

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church

**John 1:30-34 | I Didn't Know Him**

Sunday September 20, 2026

**WELCOME:**

- Announcements

**REVIEW:**

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

Last Sunday we looked at one verse and answered the question, "Why did John the Baptizer call Jesus *the Lamb of God*?"

In answering that question, we discovered how the OT sacrificial lambs pointed forward to the Lord Jesus as ***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***

**KEYPOINT 1:**

*Sin is the lack of moral perfection in our lives.*

**KEYPOINT 2:**

*Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for the world, but his shed blood only benefits those who believe.*

I hope that exposition of that verse was beneficial.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Today, John takes us back to the baptism of Jesus and explains how God revealed the Messiah's/Savior's identity to him.

As we follow John's testimony, we will see three truths:

1. Jesus existed before John
2. The Spirit descended and remained upon Jesus
3. Jesus alone baptizes His people with the Holy Spirit.

*\*\*Please stand to read and honor God's Word.\*\**

**SCRIPTURE:**

**John 1:29**— The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

**John 1:30**— This is the one I told you about: 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.'

**John 1:31**— I didn't know him, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."

**John 1:32**— And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he rested on him.

**John 1:33**— I didn't know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The one you see the Spirit descending and resting on—he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

**John 1:34**— I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

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

**PRAY:**

*Your throne, God, is forever and ever; the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of justice. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy more than your companions (Psalm 45:6-7).*

**EXEGESIS:**

**John 1:29**— The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

**John 1:30**—*This is the one I told you about: 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.'*

This should sound very familiar.

It's the third time John the Baptizer says it.

**John 1:15**—*This was the one of whom I said, 'The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.'* "

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

Why does John repeat himself for the third time?

It must be important, and it is.

John repeatedly points us to Jesus' preexistence.

**Hebrews 13:8**—*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

John's statement sounds almost like a riddle.

The main point is that Jesus had no birth date—His life didn't begin in Bethlehem.

The Lord Jesus is God.

He is preexistent—the Lord pre-exists His creation.

**John 1:3**—*All things were created through him,*

*All things were created because of, or by, the Lord Jesus.*

He is the source of creation. If something exists, Jesus created it.

If it has being, Jesus gave it being.

Without the Lord's preexistence, the entire Trinity collapses; Jesus cannot be God, which would then make Him a liar.

And if the Lord is a liar, we are left hopeless in our state of sin.

But the Lord is not a liar; He is truly God and truly man at the same time.

Theologically, this doctrine is called the hypostatic union—two distinct and complete natures—meaning Jesus is truly God and truly human in one person.

He has proved this by His supernatural birth, doctrine, works, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension.

**John 1:31**— *I didn't know him,*

John says it twice, here in verse 31 and again in verse 33.

This raises an interesting question.

If John understood that the coming Messiah existed before him and ranked above him, why does he now say, "I didn't know him"?

John knew important truths about the coming Messiah, but he did not yet know which man God would identify as the Messiah.

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

A police officer may receive a detailed description of a missing person—the person's height, clothing, age, and appearance.

The officer knows what to look for, but he cannot say, "That is the person," until he sees the evidence.

John knew the prophetic description of the Messiah, but the Father still had to identify the Messiah to him.

John's statement "I didn't know him" means he had no prior personal knowledge of Jesus's full identity.

The Gospels make no mention that John and Jesus grew up together— or even had regular contact.

We don't know anything about John's childhood except that he "grew up and became strong in spirit" before beginning his public ministry.

Scripture provides sparse information about Jesus' childhood as well. We know that Jesus:

- Born in Bethlehem
- King Herod was ruling Israel
- Wise men came to visit
- Jesus visited the Temple at the age of 12.
- Jesus grew up in Nazareth, where he learned how to be a carpenter/handyman/stonemason from Joseph.

These early years of Jesus are called "the hidden years."

Their kinship was more genealogical rather than relational.

And that's very important for what John says next.

**John 1:31**— *but I came baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."*

John's mission was to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus.

He was to reveal the Lamb of God to the world.

