


John Points to Jesus

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: John humbly pointed others to Jesus, the One who laid down His life to give life to those who believe.

BACKGROUND PASSAGES: John 1:19-42; 3:22-36

 What are some aspects and symbols used in wedding ceremonies that you have found to be particularly meaningful?

While marriages and weddings look different in different cultures across different time periods, there are a few things that are fairly consistent about weddings no matter where or when they take place. First, almost always, the appropriate focus of the wedding is on the bride and the groom. Second, the most common role of the guests is to celebrate the union of the bride and the groom. These typical traits of a wedding are the ones John used to help his followers (and us) understand his role in relation to the coming of the Christ.

Group Time

Point 1: Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29-34).

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ 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 he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

When John announced that Jesus is the Lamb of God, this language would have been both familiar and strange to the people. How could a man take the role of a sacrificial lamb, much less take away the sin of the world? Because Jesus lived a perfect life as a human, never once sinning or falling to temptation. Because He did not deserve to die, Jesus’ death was the only one that could take the place of the deaths others deserved for their sin.

Voices from the Church

“Jesus was way more than just some prophet or teacher. And to point to Him as anything less than the King of kings, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, is to reject Him and insult Him!”¹

—Trip Lee

Christ as Sacrifice: Unlike the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, whose sacrifices were _____ to take away sin, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was able to _____, “once and for all,” take away sins.

Not only does the Lamb of God take away the **penalty** of our sin, but He also removes its **power**. In Christ we have been made new and our old identity no longer defines us and no longer has power over us. God has given us the Holy Spirit and set us free from the power of sin and death (Rom. 8:1-4).



How does the Old Testament sacrificial system help us understand the penalty of sin and the necessity of Jesus’ death?

Point 2: Jesus is the Groom who prompts great rejoicing in His friends (John 3:25-30).

²⁵ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

John's response to his disciples indicates that he not only recognized that Jesus is the groom but he also took great delight in the groom and was honored to be His forerunner. John wasn't struggling with feeling like he needed to defend his platform or his pride; he recognized who Jesus is and it led him to rejoice that he got to know Jesus and to play an important role in the incredible story that is redemption.



What are some reasons we may struggle to make much of Christ and less of ourselves?

Like a good groomsman, John was not threatened by the celebration of the Groom. He was absolutely delighted. Why? Because he knew who Jesus is, and he wanted nothing more than for Jesus to be lifted up so that others could have the privilege of knowing Him too and joining with His bride, the church. John would have to decrease in order to lift up Jesus, and he was honored to do so. Here we see a really important principle: **True worship of Jesus prompts us to promote Jesus, not ourselves.**

Bride of Christ: The _____ is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all _____ from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ _____.

Point 3: Jesus is the Son who gives eternal life to those who believe (John 3:31-36).

³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

³³ Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

It may be tempting to think of Christianity as just a list of things *not to do*. But through the gospel, God is calling us *to receive* something—namely, eternal life. John 3:36, a “gospel summary” verse, helps us see that receiving this gift, or missing out on it, depends upon our response to Jesus. God gives eternal life to those who believe in Jesus; conversely, those who reject Him remain in God’s wrath.



Why must we communicate that hearing the gospel comes with the need for a response?

When it comes to responding to Christ, the Bible is clear in passages such as this one that there are two options: **eternal life** or **eternal judgment**. You are either alive in Christ or dead in sin. You are either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. You are either in Christ or you are not in Christ. Jesus said plainly that He is the *only* way we can get to the Father (John 14:6). In this area, there is no middle ground. Either we are on a path that leads to death or we get to receive eternal life, and that eternal life is one of complete abundance, one where we get to experience the Spirit without limits (3:34).



What should we expect from people in a relativistic culture when they are confronted with the gospel’s clear distinction between those who are in Christ and those who are not?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read John 1:19-34

God revealed His righteousness through His Son, Jesus Christ. We get to receive the incredible gift of eternal life apart from the works that we do, apart from our own righteousness. We receive life and justification through faith in Christ. Because Jesus was the Lamb of God and took away the sins of the world, we are now justified freely because of the grace of God (Rom. 3:21-24).

There are times in our Christian walk when we feel like these simple components of the gospel are just the “basics” and we need more than that to grow. However, we should recognize that we never graduate or move on to better things than the gospel. The gospel is the bigger and better thing. The truths of what Christ did for us on the cross—removing both the penalty and the power of sin as well as giving us His righteousness—are truths that have powerful implications for every area of our lives. So look to Him and point to Him—always.



In what ways do you feel you've taken the gospel for granted? What would it look like to change that?

Day 2: Read Romans 3:21-26

Do you remember the story of the ten plagues of Egypt? The final plague was the death of every firstborn son. The only way to protect against this plague striking your home was for a lamb to be sacrificed and its blood used as a marker over the door of your home, just as God had instructed (Ex. 12:1-13). The blood of the lamb was an indicator that a home would be passed over and spared.

After their exodus out of Egypt, the Israelites celebrated the Passover each year as a way to remember and celebrate God's protection and provision. Yet the sacrifice of a lamb, and all the Old Testament sacrifices, meant that God only "passed over" sins previously committed. The sacrifices pointed forward to the blood of the perfect Lamb of God who would one day come to take away the sins of the world for all who believe.



What does it mean and why does it matter that God was able both to demonstrate His own righteousness while also declaring those righteous who have faith in Christ?

Day 3: Read John 3:22-30

John the Baptist said that being with the groom made his joy complete—even though that meant John would decrease in popularity, prominence, and authority. Can we say the same thing? Does being with Jesus bring us so much joy that we would consider it an honor to decrease? That we would consider decreasing being part of the completeness of our joy? If we're being honest, this often is not true of us. But why? What stands in the way of this for us?

