

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. Peter Ollerhead

Some journeys Jesus made: Jesus at the River Jordan (John 1:15-51)

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today* where this week we are beginning a new series of four talks entitled 'Some Journeys the Lord Jesus Made'. For the next twenty minutes, or so, we shall be looking at the Scriptures which tell us of His journey to the River Jordan at the beginning of His earthly ministry. The first passage I want to refer to is in John 1, though I ought to set the context first so that we can better understand when I read the verses. Our attention will be directed to John the Baptist and what he had to say when the Lord appeared at the River Jordan, where John was baptising the people that came to him. Whereas we shall consider further words of John later in the programme it is John 1:28-29 that I want us to start with and I read from the English Standard Version: "*These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptising. The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."*"

I deliberately start with this declaration of John the Baptist, even though many wonderful things have been stated about the Lord by the Gospel writer in the previous verses. I am persuaded that we can never grasp the reality of the Word becoming flesh apart from the necessity of Him being the Lamb of God who takes away our sin.

Before we pursue this thought, however, I wish to draw attention to an important feature regarding the ministry of the man, John the Baptist, whom the Lord went to meet on His first journey in John's Gospel. It is made plain there that John was primarily a witness to the identity of Jesus - a forerunner of another who would bring the gift of the Holy Spirit with Him. He, the Baptist, did not come on his own volition. He had been sent by God (John 1:6) so he spoke with the authority of heaven. Was John, the Gospel writer, carefully emphasising the true role of John the Baptist to counteract the teaching of the sect that followed the Baptist's teaching? We get an example of this in Acts 18:24-25, when Apollos came to Ephesus knowing only the baptism of John. It is just a thought.

I have no doubt that the two disciples, present the next day when John drew their attention to Jesus being the Lamb of God (John 1:29), were well aware of the full meaning of that term. Being Jews, they would have been instructed in the truth of the Passover (Exodus 12:1-28) and the Pascal lamb from an early age. To help us to stand alongside them, I will briefly recount the salient facts of the escape from Egypt under Moses. You will remember that the Egyptians had been subjected to the terrors of the various plagues owing to the stubbornness of Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1-12:36). The final judgment was the death of the firstborn throughout the land (Exodus 12:29-30). In order to be protected, each household had to be sheltered by the blood of a slain lamb (Exodus 12:1-28). The Israelites always remembered that night of their deliverance when the Angel of Death passed through the land, never troubling a house with the blood of a lamb applied to the door posts. Now they hear John the Baptist announcing that the Man walking towards them was none other than the Lamb of God. Immediately they ceased to be disciples of John, moving their allegiance to the Lord.

Andrew was so impressed that he went to find his brother so that he, too, could share the same knowledge (John 1:40-42). To further illustrate the importance of this allusion to the Lord Jesus being the Lamb of God which Simon Peter ultimately grasped after Andrew, his brother, had passed it onto him I shall now read from Peter's first letter: "*knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made known in the last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*" Those words are from 1 Peter 1:18-21 and I like to imagine that, when Peter was writing these words, his mind went back to that bright morning when first he saw the Lord and heard His voice. Whether Andrew was still alive when Peter recalled the occasion I know not. I would guess however that Peter was always grateful that Andrew had troubled to find him, that he might share the glorious news of Jesus being the Lamb of God.

Do those of us listening to this broadcast value the efforts of people in our past telling us about the Saviour? I am ever grateful to the Lord for two ladies that spoke to me in a Sunday School, many years ago. They weren't charismatic characters or outstanding extroverts, and nobody would have looked twice at them, for they were but workers in a sewing factory. They were, however, kind and pleasant so that one absorbed the Bible stories and texts that they taught the various children who passed through their hands. Partly through their efforts, I became a believer in the

Lord Jesus so I would encourage all who do a work for the Lord to be consistent in your labours, for you never know if the seed is falling on good ground.

As I write this, my wife has just given to me a letter, from a friend now in her eighties, from which I will quote for it is relevant to this paragraph: "I started at the Sunday School when I was about six. We were outside playing and a girl who was on her way to Sunday School stopped and asked if we would like to go with her. The following week I and my brother and sisters went along. I went all through Sunday school then Bible Class, and was saved, baptised and received into fellowship all started by a young girl who stopped and spoke to us."