And that revelation would come only through divine revelation—not through personal acquaintance or family connection.

Nepotism doesn't work in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was not revealed as the Messiah through family connections, human influence, or personal favoritism—God revealed Him.

John's lack of prior personal knowledge protected the integrity of his testimony.

He did not identify Jesus because of family loyalty or personal preference.

He identified Jesus because God gave him an unmistakable sign.

That explains why John now describes the purpose of his ministry.

Remember what John the Apostle said at the beginning of His Gospel about Jesus.

**John 1:10**—*He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him.*

**John 1:11**—*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*

Even though the Lord God Almighty stood physically among His people, they didn't recognize him—including his own cousin, John the Baptizer.

**John 1:31**—*but I came baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."*

"Baptizing with water" clarifies John's role as the forerunner.

John was tasked with pointing the Jewish people to the Messiah.

Those who heard John preach and repented of their sins were then baptized (immersed) in water.

John emphasizes the mode —water—in which he baptizes and contrasts it with the mode in which the Lord Jesus baptizes: the person of the Holy Spirit.

John's baptism was only a shadow and symbol that pointed people to the baptism that Jesus was bringing—a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

**KEYPOINT 1:**

*John preached change while the Lord Jesus brought the power to change.*

A road sign can point you toward a hospital, but the sign cannot heal you.

In the same way, John's ministry pointed people toward repentance and toward the Lord, but John himself couldn't give spiritual life.

John was the signpost; Jesus is the Savior.

John could administer the outward sign of cleansing, but he could not cleanse the heart.

He could prepare the people, but he could not reveal the Messiah by his own wisdom.

So John is saying that, up to this point, all he knew was to preach, baptize, and wait.

The fact that John didn't have the whole story—but was working within God's will and timeframe— should be comforting to us.

John didn't have an inside track on next steps—he had to wait like everyone else.

Even John was kept in suspense—yet in the Father's providential timing we see this:

**John 1:32**— *And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove,*

At this moment, God the Father opened John's eyes.

John was told beforehand—somehow and somehow by the Father—that the Holy Spirit would descend and remain on someone as the unmistakable sign of the Son of God.

What did John actually see?

**John 1:32**—...like a dove

We see this expression "like a..." throughout Scripture.

John hears "a loud voice behind me like a trumpet" (Rev 1:10),

The Lord's "eyes were like a fiery flame" and "feet were like fine bronze, and his voice like the sound of cascading waters" (Rev 1:14–15).

Cascading waters —think of the sound of a deluge, outpouring, or waterfall.

John himself "fell at his feet like a dead man" (Rev 1:17).

Jesus sends His disciples "like sheep among wolves" (Matt. 10:16)

So it's fair to say that John seeing the Holy Spirit like a dove is not literal.

Because with what human eyes could he see the Spirit?

Why did the Spirit appear in the likeness of a dove?

This is no coincidence.

A parallel exists between the sign and its significance.

The dove symbolizes purity and gentleness.

A dove's significance describes Jesus' character, which draws from the OT.

**Isaiah 42:3**—*He will not break a bruised reed,  
and he will not put out a smoldering wick;*

The two images—a bruised reed and a smoldering wick—are metaphors for human suffering, vulnerability, and frailty.

The bruised reed and smoldering wick represent anyone who is broken, abused, and facing rejection, yet the Lord is very gentle and tender with them.

A bruised reed and a smoldering wick embody extreme delicacy—hardly anything could be more tender and fragile than a broken soul.

Instead of crushing what's already damaged or extinguishing what's barely burning, Jesus tends to His people with the greatest of divine care.

The imagery of a dove may also remind us of the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation or announcing a new beginning after the flood.

Those are some thoughts on the dove's symbolism.

At Jesus' baptism, God was announcing the beginning of something new.

The Messiah had arrived, and His public ministry was the beginning of receiving grace and living by faith.

**John 1:32**— *And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he rested on him.*

God clearly gave John a direct revelation, telling him that when he saw an image like a dove come down during the baptism, he would know that a certain Someone was the Son of God.

Jesus' baptism commissioned/ordained His ministry.

