

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church

John 1:19-28 | The Voice

Sunday September 6, 2026

WELCOME:

- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—please take them home with you.

REVIEW:

We continue our verse-by-verse exposition of John's Gospel this morning.

Last Sunday we learned a lot about grace.

Grace is the undeserved and unmerited favor of God.

God's grace is a gift to us—a gift that we certainly don't deserve.

John not only taught us about grace, but “grace upon grace.”

John painted the picture of “grace following grace” or “grace heaped upon grace,”

Imagine standing at the beach and watching these waves come in.

Just as one wave rolls back into the ocean, another wave is there to replace it.

When do the ocean's waves stop? They don't.

If they did, we would know that something is terribly wrong with the ocean.

In an infinitely greater way, you cannot stop the divine waves of God's grace.

God's grace is not a single gift, but successive waves of divine favor.

Last Week KEYPOINT 1:

Jesus will provide grace, but not in the way or in the time you think.

I hope that sermon, along with my notes and Wednesday's Bible Study, helped you understand and apply God's amazing grace more clearly in your life.

With those words on grace, John ends his prologue.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, we begin the story of one momentous week.

Beginning in verse 19, John records a succession of days during which Jesus is revealed to Israel.

On this first day, an official delegation arrives from Jerusalem with one pressing question for John the Baptizer: 'Who are you?'

But while they are preoccupied with the identity of the messenger, they remain blind to the Messiah standing among them."

As with any good story, today's narrative is filled with tension, drama, and raw emotions.

The raw emotions stem from deeply held religious beliefs and traditions.

What religious assumptions or traditions might prevent you from hearing what God has actually said through His Word?

Let's find out together!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

John 1:19—This was John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

John 1:20—He didn't deny it but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

John 1:21—"What then?" they asked him. "Are you Elijah?" "I am not," he said. "Are you the Prophet?" "No," he answered.

John 1:22—"Who are you, then?" they asked. "We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?"

John 1:23—He said, "I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord,—just as Isaiah the prophet said."

John 1:24—Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

John 1:25—So they asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you aren't the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?"

John 1:26—"I baptize with water," John answered them. "Someone stands among you, but you don't know him.

John 1:27—He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie."

John 1:28—All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

*****May the Lord bless the reading of His Word.*****

PRAY:

Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory because of your faithful love, because of your truth. (Ps. 115:1)

EXEGESIS:

For eighteen verses, John has told us who Jesus is.

Now the curtain rises, the narrative begins, and we meet the first witness called to testify about Him.

John 1:19—*This was John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"*

John's Gospel is the only one that has this interaction with these priests.

Matthew does say...

Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him (Matt. 3:5)

Obviously, John is attracting a lot of attention—and that's why these priests and Levites show up.

Why is John attracting all this attention?

Because it's been 400 years since the Lord sent a prophet to Israel.

Can you imagine that?

We get irritated when the Lord doesn't answer our prayers in four minutes!

Not only have the chosen people of God not heard from God in 400 years, but the last thing God said to them was...

Malachi 4:4—*"Remember the instruction of Moses my servant,*

Malachi 4:5—*Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.*

Does that sound encouraging? No, this is terrifying.

But don't worry, it gets worse because the last verse of the OT says...

Malachi 4:6—*I will come and strike the land with a curse.*

Wow, the last word in the OT is “curse/destruction.”

And for the next 400 years, the Lord said nothing to His people.

He was silent—this timeframe between Malachi and John the Baptizer are called the “Silent years.”

And you thought getting the silent treatment from your spouse or kids was bad.

Theologically, this period is called the “*Intertestamental* Period.”

The 400 years are between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Compare it to a radio station that broadcasts dead air for a few moments, and you turn it up to see what's wrong.

BAM! The announcer's voice comes through the airwaves and startles you.

That's what John the Baptizer did—he shattered God's silence with John's voice.

Luke 3:2—*God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.*

Luke 3:3—*He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,*

John the Baptizer seems to arrive like a comet from out of nowhere—telling everyone to...

Matthew 3:2—*Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!*"

The last word from the prophet Malachi is “curse,” and the first word from the prophet John is “repent”—what in the world is going on?

The nation of Israel is in crisis.

The coming of their Messiah was at hand—and they’re not ready.

Although God preserved a faithful remnant, the nation as a whole was spiritually unprepared for its Messiah.

John 1:19—*This was John’s testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem*

Who are these Jews?

When John uses the term “the Jews” (seventy times throughout his Gospel), he is not making a racial slur because nearly everyone mentioned in the Gospels is Jewish.

When John speaks of “the Jews,” he is referring to a high-profile political group—a powerful group of Jewish men called the Sanhedrin.

