jn 1:19-34.
- "The Power of the Incarnation" - Timothy J. Keller - in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2016-2017* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2016).

phenom. You see in **v.20** he “*confesses that He’s not the Christ.*” ***When was the last time someone asked you if you were “the Christ?”*** If you’re having to confess that you’re NOT the Christ, it means something big’s going in the background. John was ***attracting*** TONS of people. He’d become a HUGE/viral ***attraction!*** And the reason why is because John entered the Jewish fray at a very unique time in history; namely, one in which God had not spoken to His people Israel in over 400 years. ***Can you imagine not hearing from God for 400 years?*** I mean 400 years ago, there was no internet/no electricity! Heck, 400 years ago America didn’t exist. That’s how long it’d been since God had spoken to His people. And during that time His people had suffered enslavement under 4 different empires - The Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and now the Romans. And so you can imagine the almost fever-pitch level to which expectation of the messiah’s arrival had grown. So needless to say, when John shows up and starts drawing big crowds, it’s BECAUSE people are thinking, “*finally, some God stuff going on.*” ...Now of course we all know: Whenever God stuff’s going on, those who think they’re in charge of the God stuff start asking questions like, “*Hey uh. We heard some God stuff’s going on. And ya know, since we’re in charge of the God stuff, we wanted to ask...what’s going on? ...Are YOU the Christ?*” To which John says, “*I’m not!*” “*Well then, they ask, are you Elijah?*” To which John again says, “*Nope.*” Cuz apparently there was a belief in Jewish circles that Elijah, who’d been long gone since the OT, was gonna show back up at a later date to announce the arrival of the Messiah. Even today, many Jews who believe the messiah is yet to come AND celebrate Seder, still put out a glass of wine for Elijah. But what’s really interesting about this is that later in ***Matthew 11:14***, Jesus actually calls John...Elijah. But HERE John’s saying he’s NOT Elijah. So people read this and say, “*Ah ha! Bible contradiction. Bible’s just a legend. Nanna nanna boo boo.*” ... But let me ask you/be honest, don’t you think that if the Bible was this fictional story put together by a bunch of Illuminati dudes in a smokey room, that a “contradiction” like this woulda been edited out in the first draft? Of course! Which is WHY, the more likely explanation is that John’s saying, “*I’m not Elijah...in the way you’re thinking.*” Meaning I’ve not come to, as people thought Elijah would do, open the proverbial can on Rome and make the world fly right. He’s saying, “*That’s not me. I’m not the Christ. I’m not Elijah. And I’m not the Prophet.*” ***Here’s the point:*** John had every opportunity to create for Himself an identity, a persona, a platform that wouldn’t have just made him a big deal, but the BIGGEST of deals. ***When was the last time, you were offered a level of influence*** - maybe a promotion or some recognition - and you said, “*that’s not me/no thanks!*” It’s unheard of. But it’s EXACTLY what John did, because as Matthew Henry said, “*John was more industrious to do good than appear great.*” This is WHY, if you keep going, when the “interns” ask John a final time who he is, he says in ***v.23***, “*I’m the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.*” And he’s quoting ***Isaiah 40*** there, in which Isaiah - telling Israel, hundreds of years prior, to live in anticipation of the Lord’s coming - said, “*A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight a path.*” John is quoting that. HOWEVER you see, HE says NOT “*A voice cries out,*” but “*I AM the voice.*” So not just live in anticipation of the Messiah; he’s saying, “*be ready NOW. You think I’m a big deal? I’m nothing. BUT I’ll tell you about One who IS a big deal.*” And I wonder - just my brain wandering here - but I wonder if Jesus was in in the crowd listening/watching John scandalously baptize people. And I say scandalously, cuz in baptizing like he was, John was very clearly doing something out

of the ordinary. You see the “interns” ask him, “*if you’re not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet, or basically anyone special, why are you baptizing?*” They’re confused because baptism was something reserved for unclean Gentiles who wanted to be brought into community with Israel. It WASN’T something you did for Jews because Jews weren’t considered unclean. They were there people of God right? And yet JOHN is baptizing BOTH Gentiles AND Jews - that’s what’s caused the Jewish leaders to take notice - which MEANS John is effectively telling EVERYONE “you’re all/WE’RE all unclean.” I mean it’s INCREDIBLY offensive - to tell Jews, especially Jewish leaders, who thought of themselves as like religious Ninjas - that they’re “unclean”!