- Just as Moses commissioned Joshua at the Jordan.
- Just as Elijah's mantle and spirit passed to Elisha

When an Elder or Pastor is ordained in the church, there is a formal event or ceremony.

God the Father selected John's baptism as the event.

Jesus' baptism publicly inaugurated His messianic ministry.

He was not becoming the Son of God.

Jesus receives a similar commissioning but with a very special difference.

**Mark 1:9**—*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.*

**Mark 1:10**—*As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*

**Mark 1:11**—*And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.”*

The Father's voice affirms Jesus' divine sonship, anointing, and commission.

The Baptizer recognized that this sinless Son of God would become the fulfillment of the Hebrew sacrificial system as the Lamb of God.

**John 1:32**— *and he rested on him.*

The other three Gospels mention the Holy Spirit anointed the Lord.

But John is the only one that says the Spirit “rested/remained/abided” upon Him.

Why is this important?

Because in the OT, the Holy Spirit would come upon someone, enabling them for a specific task. For example:

During the Exodus, when the Holy Spirit rested upon the seventy elders, they prophesied, but only once. (Num 11:25–29)

The Spirit came powerfully upon King Saul, enabling him to prophesy alongside a group of prophets. (1 Sam 10:6–10)

Gideon experienced the Spirit’s empowerment to rally the troops for battle. (Judg 6:34)

But at this moment, the Spirit not only descends on Jesus, but remains/rested (vv. 32, 33) on him.

This “resting” relates to the divine side of things that was prophesied in the OT.

Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be full of the Spirit at all times.

**Isaiah 11:2**—*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
a Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
a Spirit of counsel and strength,  
a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.*

**Isaiah 61:1**—*The Spirit of the Lord God is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and freedom to the prisoners;*

It's the same Holy Spirit Jesus sends to His Church at Pentecost that we have today.

**John 1:33**—*I didn't know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The one you see the Spirit descending and resting on—he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'*

We now know why John didn't know who the Messiah/Savior is.

We also can see John's conviction of being sent by the Father.

The Spirit's permanent presence upon Jesus identifies Him as the promised Spirit-anointed Messiah.

But John's testimony goes even further: Jesus has the divine authority to pour out the Spirit upon others.

**John 1:33**—*he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'*

Here, at last, we have the antithesis to John's statement in verse 26: "I baptize in water."

John the Baptist's baptism with water was preliminary because it was for repentance and symbolized the washing away of sins.

John's baptism was an outward sign calling people to repentance.

Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit is the inward seal that actually saves someone.

The OT anticipated redemption as the time when the Spirit would be poured out on his people.

**Isaiah 44:3**—*I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring.*

**Joel 2:28**—*I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity; then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will have dreams, and your young men will see visions.*

He would send the Holy Spirit upon all believers, empowering them to live and to teach the message of salvation.

In Ezekiel's prophecy of restoration, God promises not only to purify his people with clean water but also to impart to them a new spirit—his own Spirit.

John's listeners should not have regarded this promise as completely unfamiliar.

Israel's prophets had foretold a day when God would do more than wash His people outwardly—He would cleanse their hearts and place His own Spirit within them.

**Ezekiel 36:25**—*I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols.*

**Ezekiel 36:26**—*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

**Ezekiel 36:27**—*I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.*

This outpouring of the Spirit came after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven (see 20:22; Acts 2).

**John 1:33**— *I didn't know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The one you see the Spirit descending and resting on—he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'*

John has now taken us from uncertainty to certainty, from waiting to witnessing, and from “I didn't know Him” to “I have seen and testified.”

**John 1:34**— *I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”*

That is the movement of the entire passage.

That moment of divine realization came when John baptized Jesus.

### **APPLICATION:**

As I close, I'd like us to focus on John's statement of “not knowing Jesus”—he said it twice.

So it's important that we discuss and consider it all week long.

My question: *How did John move from “I didn't know Him” to “I have seen and testified about Him.”*

There's a change of tone and confidence between those two statements.

What happened in between?