These men were Jerusalem's religious leaders.

Even though Rome ruled Israel at this time, the Emperor allowed these men to rule under his authority.

The Sanhedrin would be similiar to our Supreme Court today, minus the religious aspects.

John 1:19— *the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites*

The priests worked in the Temple—their primary responsibilities centered on temple operations—preparing and offering sacrifices, conducting purification rituals, and leading worship services.

Outside the temple, the priests held significant authority—serving as community leaders, synagogue officials, administrators, legal scribes, teachers, and judges.

The priests were even the ones who inspected the cases for leprosy.

Coming from the tribe of Levi, the Levites assisted the priests.

Moses had an assistant—Aaron, the first priest— and the Levites were there to help him take care of the Tabernacle.

Why would the Pharisees send these men to interrogate John the Baptizer?

Because they were hearing rumors about this new religious movement.

It's completely different than today—no one cares if someone starts a cult in Cornville.

That's not how it is in the first century.

The Sanhedrin has authority over all religious matters.

The priests ask...

John 1:19—"Who are you?"

We know the question, but we don't know the tone.

I'm guessing that their question is meant to intimidate John.

Keep in mind they walked over 60 miles— to ask this question.

That's a 3-4 day hike from Jerusalem to the Jordan—like walking from here to Flagstaff.

They ask, “*Who are you?*”

So right from the get-go, we're off to a bad start.

Whenever you ask the wrong question, you're going to get a wrong answer.

Their question proves how far they are from the Lord.

It also proves that although they are reading their Hebrew Bibles, they are not interpreting them correctly.

Rather than pulling out what God has to say (exegesis), they are placing their own wants and desires on Scripture (eisegesis).

And when we place our own ideas, concerns, wants, and desires on Scripture, we'll always be off base.

We see this today when people say things like: “This is what this passage means to me.”

The Baptizer could have answered, “Who am I?”

- I'm the one who Isaiah and Malachi prophesied.
- I am the son of Zacharias the priest.
- I am the most important prophet that the Lord God has ever sent.

John had an impressive résumé, but he did not hand it to them.

He remains so incredibly humble throughout this confrontation.

To them, the Baptizer was an intruder—they didn't want him.

He was outside their religious systems of that day.

He didn't fit into their "holy huddle."

The Baptizer didn't go to their seminary.

He didn't do an internship at the Temple.

He didn't even choose a side in his Judaism— Pharisees/conservative, the Sadducees/liberal, or the Herodians/secular.

So the priests are thinking to themselves, "Who does this guy think he is?"

How does John respond?

John 1:20—*He didn't deny it but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."*

Think about this—the Baptizer was so full of the Holy Spirit, preaching with such conviction, that people wondered if he was indeed their Messiah.

That's how pure and powerful John's life was.

This alarmed the Jewish leaders.

"He didn't deny it"—John told the truth.

But John openly confessed, without hesitation or ambiguity, that he was not the Messiah.

Before he told them who he was, he made certain they understood who he was not.

Today, we live in an age of carefully managed profiles, personal brands, online followers, titles, résumés, and platforms.

We are constantly encouraged to enlarge ourselves—John does the opposite.

John refuses to enlarge his brand because he's not the Messiah.

The Messiah is one of the many titles for the Lord Jesus.

The Messiah means “the Anointed One.”

The Messiah is the Savior and the Deliverer for the Jewish people.

The priests continue their interrogation...

John 1:21—“*What then?*” they asked him. “*Are you Elijah?*”

Elijah is an OT prophet who never died—he was taken up to Heaven in a first-class chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11).

This is a fair question from the priests.

After all, John resembled Elijah in his appearance and personality.

In fact, John is so closely identified with Elijah that an angel told his father that John would come “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” Mal. 4:5, 6 (cf. Luke 1:17).

So is John Elijah?

John 1:21—“*I am not,*”

Now, John's answer creates a problem for us today—not the priests asking this question in the first century.

We'll get back to them in a minute.

John's answer creates a problem for us because of what Jesus said,

Matthew 11:11— *“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared,*

Matthew 11:14—*And if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come.*

Do you see the rub? Jesus says that John IS Elijah, but John says that he's not!

Do we have a contradiction in our Holy Scriptures? No.

Jesus is not saying that the Baptizer is Elijah reincarnated.

What the Lord is saying is that John was Elijah in a spiritual sense—John was “Elijah-like.”

Strike two: John rejects another prestigious identity.

But the delegation has one more possibility.

John 1:21— *“Are you the Prophet?”*

Notice that the question was not, “Are you a prophet?”

Because John is a prophet.

Instead, they ask, “Are you the/that Prophet?”

The priests are pointing us back to their Hebrew Bibles, when Moses said...