But look what John says. He doesn’t even answer the question, cuz frankly he doesn’t care. He says, **vv.26-27**, “*I baptize with water, but among you stands one you don’t know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I’m not worthy to untie.*” And I love that because, ya know, unlike here in Southie where you can get a mani-pedi like 24/7, back in THAT day...no such thing. Not to mention...no cars...or paved roads...or sneakers. So the way you traveled was by foot, in sandals, on dusty paths, filled with livestock poop! SO when you arrived at your location, the first thing you did is untie your nasty sandals and have your disgusting feet washed. But given how gross of a job that was, it was only ever something slaves did. So if you’re “*untying someone’s sandals,*” that means you’re bottom of the social ladder, my friend...John says, “*the messiah - I’m not even worthy to untie his sandal.*” NOT “*I’m ONLY worthy to untie his sandal*” - like a slave - But before Him, I’m even LOWER than a slave! Incredibly humble!

So on the one hand John’s developed this immense influence, BUT seems to continually shirk it. Says things like, “*I’m nothing. I’m unworthy. Don’t look at me. Look at Jesus.*” As he says in **vv.29-34**: “*Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. THIS is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He WAS before me.’*”...But then on the other hand, he’s developed this immense resistance to everything he’s doing; and yet doesn’t seem to care - is like, “*bring it on. I don’t care if you don’t like it. You’re unclean; ya need to be baptized and ya need to know it!*”...I love the way **v.20** kinda summarizes it - says, “*John confessed, and did not deny, but confessed,*” meaning he was humble enough to confess that he wasn’t the Christ and was unworthy to be considered as such, BUT he was also bold enough to KEEP confessing and not deny Jesus as the Christ no matter the blowback. Just this unbelievably **attractive** combination of BOTH humility AND ferocity; calm and courage; having neither a deflated ego nor an INflated one...Back during the American Revolution, King George, in Britain, got word that the colonists wanted to make George Washington...a King. Cuz of course Washington had been a powerful military leader and a great first term President. BUT despite the pleas of the colonists, Washington not only wouldn’t allow them to make him King, BUT he intended to give up a second term as President, and return to private life...George heard that and is said to have stated, “*If Washington does that (gives up his power), he’ll be the greatest man in the world!*”<sup>2</sup>...The **attractiveness** of Washington’s greatness is - given the context - merely a shadow of John here. Unbelievably **attractive!** And as Scott Sauls says, “*(something) that*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.historicamerica.org/journal/2014/12/23/george-washington-becomes-the-greatest-man-in-the-world>

*doesn't just happen/beautiful people don't just happen.*"<sup>3</sup>...So the question is **how do WE/CAN we develop that kind of attractiveness ourselves?**