John's situation was not that much different than ours—because we also need a divine revelation from the Holy Spirit to know Him.

“Knowing Him” is not about emotions—although it can be emotional.

“Knowing Him” is also practical, tangible, and effectual in your life.

In other words, “Knowing Him” impacts and affects your life.

- How do you know that you’ve “seen” the Lord like John?
- How do you know with 100% certainty that you're saved?
- What evidence should there be in your life?

John the Baptizer had evidence of the Holy Spirit working in His life—what about you?

When the Lord saves someone, there is an immediate transformation AND an ongoing process of spiritual growth.

When someone enters into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, they become “a new creation.”

**2 Cor 5:17**—*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, (died) and see, the new has come! (Made alive)*

This spiritual transformation begins with being “born again” (John 3:3–7).

Here’s my question: **How do you know you’re spiritually alive?**

By God’s grace, we don’t have to guess—Scripture tells us everything we need to know.

Scripture tells us how to finish life well.

The Apostle Paul provides a very specific list of how unbelievers and Believers will live.

As I go through these specific moral issues—don’t hear *perfectionism/legalism*.

We will never do these things perfectly, but we can do them increasingly.

**Galatians 5:19**—*Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity,*

**Galatians 5:20**—*idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions,*

**Galatians 5:21**—*envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

**Galatians 5:22/23**—*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

These are the fruits that come from “Knowing Him.”

Not perfectly, but increasingly over time.

Now, I’ve read and taught on that list several times, but I want to press into this issue of “Knowing Him.”

Because Scripture has much more to say about how Christians are to bear fruit.

Scripture commands Christians on what to do and what not to knock off.

**James 1:19**—*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger,*

Since the time of your profession and baptism in Christ, have you changed in these three areas?

Are you quick to listen—or are you still talking over people?

Are you slow to speak—or are you planning what to say, while the other person is still talking?

Are you slow to anger...or do you still have a short fuse?

Gentlemen...do you call yourself a Christian, but act like Cain, Esau, King Xerxes?

Ladies...do you call yourself a Christian, but act like Sarah, Rachel, and Jezebel?

**Proverbs 29:11**—*A fool gives full vent to his anger,*

Not a Christian—but a fool.

BTW, are you fellowshiping with fools?

**1 Corinthians 15:33**—*Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."*

**James 4:11**—*Don't criticize one another,*

Dear friends, criticism is not a spiritual gift.

**Ephesians 4:29**—*No foul language should come from your mouth*

**Proverbs 10:18**—*and whoever spreads slander is a fool.*

**1 Peter 2:1**—*rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.*

**Titus 3:2**—*slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people.*

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**Matthew 12:36**— *I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak.*

**Matthew 12:37**— *For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."*

“Knowing Him” demands a change/transformation in your words, behavior, and conduct.

The change of who you used to be— to who you are today— is the proof that you have ***“seen and testify that Jesus is the Son of God.”***

All of those fruits of the Spirit are all interrelated.

These moral fruits do one of two things:

- 1) Prove you're saved
- 2) Prove that you are not.

They either prove that you know Jesus, or that you don't.

Because there is no such thing as a loveless, joyless, impatient, unkind, faithless, critical, and divisive Christian.

In today's passage, John the Baptizer progressed in his spiritual walk.

At first, he said, “I didn't know Him.”

Then John had a personal experience with the Lord Jesus.

It's through that personal experience that he later said, ***“I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”***

What about you? What's your testimony?

How have you gone from death to life?

**2 Cor. 13:5**—*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless you fail the test.*

**2 Peter 1:10**—*make every effort to confirm your calling and election*

In other words, if you have seen the Lord, believe in Him, and have a testimony, Scripture says.... “Prove it.”

Jesus says...

**Matthew 7:20**—*you'll recognize them by their fruit.*

The interesting thing about fruit... is that when it's good, life can be really sweet.

However, when the fruit is bad, life is sour, stale and rotten.

Dear friends, do you “know Him” as the Baptizer did?

I pray that you would examine your life this week and do some business with the Lord through examination and repentance.

**PRAYER:**

**SONG:**

**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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