



## TIME OF GRACE®

# *Fake News/Real Jesus: Why Jesus Is Who You Need*

## Study Notes

### *Summary*

How can an imperfect person fall asleep without guilt? How can the abused live without shame? How can a sinner end up in the presence of God? The Bible's answer—a Lamb. A spotless substitute, accepted by God's own design. This is what John the Baptist's followers would have thought when he pointed to Jesus and shouted, "Look! The Lamb of God!"

- **John 1:29,30:** <sup>29</sup>The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"
- John's Ad on Jesus: "Look! The \_\_\_\_\_!"
- **John 1:31-34:** <sup>31</sup>"I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." <sup>32</sup>Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. <sup>33</sup>And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."
- God's Ad on Jesus: "Look! The \_\_\_\_\_!"

### *Points to Ponder*

1. Read John 1:19-28 (the verses we didn't cover in this sermon series). What else does John the Baptist want you to know about Jesus' identity?
2. Which of the two "ads" about Jesus brings you the most comfort? Why?
3. **Evaluate:** The more you think of Jesus, the less you will think of life's challenges.

## *Homework for Next Week*

Read John 2:1-11.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Fake News, Real Jesus: Why Jesus Is Who You Need**  
John 1:29-34  
April 26, 2020

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

We might call America the land of the free and the home of the advertisements. If you had to guess how many ads you saw - like online, on billboards, on the street, in the newspaper - in the past 24 hours, what do you think that number would be?

When my soccer teammate said, "Hey, Mike, I saw your cousin on a billboard." I said, "My cousin? Where?" He said, "Well, right there on the interstate; going north to Green Bay." I said, "No, she's not. I drive that road all the time." So after the game, I went on the road and guess what? There's my cousin like a massive version of my cousin and I zipped past her without even looking and without even noticing because that's life in America; it's hard to know where to look and it's hard to look at one place for very long.

And yet, here's what I know about you; what I know about all of us: That the places we look will affect us. The stuff for the next seven days that you pay attention to will affect your thoughts, your heart, and your faith. They'll touch your emotions and your spirituality. Whatever you choose to look at, in whatever direction, whoever gets your attention will capture your heart. I bet you've experienced this, right? Like if you spend all day just like scrolling through the news stories and because people pay attention to like car wrecks and train crashes, you know, it's easy to click on all the stories about school shootings and church shootings and synagogue shootings and, you know, more corruption, false charges, and all the stuff that fills like the headline news. And I bet after like an hour of that, if that's all you pay attention to, it will affect you. You feel hopeless, maybe distressed, maybe depressed, maybe angry, but it will affect you. If you're into politics and, you know, you just sit down in front of like the one cable news show or the other one and there's just like accusations and people pointing fingers and defending themselves or saying, "No, it's your fault," that will get you. You won't turn the TV off and feel more at peace or more hopeful or more joyful because what you pay attention to will get to your heart.

Which is why I'm really glad that you're here today because today - unless you're scrolling through your phone while I'm talking; I hope you're not - we're going to pay attention for way more than 5.77 seconds to Jesus. And thankfully, we're not in our cars; we're not going to zip by the billboard that's about Jesus. We're going to stop for about 20 to 30 minutes and just pay attention to who Jesus is. Because today, in a very little chunk of the Bible that I want to teach to you, there's going to be two big billboards that God wants you to see and they're both really about the identity of Jesus. One was put up by Jesus' relative, a guy named John the Baptist, and the second was put up by God himself, the Holy Spirit. And my hope is that if you pay enough

attention to these two images of who Jesus actually was, the real Jesus, it will change you and it will give you peace and it will give you life; it will give you hope and it will give you freedom.

The next day, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards 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.'" So John the Baptist takes out this billboard and he wants you to know that Jesus is a big deal, alright? He kind of speaks in a riddle at the end there. He says, "A man," that's Jesus, "who comes after me," - Jesus was born after John; he started teaching publicly after John. And yeah, John says, "He has surpassed me. He's more important than me, more glorious, you should pay attention to him, not me." Why? "Because he was before me," which can be kind of confusing, right? If John was born here and Jesus was born after him, how could Jesus be before him? And the only logical answer is because Jesus is God. He was born after him in this life but Jesus says the eternal Son of God has always existed. He's really, really important and here's why, John says. "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That's John's billboard. In fact, if you're taking notes in your program today, I'd love for you to write that down. John simply says, "Look the Lamb!" Think about that! Pay attention to that and you will find freedom in life.