Let all of us ever seek to make known the greatness, glory and loving kindness of the Lord Jesus and His great salvation!

To return to Peter's letter, from which we read a few minutes ago, it is important to realise that the Apostle is much older, when he wrote this letter to the dispersed Christians of Pontus, Galatia and Bithynia (see 1 Peter 1:1), than when he met the Lord so many years before. Had the truth that was brought out by the Baptist that day faded? Never! The truth of redemption by the precious blood of the Lord glowed ever more radiant and resplendent, casting its preciousness on to every thought that Peter had of the Lord Jesus. Now, much more than at the Jordan, Peter knows the rich forgiveness of God gained through the death of the Lord. It needed the ministry of the risen Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit to open Peter's eyes and understanding to the wondrous reality of being redeemed from dead works and any merit that the Law could bring.

At that first interview with his Master, Peter was changed. From now on, he would be Cephas or Peter, that is the stone, not Simon (John 1:42). As with Peter, so with us. We, also, need the Spirit of God to make us aware of the necessity of believing in Him, and Him alone, so that we become His followers. I would gently ask if each one of us listening to this broadcast knows something of the preciousness of the Person of the Lord, and of the immensity of His work that first Easter, when He broke the power of death for ever. In short, are we believers in the Lord Jesus?

Before the Lord makes that journey to the River Jordan, we learn a matter of supreme importance about Him. I quote, again, from John 1, and, again, from the English Standard Version: "*For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known*", John 1:17-18.

The New international Version translates the last phrase as, "*...but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*" I repeat this is a matter of tremendous importance. Before He ever appears in John's Gospel, the Lord is identified as God. There are some who say that the Lord was a man and nothing more. They are correct when they claim the Lord was a man, though I would state it differently by saying that the Lord is a man. They differ widely from Scripture when they say that He was only a man. John's Gospel, on its first page, states categorically that He is God.

I am not splitting hairs here, for I am absolutely convinced that the identity of the Lord Jesus is at the centre of the Christian Gospel. These early verses of John's Gospel settle the matter once for all. A commentary that I regularly use, Leon Morris' *The Gospel according to John* (ISBN 9780802869340) states the position unequivocally: "... [John 1:14] states that the Word 'became' flesh, involving a change in state. This is the basic statement of the Incarnation, for Christ entered into a new dimension of existence through the gateway of human birth. ... As the pre-existent Son of God, He was the Creator of the world and the Executor of the will of the Father. As the incarnate Son of God, He exercised in His human existence these same powers and revealed effectively the person of the Father."

Later in John's experience, when the Lord Jesus made a journey to the Mount of Transfiguration, the Apostle was privileged to witness something of the eternal glory of the Lord (see Matthew 17:1-13, Luke 9:28-36).

To further enlarge upon the point of the Lord being the Son of God, we must consider some further verses in John's first chapter, so I read now John 1:32-34: "*And John bore witness: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is the he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'*"

We could supplement this account with those from the other Gospels, yet nothing would be added or subtracted, as they all emphasise the claim that Jesus is the Son of God. I think, also, that it worth commenting on the statement recorded in the three synoptic Gospels, where a voice from heaven acknowledges that "*...this is My beloved Son. Hear Him*" (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35, also see Matthew 3:17 and 2 Peter 1:17) We must appreciate that this acknowledgement came at the conclusion of the, so called, hidden years of the Lord's life. Whereas we might know nothing about this period, God the Father announced His pleasure in a faithful life lived in obscurity.

The significance of the title 'Son' can be further understood by referring back to John 1:18, where the revelatory function, of the Son making known the Father, is stressed. The aspect of revealing the Father occurs many times in the Lord's ministry, with the most well-known incident being the conversation in John 14:9-10 when: "*Jesus said to [Philip], Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father?*"

Those words are patently clear that the Lord Jesus, as the incarnate Son, revealed God the Father to us.