And the answer is: Yes! BUT you gotta have 1 Thing John the Baptist had: You gotta have - write this down - **A Particular View of Jesus!** Or said another way: You have to have Jesus as the central factor in your identity. Cuz, let's do a little cultural analysis here: apart from Jesus, the only two options you have for developing yourself/your identity, as it were, are looking at yourself OR looking at others. So ya know, looking within yourself to discover your passions, talents, and thereby hopefully some self-confidence. OR looking at others and kinda measuring your achievements alongside theirs in order to feel confident...But here's the problem: The former hurts YOU and the latter hurts others. Cuz think about looking at yourself. The way this normally plays out right, is you're lacking confidence. Maybe ya feel like your coming up short in some area, or you're wrestling through a character flaw, unhealthy personality trait, something like that. **So what do you do?** You go to a therapist. And the therapist tells you: you just need to *"look inside yourself and see how special, beautiful, talented you are. THAT'S the way to confidence,"* we're told. And of course, it sounds good cuz, by-and-large/as a society we think our main problem is low self-esteem and that we just don't see the greatness within us. But the problem with that advice is it can REALLY harm you. Cuz on the one hand it gets you to focus more on yourself to the exclusion of others right? But ya know what people who focused solely on themselves and say things like, *"I only care about how I feel"* - are called? They're called sociopaths and narcissists, and they're incredibly harmful...But then on the other hand, it's ALSO harmful, cuz quite frankly, it's illogical. I mean, you're effectively being told that when you look at yourself, you're not confident. So the way to fix that is to look at yourself again. But the reason you're not confident is precisely BECAUSE you looked at yourself and saw your shortcomings in the first place. So looking again isn't gonna help you and may actually make things worse. This is why a friend of mine, who recently decided he was gonna take 6 months off work to kinda "find himself" - apparently had enough savings to be able to do that, travel, do a bunch of therapy and such - after 6 months of really focusing on himself, confessed that instead of actually "finding himself;" he FOUND himself feeling more lost than ever. It's no wonder why in the West, despite having the highest average quality of life by almost every metric are, we have some of the most depressed/anxiety-ridden people on the planet. Ya can't look at yourself!

But nor can you look at others. Cuz if looking at yourself hurts YOU, then looking at others and kinda comparing your performance with theirs in order to tell yourself you're worthy and such - that hurts THEM. Can actually lead you to demonize and dehumanize people. Cuz think about it: If your identity is based on your performance, whether that be actual achievements or just something like your beauty, intellect, etc, then your identity will always, to some degree, be at the expense of others. In other words, if you're proud of being smart, pretty, successful, it's not really, you understand, cuz you're proud of being smart, pretty or successful; it's cuz you're proud of being smartER, prettiER, more successFUL than others. So when you're around those people - whether you say it out loud or not - you naturally see them as dumber, uglier, less

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<sup>3</sup> The actual quote is: "Beautiful people don't just happen." - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/gospelbound/beautiful-people-dont-just-happen/>

successful, which is to say, you demonize, dehumanize, maybe even exclude them from your company. This is why if you talk to people from more Eastern cultures, they'll often tell you about how exclusionary and pressure-packed relationships can be. BECAUSE they're based on your performance in relation to others. So your performance/your actions affect your family, your tribe, your village. It's why eastern cultures are often referred to as "honor-shame cultures." Because your performance can literally bring either honor or shame to those around you.

So you can't look at yourself, but neither can you look at others. You have to, like John the Baptist here, **look at Jesus in a particular way!** Cuz notice, John looks at Jesus and he sees **2 Things. First**, in **v.29**, he sees Him as **what?** *"The lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"* **right?** He's literally *"beholding"*/looking at Jesus and seeing *"the lamb of God."* Now of course that imagery is rich and it harkens back to an old story. The very first time we're told in the Bible, about the killing of an animal like a lamb is back in Genesis, when after having sinned, God COVERED Adam and Eve's nakedness/their shame with animal skins... THEN the first time, not just an animal, but a LAMB shows up is when Abraham's been told by God to sacrifice his son Isaac BUT God stops him by providing a lamb in the thicket to sacrifice instead. The very clear implication being that, if God provides a lamb to be slain, then we don't have to die... And then after that, hundreds of years later when the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, God sent out His angel of death to punish the wickedness of the Egyptians by bringing a plague on every Egyptian home that killed the first-born son IN every home. But God told Israel, *"If YOU kill a lamb and smear it's blood on your doorposts, my angel of death will pass over you."* It's what Jews celebrate at Passover. So again the message was: *"A slain lamb, in your place, ensures that you don't have to die."*... Which is why, throughout the rest of the OT, you get this complicated religious industry that develops around the sacrificing not just lambs, but bulls, goats, and rams... So catch the scene here: John's preaching, and he looks up, and with astonishment says, *"Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* And ya gotta believe, in that moment the Holy Spirit starts taking all these different themes and threads and weaves em together for John, so that he says, *"Yes! The lamb of God. I get it! It wasn't little animals that died for our sins. Or skins that ultimately covered our shame. Or even religious rituals that made us right with God. It was God Himself!"* God the Son, coming AS the lamb, to take away your sin and mine... And you say, *"Why Jesus as a lamb, rather than a goat something, since they were killed too?"*... It's because, as Tim Keller notes, *"lambs/lambs don't buck their murderers. They don't even open their mouths. They don't bite. They don't scratch. They don't run away. They just lie there, and let you kill em... They're a voluntary sacrifice!"*... John is seeing all this in Jesus and he's humbled to the core!... Cuz how can you NOT look at Jesus/see ALL He did to give you opportunity to be brought back into relationship with God and NOT say, *"I'm nothing. I don't even deserve to untie His sandals!"* THAT'S how John could be humble without being despondent, and feel inferior without being deflated. It's cuz he's **looking at Jesus** and seeing all Jesus HAD to do for Him.