Which, not to be critical of John, but that doesn't seem like great marketing, does it? I mean, if I like went to a farm and brought a lamb and took him out on stage here and said, "Look! A lamb! Go in peace." It wouldn't work for you, right? We could take a field trip to a farm but it wouldn't help our faith very much and that's because for us, lambs aren't that inspiring, right? They don't empower us. Have you ever seen a high school choose a lamb as its mascot? It never happens. Like, they would get slaughtered every Friday night in the football game, right? Sorry, that's a really bad lamb joke. No, for us, like 21st century America, like lambs don't inspire us; they don't empower us. But back in first century Israel, they absolutely would have. In fact, if you're familiar with the teaching of the Bible, you might know that lambs were one of the most powerful, powerful pictures to teach us about God. These days, when we come to worship and we come to a church, we might sing a few songs, we might listen to a few passages, we might say a few prayers. But do you know what people did back in Jesus' day? They would come to church with a lamb. And it was like this shocking billboard from God about the seriousness of sin but also the boundless patience of God's love. With that little lamb, God would teach you in an instant that he was a God that was both full of grace and truth. That he takes sin way more seriously than we do. But his love is also massively beyond any version we've seen of it on this earth.

Here's what happened: If you had been like jealous during the week and you had seen the house your neighbor was living in or the relationship your sister had, you were jealous. Or you're like super critical and instead of encouraging people with your words you kind of nitpick and found the thing that was wrong. If you had fallen into an addiction and had lost your self-control, if you had said something in the heat of the moment that was really angry and unloving and unkind, if you had sinned, you would come to church with a lamb. And you'd hand it over to the pastor, to the priest, and he would smile and then he'd take out a knife and he'd stab it and he'd cut open its windpipe and the lamb would just bleed like crimson red all over its beautiful white fur and you'd watch because that was God's ad. He wanted to say if even jealousy or a lack of

self-control or anger or lust or greed or a critical word, if that's not a big deal because, you know, everyone does it, not to God. God is good and that makes sin really, really bad. And as you would watch that sacrificial lamb bleed and then the priest would look up and do you know what he'd say to you? "Go in peace. You can go." But first, he would bless you. He'd say, "Wait, wait, wait - the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. So go." And you'd walk away unscathed. The lamb would be dead but you'd be alive. The lamb was full of blood but you would leave simply blessed because that was God's ad. He wanted to visually depict some way to show that sin is really, really bad to God; we have to take it seriously. And yet, God's heart is so merciful and so forgiving and so patient and so kind.

So think of what it must have sounded like in that culture back in the first century where Jesus shows up - just a normal guy in sandals with a beard - and John's says, "Look, look, look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" He doesn't take away like this guy's sin or those people's sins or this nation's sin. He takes away the sin of the world!

Recently, I heard a pastor preach on this same passage and I remember what he said. He said in the Old Testament, during the Passover celebration, one lamb would forgive the sins of a family. And once a year during the Jewish Day of Atonement, it was one sacrifice that would forgive all the sins of the Jewish people. But when Jesus showed up, John the Baptist said, "Look, the Lamb of God, one sacrifice, who will take away the sins of the world."

Which is what I thought about last Thursday. Last Thursday, a member of our church texted me and said I had to get to a local high school by 3:30 and I showed up and something amazing happened. Two young men - one from China and one from Vietnam - were baptized. And even though they weren't born in the same country that I was, even though their native language was very different than the one I grew up with, like to celebrate the grace of Jesus. And why? Because Jesus is not the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of white people. Or American people. Or English-speaking people. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The entire world. The Americans and Asians, Brazilians and Mexicans, the German, the Italians, the Chinese, the Czech. It doesn't matter where you're from, where were you born, the color of your skin. Around the throne of Jesus are people from every tribe and nation and language and tongue because Jesus himself rose from the dead and he said, "Go and make disciples of all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

See, it doesn't matter where you're from; you can look at Jesus. And just as importantly, it doesn't matter what you've done; you can look at Jesus. That's the first big billboard I want you to stop and see today. But there's actually one more before I say "Amen" and it comes from God himself. Now check out John 1 once more. John the Baptist is still speaking here and he says, "I myself did not know him," Jesus, "but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel. Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Jesus. And I myself did not know him but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is God's chosen one.'"

Pretty fascinating, huh? John the Baptist, who is related to Jesus and who would be like the hype man for the Messiah, he actually said, "I really didn't know it was Jesus but God told me." Apparently, if you think of Jesus as like - as like glowing, kind of floating over the ground, halo over his head kind of guy - he wasn't. He had callouses on his hands, sandals on his feet, and a beard on his face. He could have walked right by you and you wouldn't have looked at him twice. And so God had to put up a billboard. God said, John, I'll let you know who he is. It's the guy on whom you see the Holy Spirit come down like a dove. That was God's ad. If you're taking notes, write this down on your last fill in the blank. God's ad on Jesus was simply this: Look, the dove! Which is terrible marketing, isn't it? The dove! Like, if you all gave thousands of dollars today so we could get some extra billboards and I just put a giant dove up on it, would you be mad at me? Like, come on, Pastor, you don't have to be a marketing expert to realize like a dove doesn't draw people to faith; it doesn't inspire and empower people. But it did with Jesus.