For any who have joined us since we started, can I say that you are listening to *Truth for Today*, where we are looking at the details centring around a journey that is recorded for us in the first chapter of John's Gospel. Please stay with us for the last few moments of our study. I wish now to look at the implications, for the two disciples of John who were present when the Baptist pointed out, for the second time, that Jesus was the Lamb of God (John 1:29, John 1:36). We have seen that John the Baptist bore witness to the Lord being the Son. He also had the task of disclosing the identity of the Messiah, which is what he did for the two disciples. They immediately left the company of John to follow Jesus. We know that they identified the Lord as the Messiah, for John, the Gospel writer, tells us that Andrew told his brother Simon that he had found the Messiah (John 1:41).

This again is not a vague religious truth that has no meaning for us in the twenty-first century. When challenged, we still claim to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the biblical title for the Man born at Bethlehem and crucified at Calvary. When we make that confession, we are stating that we have been persuaded by the Spirit of God that He is the Christ or Messiah, that is the Sent One of God, who will eventually fulfil all the promises of the Old Testament. Never forget the words that Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:20: "*For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*"

The state of the world at the present time makes it obvious that He is not yet reigning, but the day is coming when the Christ of God will rule in righteousness and justice.

We have previously mentioned Andrew seeking out his brother, Peter, to tell him he had found the Messiah (John 1:41). Who was this Andrew who pops up at various times in the Gospel narrative? We discover, from biblical sources, that he was a Galilean of Bethsaida (John 1:44), and quite probably a fisherman. It is not without meaning for our day that he, like his brother Peter (see Matthew 26:69-75), had an accent that betrayed his origin from the north of Israel. We are sometimes apt to identify and classify people by their speech. The Lord Jesus never did. He chose His disciples by referring to their obedience to follow and learn of Him. What is important, and well worth emulating, is Andrew's desire to bring people to the Lord. As we have seen, he first brought his brother, Peter, to meet Jesus. We find him again, in John 6:1-14, bringing a lad with five loaves and two fishes, thus enabling the Lord to demonstrate His power by feeding five thousand people with such meagre provisions. In John 12:20-26 we find Andrew, in company with Philip, telling the Lord about some Greeks who wanted to talk with Him. How estimable to have the reputation of bringing men and women to the Lord!

For the last couple of minutes, we must consider another journey that the Lord undertook that is outlined for us in the John 1:43-51. There we find that the Lord travelling to Galilee where He issues an invitation for Philip to follow Him (John 1:43), an invitation that meant Philip was included in the twelve apostles. For two thousand years the Lord Jesus has been calling people to follow Him, and I do not doubt that many listening to this broadcast are among the number who have responded to His gracious invitation. Notice though, that this invitation to Philip has an inference for service, for he immediately responded by seeking out Nathanael, so that he could pass on the good news (John 1:45). Nathanael, like many of us, did not respond with enthusiasm for he was concerned that Philip's Messiah did not fit the pattern of the long promised king, as understood by Nathanael (John 1:46). Philip's appeal to meet the Messiah was given using the words 'Jesus of Nazareth', which was greeted by the negative answer of Nathanael of "*How could any good thing come out of Nazareth*" (John 1:46).

There is an example here for all of us to emulate for Philip does not turn away defeated or deflated. He continues in his quest of introducing Nathanael to the Lord. Finally, he is successful by simply saying "*Come and see*" (John 1:46). This is the answer of David in Psalm 34:8: "*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*"

We can talk to a person about the Saviour, and quote many scriptural texts, yet the proof of the validity of the message will never be known until a person takes that step of faith into the warmth of the knowledge of Christ. At this juncture, I must emphasise that we should not continually pester a person with texts and pamphlets, rather we should be available for help and friendship, always "*ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us*" (1 Peter 3:15).

Finally, listen to the confession of Nathanael after he had been introduced to the Lord Jesus: "*Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel*" (John 1:49)

My prayer, as we finish this morning, is that all of us could make that same confession as Nathanael, that we, too, truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah or Christ of Israel.

For the last twenty minutes we have thought together of the journeys that the Lord made to the River Jordan, then back to Galilee as recorded in John 1. We did not cover the greatest journey that He ever made, which was from the eternal realm to this world, or as John 1:14 states "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" May we ever serve and bow in worship before the glory of the Lord Jesus, the risen triumphant Son of God, who was sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world.

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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