Only God can show you what it is for your heart. Maybe it's not knowing Jesus enough. When we have shallow ideas of who Jesus is, our joy stays shallow too. But the more we know the riches and depth of His infinite love and kindness, the more depth we add to our joy. Maybe we think too highly of earthly things because we don't realize how temporal and fleeting they are in light of eternity. Or maybe it's a little bit of both. The answer to this problem can only be found in Jesus and revealed to us through the kindness of His Holy Spirit.



In what ways do you most struggle to find complete joy in being with Jesus—even when that means decreasing in some way?

Day 4: Read John 3:31-36

This passage makes a clear statement to the exclusivity of the gospel. Jesus is the only way to life, and rejecting Him leads to death. In our relativistic culture, we like to make categories for every person to have something personalized or unique for themselves. And while God has made us all different and our diversity is a beautiful reflection of Himself, this is not an area where God makes caveats. We either have life or we don't.

Think about how ridiculous it would sound if a relative of yours had major surgery and the doctors came out to give you an update. You've been worried, so you ask, "Did she make it out alive?" The doctor says, "Well, sort of. She's sort of dead." That would be absurd. You can't be "sort of" dead. You are either dead or alive. The same is true for our spiritual lives. We are either dead in sin or we are alive in Christ. The only way to life is through the Son.



What implications does the exclusivity of Christ have on the way you understand the gospel and how you relate to those outside of Christianity?

Day 5: Read Romans 8:1-6

In Colossians 2:6, Paul wrote, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him." The way we walk with Christ is the same way we came to know Him—through the gospel. Jesus saved us from the penalty of sin, so there is now no condemnation for the believer. Jesus saved us from the power of sin and gives us the Spirit to enable us to walk as He did. Take some time to reflect on when you first came to know the Lord. (If you haven't come to know Him yet, take some time to reflect on these verses.) For many of us, the joy and peace we experienced when we first came to know Christ are not characteristic of the way we live our lives presently. If we're honest, we probably can't say that we are always like John the Baptist, a friend who delights to rejoice in the groom. Accordingly, we should read this passage again and again and allow our hearts to rejoice in Christ as we reflect on its truths. Pray that God would give you a new joy in the gospel that would compel you to point others toward Jesus with renewed passion and excitement.



What part of these verses most excites you? How could you share that with someone this week?

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Trevin Wax

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AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

With this volume of *The Gospel Project*, the storyline of the Bible shifts from the Old Testament to the New, and we enter the era in which God begins to fulfill His promise of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the sessions that follow, you'll take a closer look at the context surrounding the birth of Jesus, the theological parallels between Adam and Jesus (the last Adam), as well as the early ministry of Jesus.

Some of these stories will be familiar to you and the rest of your group—the Christmas story, for example, or the story of Jesus' temptation. In the familiar stories, we want to help you see aspects of the Gospel accounts that you may have overlooked. In the less familiar stories, we want to help you see the beauty of Jesus' interaction with all kinds of people with all kinds of needs and all kinds of backgrounds.

Our hope as you study the Scriptures is that you will be drawn to worship Jesus as the Savior and Lord who fulfills God's original intention for us as His people. Here we see a Jesus withstanding temptation, calling disciples, loving the unlovable, and battling the evil one. May your worship of this Savior lead you to faithful obedience to His call in extending grace and mercy and the message of salvation to those around you.

UNIT 19

SESSION 1

1. "Sin," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, gen. eds. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (IVP, 1998) [Wordsearch].
2. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1992), 376.
3. Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans 10, quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 2

1. Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 40-41.
2. Jen Wilkin, *In His Image* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 107.

SESSION 3

1. John Piper, "God Is Always Doing 10,000 Things in Your Life," *Desiring God*, January 1, 2013, www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life.
2. Martin Luther, *The Magnificat*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
3. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 690.

SESSION 4

1. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 168.
2. Thomas Becon, *The Sermon of Simeon in the Temple*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 5

1. Bernard Gilpin, *A Sermon Preached in the Court at Greenewich*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
2. Gloria Furman, *Missional Motherhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 200.

UNIT 20

SESSION 1

1. Eric Mason, *Manhood Restored* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013), 1.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (SCM Press, 2015), 91.

EASTER SESSION

1. Basil, *On Humility* 20, quoted in 1-2 *Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VII in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 75.

SESSION 2

1. Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 171.
2. Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 9.

SESSION 3

1. Trip Lee, *Rise: Get Up and Live in God's Great Story* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), 47.
2. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance* 1.12.53, quoted in *John 1-10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVa in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 4

1. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14.44, quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Jerry Bridges, *31 Days Toward Trusting God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2013) [eBook].

UNIT 21

SESSION 1

1. Fred L. Horton Jr., "Exorcism," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003), 533.
2. Dexter Maben, "Mark," in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1290.
3. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning* (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2000), January 14.
4. Dacher Keltner, "Hands On Research: The Science of Touch," *Greater Good Magazine*, September 29, 2010, http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/hands_on_research.

SESSION 2

1. See *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 89.
2. St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. and ed. A Religious of C.S.M.V. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 35.
3. Kim Cash Tate, "Rejected by Friends, Loved by Jesus," *Desiring God*, December 29, 2015, www.desiringgod.org/articles/rejected-by-friends-loved-by-jesus.

SESSION 3

1. "Kawasaki Disease and Heart Transplant: Kendall's Story," Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, April 2012, www.chop.edu/stories/kawasaki-disease-and-heart-transplant-kendalls-story.
2. Andrew Murray, *Humility, in Humility and Absolute Surrender* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 42.
3. "John," in *Africa Study Bible* (Oasis International LTD, 2016), 1534.

SESSION 4

1. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on John* 24.23-24, quoted in *John 1-10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVa in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
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