If you've read much of Jesus story in the gospels, you might know that this actually happened. The Holy Spirit appeared as a dove at this moment; the day that Jesus was baptized. This next picture here is one artist's depiction that when Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit appeared from heaven like a dove. The artist here kind of depicted how all of us as Christian people are connected to Jesus through his baptism and through ours. But right here, prominently, I want you to think about that: Why did the Holy Spirit show up like a dove? Could you answer that question? I mean, the Holy Spirit isn't actually a dove. He's a spirit so he could have appeared as anything over Jesus' head. He could have been a big arrow that would like glow in the sky. He could have appeared as the Lamb because Jesus is the Lamb of God. He could have been a cross or a crown to show us he's the king of heaven. But the Holy Spirit chose to make a visible billboard as a dove. And if I paid you \$20, could you tell me why? If a pastor would have asked me that question two weeks ago, I would have said, "Well, because a dove is like a symbol of peace, right?" To which I now would respond, "Where'd you get that from? Because it's not in the Bible."

But do you know what is? I got into some like super deep pastor nerdy this past week and I looked up every single passage in the entire Bible that uses the word "dove." Can I tell you about it? I'm going to tell you about it even if you're totally not interested at this point. I found out there are 42 uses from cover to cover and they're fascinating. Alright, let me tell you all the examples and you tell me if you can figure how it fits to Jesus. The first time a dove shows up in the Bible is in the book of Genesis in the story of Noah and the ark. If you remember, there's like death and destruction, the flood waters come, God's judgment, but then Noah sends out a dove and the dove comes back with a little leaf in its beak to prove that there'd be life after death and there was going to be a future and a hope after God's judgment. And then in the book of Leviticus, doves show up again as sacrifices that people would make in church, except specifically these weren't sacrifices that rich people could afford; they could bring a lamb. But if you were poor, if you're impoverished and you had nothing, you could bring a dove and it'd be right to make you right with God. Then you jump ahead to Song of Songs, the Old Testament, poetic, kind of romantic book, and it turns out that like a dove - calling a woman a "dove" - was like an Old Testament way of flirting with her. So you guys who are dating, you brought girls here to church, you can try this after church and let me know but this guy in the book of Song of

Songs would say, "My darling, my beautiful, my dove. Your eyes are like doves," he would say. Like so captivating and interesting, I just want to look and keep looking. I get lost in your eyes.

Then the book of Psalms, King David says he wanted to be a dove so he would have wings and he could fly away from the troubles of life and be at rest. Then the Old Testament prophets, doves were used as signs of mourning and suffering. If you've ever heard of a mourning dove, because of the sound it makes, when you go through brokenness and sin, doves would mourn. And then the New Testament, the book of Matthew, Jesus said to his disciples that they should be as "innocent as doves." And you put all those passages together and do you know what you get? Jesus. You look confused. Let me connect the dots. Jesus was as innocent as a dove. He never sinned. He never did anything wrong. His words were never anything less than loving and true. And yet, Jesus suffered like a mourning dove. He came into this world and he was born in the midst of brokenness. Especially, when he went to the cross for the sake of our sins, he mourned and grieved like a dove. And on that cross, he would sacrifice like a dove. His blood was shed but not just for powerful and rich people. Instead, he was sacrificed for those of us who are poor spiritually and have so little to offer God. He would be a sacrifice to make us right.

And because of that, we have the wings of faith. Like when life is hard and broken and we feel like we can't go on, Jesus gives us wings to fly to a place where our hearts can be at rest and where we will see something beautiful. Where because Jesus didn't just die under God's judgment but he came back with words of life in his mouth, we know there is hope for us; a hope where we will actually see Jesus. And if you think falling in love and looking into some girl's eyes or being lost in the presence of some guy makes you feel good, you have no idea because Jesus is the dove. And in heaven, you don't look at him for 5.77 seconds and then look for your phone. Instead, he's so captivating and glorious and beautiful, you look at him forever and ever and ever and it never gets old. Which makes the dove the perfect ad campaign. Do you need life? Do you need hope? Do you need glory? Do you need beauty? Do you need forgiveness? Do you need rest? Well, then look at the dove.

And that's why today, I don't have any homework for you. Normally, when you come to church, I always put like a note, a question, like, "Mike, what are you going to make people do?" Alright? Like, what's the next step, what's the thing they should read, what's the passage they should memorize, what's the class they should take, what should they do at home, at work, at school? But today, that just didn't seem right because I didn't want you just to come here and look at Jesus for this time together and then get back in your car and have to look at some "to do" list that the pastor signed. Instead, here's my simple prayer for you: That you just keep looking. That when you think about today, you would just look at the grace of Jesus. That when you're done with church and you look at your bulletins on your kitchen tables, you would just think about the love of Jesus. And as you go through this week and you face struggles like we all will, you would just think about the power and sufficiency of Jesus. Because if I make you stand in front of a mirror of another "to do" list, it will zap you of life. But if I can put you in front of a Lamb or a dove or a cross, you can find the abundant life that Jesus promised.