Deuteronomy 18:15—“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

The Jewish people had not only been waiting for Elijah for the past 400 years—but for the arrival of this special prophet who would be like Moses.

Moses was not just a prophet; he was the mediator of the Old Testament.

Moses was the middleman between God and the Israelites.

By asking this question, we see their misguided expectations.

They’re expecting another middleman like Moses.

How does John respond?

John 1:21— “No,” he answered.

John denies being *that Prophet* because the ultimate fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18 is Jesus Himself.

The priests were not expecting God Himself to be their Messiah.

The priests have asked three questions; they are 0 for 3—strike three, and you’re out.

One by one, John rejects every identity they offer him: not the Messiah, not Elijah returned from heaven, and not the promised Prophet.

Their list is exhausted, so they finally allow John to answer in his own words.

John 1:22— “Who are you, then?” they asked.

Can you sense the frustration?

The priests become more and more agitated with John.

Keep in mind, these are not dumb men.

But they are becoming more and more confused because John doesn't fit into any of their expectations.

Expectations are dangerous and disappointing—especially when it comes to your relationship with God.

Expectations become dangerous when we are more committed to our picture of God's plan than we are to God's Word.

We can see that with the priests today.

KEYPOINT 2:

Religious expectations can blind us to who God truly is.

Expectations become dangerous when they turn into demands.

When we become more committed to our picture of God's plan than to God's Word—we will always be disappointed and frustrated.

ILLUSTRATION:

Several years ago Amy and I got jammed up in traffic on I-40 trying to exit I-17.

If we reject every turn because it does not match the route we imagined, we may never reach the destination.

This is what the priests did—they constructed a theological route in their minds, and John did not appear where they expected him.

John 1:22—"We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?"

The priests give up trying to guess who he is—and they start demanding answers.

I'm guessing that John can clearly see the frustration on their faces.

John 1:23—*He said, "I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord,—just as Isaiah the prophet said."*

John didn't keep them in suspense—he told them exactly who he is.

Pastoral Sidenote: Isn't it interesting how we can avoid anger and frustration by not placing expectations on people, but allowing them to speak for themselves?

The priests demanded some name or title from John—but John gave them a Scripture instead.

John does not define himself by their categories; he defines himself by God's Word.

He gave these priests the perfect answer—an answer that came from their own Hebrew Bibles.

The priests were looking for his identity in the OT books of Malachi and Deuteronomy.

But John took them to another OT book— that of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:3—*A voice of one crying out:
Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness;
make a straight highway for our God in the desert.*

In other words, everybody get to work because the Lord is on His way!

Isaiah 40:4—Every valley will be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill will be leveled;
the uneven ground will become smooth
and the rough places, a plain.

Before a presidential motorcade arrives in a new city, the route is cleared.

Intersections are closed, obstacles are removed, and nothing is permitted to hinder the President's arrival.

Isaiah 40:5—And the glory of the Lord will appear, and all humanity together will see it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

John was announcing the arrival not of a president or king—he's announcing the arrival of the King of kings—God Himself.

The people must prepare their hearts through repentance.

Humility must be lifted up; Pride must be brought low.

The uneven ground of our sin must be made smooth.

By quoting this passage from Isaiah, John said: "That's who I am. I'm here to tell you to build this highway for the King of kings."

John 1:23—He said, "I am a voice...

The priests ask, "Who are you?"—John identifies himself as a "voice."

The apostle John called the Lord Jesus "the Word."—And the Baptizer is "the voice."

You can't see a voice. You can only hear it.

A voice is temporary; the Word is eternal.

A voice is heard and then fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever.

John's voice is the manner/means/mode by which "The Word" is made known.

A microphone has no message of its own—to be useful, someone must speak into it.

John 1:23—He said, "I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

The Greek verb for "crying" (*boaō*) (boe-owl) means "to cry aloud, to shout"

It's an emotional word, and John's preaching was full of emotion.

The subject of sin and repentance is emotional — it goes straight to our hearts.

But it's not only John's volume level—it's his cry — the pleading of his heart.

He wants people to be ready—the Messiah is near.

Judgment for how they live their life is on the way.

So it's out of love that John preaches, "Repent! Change your thinking! Change your ways! Believe and be converted!"

John 1:24—Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

In other words, that answer from John—as prophetic and Biblical as it is— is not going to suffice.

The priests know the Pharisees will want more details.

John 1:25—*So they asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you aren’t the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?”*

In other words, “Time out, John! If you’re just a voice/worker bee—what gives you the right to baptize?”

And baptize Jews of all people!

After all, Israel isn’t the Verde Valley! They got standards for baptism! :)

John calls *everyone* to repentance—both non-Jews (Gentiles) AND Jews.

