

## **2025 TALK, 31.8.25, JOHN 1:24-39, REVELATION 21: 1-5**

### **NEW LIFE... AND THE PROMISE OF A NEW WORLD**

Here we are, the threshold of a new school year. A new beginning for children & young people. A new beginning for us all, in different ways, at the end of the summer holidays. (Boo! Yes it's sad. Always have that sense of loss, saying goodbye to the longer days of the summer). In planning the preaching for the autumn, I felt drawn back to this first chapter in John's gospel. Here is the new beginning of Christ's baptism & the start of his ministry among his people.

John chapter 1. Straight away, as we think about John baptising & the baptism of Jesus, we are also suddenly immersed in a strange world. An ancient world, with strange language & customs. So, there's this belief (from the Pharisees) that only the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet are allowed to baptise God's people. It would take some time to unwrap their way of thinking, so we'll just say that the Pharisees had come up with all sorts of rules & regulations. Not much here about the promise of new life or a new world order...

Strange customs, but also strange language from John the Baptist. This is a strange world in which we are told someone who came after John the Baptist 'surpassed him because he was before him'... Someone who, although John ends up baptising him, he is 'not worthy to untie his sandals...'. How do we make sense of these dead-end encounters between John & the Pharisees, and the enlightening encounter between John & Jesus of Nazareth?

What we can say about the gospel of Jesus, is that what we see here amounts to a significant new beginning. No-one in the past has baptised people in the Holy Spirit. Only God has done this. And now we hear John the Baptist saying that someone is now secretly among them, who is able to baptise people in the Holy Spirit...! Wow! Just imagine being told that... Now God is here in the flesh, embarking on a Holy Spirit mission. There is continuity here, because this someone has been long-promised from ancient times. But this is indeed an important departure from what has gone before. A significant new beginning...

There's very little time between John saying to the Pharisees that this person coming 'after him' is 'among them' – and him appearing. Indeed it's just the 'next day'... On this 'new day' John the Baptist declares: (POINT) 'Behold! – look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'... Alleluia! John 'saw' Jesus. Can you imagine John's excitement at seeing Jesus ?. A moment he

has been waiting for all his life. And what a way for Jesus to be introduced to his people, at the start of John's gospel... Jesus' mission of saving people from their sins is very clear from the v. beginning. Of course, we are not told at this stage how this will be, but that's Jesus' mission statement right from the start.

The very next day, John repeats this announcement in a shortened version, when Jesus once again comes down to the River Jordan: 'Look the Lamb of God!', he declares. And those five words, repeated for a new day, are enough to convince Andrew & his friend to follow Jesus. When Jesus then asks them, in his typically direct way: 'What do you want?', they simply reply that they want to be with him, to spend time with him. So Jesus says: "Come & you will see". And just like the shepherds hurrying down into Bethlehem, Andrew & his friend 'went & they saw'... Alleluia! They joined John the Baptist in seeing Jesus for who he really was. Someone who would give them (time & again) the gift of God's Holy Spirit, so they could live a new life. Someone who was worth following – all through life & beyond this life.

The gospel of Jesus is all about individual people, like Andrew here, finding new life. But sometimes churches make the mistake of thinking that the gospel begins & ends there. The gospel is not just about personal salvation. As we know, this is just the beginning of Jesus' world-embracing message.

The good news of Jesus is so much bigger than the boxes & the buildings we believers often put it in. Christ's gospel of the Kingdom of God breaks beyond barriers of custom & language, because it's a message to share with those both near & far. So, as we see straight after being with Jesus, Andrew finds his brother, Simon, to share the good news with him. Here's how sharing our faith can work. As natural as wanting to share a feast with a friend. That's how Alpha works, at its best, too. So, I encourage you to think about two things. Do you want to come to Alpha, to join with others in asking questions, like: 'Who was Jesus?' And if you are thinking of coming, who might you also invite along to our first Alpha evening on 16<sup>th</sup> September?

But there's more. John the Baptist says: 'I was told to come baptising, so that the Lamb of God, the Messiah could be revealed to God's people, Israel'. But there's more here too. John talks of this Lamb of God taking away the sins, not just of Israel, but of the **whole world**. Alleluia! This new beginning in Jesus is not just on a global scale, it's on a cosmic scale. God promises, in Jesus & by

the H.S., to make a new heaven & a new earth! Alleluia! And yes - we need to see Jesus & to see something of this new world today ... The people of Kyiv, Gaza, Epping are longing to see a new world & we join them in this longing...

Let me finish by telling you a story...