Essentially, I want you to feel this week what Charles Spurgeon felt on January 6, 1850. You ever heard of that name before? Charles Spurgeon is actually one of the most famous Christian pastors of the past 2,000 years. He was a Baptist who lived in the late 1800's and as far as I can tell, he was one of the first megachurch preachers. In downtown London, they built a church for Charles Spurgeon where 5,000 people could sit and every Sunday, more than 5,000 came. They say 1,000 people would show up even though there weren't seats and they would stand and listen to this man who was supernaturally gifted and abnormally blessed. And do you know how Charles Spurgeon first became a Christian? It wasn't from his mom and dad. He grew up in kind of an outwardly religious home but he had no personal relationship with Jesus until January 6, 1850. As a 15 year old, he was walking down the street during a vicious snowstorm that had descended on London. And he's trying to meet someone for an appointment but the weather was so bad he couldn't make it. And so by chance, he ended up stepping into this little Methodist church just as the service was beginning. And the weather was so terrible that only a dozen people showed up for the service that day. In fact, it was so severe that the pastor himself couldn't make it so some random guy from the church, who apparently, as Spurgeon says, wasn't very good at preaching, he got up to preach. And the text he chose was Isaiah 45:22. Here's what that verse says: "Look to me,' says the Lord, 'and be saved."

Spurgeon told the story over 260 times in his sermons of what happened next. He said, "The poor preacher didn't have much to say, thank God, because he wasn't very good. But that compelled him to keep on repeating the passage, 'Look to me,' says God. 'Look to me,' says God. 'Look to me.'" The preacher looked out at the dozen worshippers and he said some of you have been looking at yourselves but that won't do any good; you'll never find comfort in yourself. And so the preacher started to imitate Jesus. "Look to me," Jesus said. "I'm sweating great drops of blood. Look to me; I'm hanging on a cross. Look to me; I'm dead and I'm buried. Look to me; I rise. Look to me; I ascend. Look to me; I sit at the right hand of God. Look to me; O, Look to me," cried Jesus.

And then the preacher looked right at the 15 year old Charles Spurgeon and he said to the rest of the church, "That young man right there looks miserable." Spurgeon later said, "Well, I did, but I wasn't used to pastors talking about how I looked during their preaching." And the pastor said, "Young man, you will be miserable in life and in death unless you listen to this word. So young man, look. Look to Jesus."

Here's how Charles Spurgeon described what happened then: "There and then, the cloud was gone. The darkness rolled away and in that moment, I saw the sun. I could have risen and sung with the most enthusiastic of Christians about the precious blood of Jesus. And as the snow fell on my road home, I thought every snowflake talked with me and told me of the cleansing pardon I'd found in Christ."

Just look. You don't have to be a member of our church to look. You don't have to have read a page of this book to look. You don't have to be anything to look. Just look at Jesus and you will be saved. Let's pray.



Dear Jesus, thank you for being the Lamb of God. Thank you that 2,000 years ago, you didn't come to give us a lecture but to show us your love. Thank you that you didn't give us a second chance. Instead, you made one sacrifice that was enough for all of our sins. I pray boldly today in your name, Jesus, against every bit of guilt and shame that no matter how ugly or dark, twisted or embarrassing or shameful the things that we have done or said or thought, that we would leave today with peace. That we would believe what is actually true; that through faith in Jesus, the face of God is looking on us with favor. It's shining upon us and it is gracious to us. And I pray, God, that that message would change us. Simply looking at Jesus, the source of salvation, would change us so that we could be people of incredible love.

I pray, Jesus, for us as a church. You bless us with many years of pointing to you and your cross and I pray that we would keep doing it. We live in a culture of marketing, God, that loves three quick tips and five simple steps. But that will not change human hearts like this one simple message that will never get old to us - just to look at you. Jesus, I think about people from our church who have passed in recent years and I think of the expressions on their faces as they look at your face. I think how interesting, how glorious, how good, and how beautiful you must be if they look and they keep looking and they never want to look at anything else.

And I thank you, God, that this is our hope. That no matter how big our struggle, whether we solve our problems today, tomorrow, a decade from now or never, we have an eternity of seeing your face. Help us to see it even now through the eyes of faith; that we'd be satisfied and at peace. I pray this today, Jesus, in your name because it is wonderful, it is powerful, it's marvelous, and it's enough. So we pray today, Jesus, in your name, Amen.