But notice too, he's also looking at Jesus and seeing all Jesus was WILLING to do for Him. Cuz you see there in **v.32** John's baptizing Jesus and he says, *"I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him."* That's an affirmation of Jesus' divinity. That Jesus is the

holy One with whom the Spirit is always present. ***So what's John looking?*** He's looking at God...being baptized. God...identifying with you and me. Cuz of course, baptism is the picture of how WE, who are dirty with sin, are made clean right? We go into the waters dirty, but through faith in Christ come out clean! JESUS, as God here, is going in clean, but in the end and on the cross will ultimately come out dirty...He's actually the ONLY ONE who's ever gone into the waters CLEAN...and come out dirty! Was WILLING to be plunged into all your filth and mine so, by mere faith in Him, YOU can be raised to new life and cleanliness. John's looking at that and going, *"Yes! How much must He love me to be WILLING to do that."* ***How much must God love YOU to be WILLING to do that?***...THAT is how John could be bold without being arrogant, and feel superior without being inflated. He's ***looking at Jesus*** and seeing all Jesus was WILLING to do for Him and it fills him with unbelievable courage.

So see Friends, if the question is: ***How do we develop the kind of attractiveness John had?*** The answer is: To the degree that you only ever look at yourself or others, you'll be DEflated or overly INflated - both of which are extremely ***unattractive!*** But to the degree that you look at Jesus - both what He HAD to do AND was WILLING to do for you - THAT'S the degree to which you'll become so humble, winsome, and inviting that you could never feel superior to anyone. But ALSO so bold, courageous and fierce that you'll never care what anybody thinks about you...It's like in my house. We have a bunch of creaky steps and walls, and so, me Abby, the girls, we all sleep with sound machines. And of course, the great thing about a sound machine is, it doesn't eliminate noise; it just raises what's called the "noise floor."...Likewise, the Gospel doesn't eliminate YOU, your personhood or your identity; it simply raises the "noise floor" of your heart, up from yourself or others, and onto Jesus - causes you NOT to think more or less of yourself, but simply to think about yourself...less...as you become MORE fixated on Jesus!... ***And isn't that the kind of person we all wanna be?*** Of course it is! Cuz that's the kind of person that's EXCEEDINGLY ***attractive!***...And all it takes is looking at what Jesus HAD to do for you, until it drowns out any sense of inflated self-sufficiency, AND looking at all He was WILLING to do for you, until it drowns out any sense of DEflated self-despondency... You do that, and I promise you'll become an unbelievably ***attractive*** person...So Church, pick up your eyes today. Behold *"the lamb of God...the One on whom the Spirit remains."* Take a look. And then, when you think you've seen it. Look again, and again, and again and watch it produce in you a kind of attractiveness that nothing else can!...*"Father, in a moment, as we take up the offering, and move to reflect on what we've seen in your Word, we pray that you'd enable us to take our minds off ourselves; off of others, and simply behold "the lamb," in such a way that it produces in us a kind of calm-courage, humble-ferocity, and warm-boldness. Oh how attractive that would be. And so we pray it in Jesus' name...Amen!"* **(STOP RECORD)**