This is a big problem—because the Jews weren’t baptized; they were circumcised.

Baptism was only for the non-Jews who converted to Judaism.

What made John’s baptism even more confusing to the priests is that John was the one performing the baptism.

Normally, when someone converted to Judaism, he was not baptized by the Levites or the priests.

The typical procedure was for the convert to baptize himself.

This shocked the priests. Why?

First, it broke their traditions.

How many times have you been to church and heard, or maybe you’ve said, “we’ve never done it like this before.”

Second, the priests never authorized John’s ministry.

Third, because they thought they were already in God's kingdom—which means they didn't need to be baptized.

Now, notice that John didn't answer their question.

They asked, ***“Why do you baptize?”***

John 1:26—*“I baptize with water,” John answered them.*

John's baptism was a symbolic act of repentance—the water is a sign of cleansing.

John's baptism was different than our baptisms today.

It was an outward sign and public confession where someone admitted that they were a sinner and were spiritually unclean and unprepared for the Messiah.

So once again, John redirects their attention away from himself and toward Jesus.

John 1:26—*“Someone stands among you, but you don't know him.*

These men had traveled to investigate a religious movement, but they failed to investigate their own hearts.

They read of Isaiah's prophecy, yet they were blind to its fulfillment standing before their eyes.

So, John gives them the truth...

John 1:27—*He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie.”*

To us, this is an obscure reference—to the priests, it's an act of defilement.

A disciple of a rabbi was not only a student, but a servant.

Although he was a servant, he wasn't a slave.

The one thing that differentiated a disciple from a slave was that the disciple was never required to care for his teacher's sandals.

The roads in Israel were hot and dusty, so people's feet were obviously dirty, dusty, and smelly.

So a student/disciple had to do lots of things for the Rabbi, but not touch his sandals or wash his feet.

That was the job of a slave.

With John's answer, he is not saying, 'Jesus outranks me.'

He is saying— *If the only job the Lord has for me is to take care of his sandals and wash his feet—I'm still unworthy to do so. I'm beneath this task.*

John 1:28—*All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

Bethany is mentioned to authenticate the narrative.

This is not the same "Bethany" near Jerusalem where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived.

This is the Bethany on the other side of the Jordan.

There is no record of the exact location yet—it seems to be another biblical site that has disappeared through the centuries.

APPLICATION:

As we close, I'd like to leave you with four thoughts on how to apply this passage to your personal life.

Once again, my sermon notes have more details.

1. We recognize the humility of John the Baptizer.

John is given to us for many reasons—two of them are his *witness* and his *humility*.

This delegation of priests kept looking to John for answers— but John kept pointing them toward their Messiah.

As Christians, we are all witnesses for the Lord whether we realize it or not.

The question is whether we are a good witness or a not-so-good witness.

What separates the two is not:

- Introvert/extrovert
- The amount of— or lack thereof —Bible knowledge
- How much evangelism training you've had

What separates a good witness from a not-so-good witness is humility.

As you live your life, no matter what phase you're in, you'll never go wrong by remaining humble and pointing people to the Lord.

1. Humility**2. Interpreting God's Silence:**

God was silent for 400 years before John showed up. We can't stand 4 minutes!

1. What do you tell yourself when God doesn't answer your prayers according to your timeframe or plan?

- “God has forgotten me.”
- “God does not care.”
- “Nothing is happening.”
- “My situation will never change.”
- “If God loved me, He would answer now.”

How do you respond when God is silent?

What does Scripture say about your response?

1. Humility

2. Interpreting God’s Silence:

3. Religious expectations— can blind us to who God truly is.

Because John did not fit the priests’ expectations, they became increasingly frustrated.

How frustrated are you with God right now?

I’d like to encourage you to examine your expectations this week.

Allow Scripture to correct your expectations:

- We can unknowingly demand that God conform to our plans—and for Him to meet our expectations.
- Be careful not to confuse your long-standing traditions with biblical truth.
- Be aware of rejecting God’s plan when your prayer arrives in a surprising way.

1. Humility

2. Interpreting God’s Silence:

3. Religious expectations— can blind us to who God truly is.

4. Identity: Know who you are—and who you’re not

John did not allow the delegation’s questions to define him.

He also didn't exaggerate his importance or deny his calling.

He responded with a Biblical understanding of himself.

1. Are you allowing God's Word or other people's opinions to define your identity?
2. In what area are you tempted to promote yourself, protect your reputation, or seek recognition?

PRAYER: (The Voice)

LORD'S SUPPER

BENEDICTION:

May the LORD bless you and protect you;

*may the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;*

*may the LORD look with favor on you
and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24)*

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