

A Witness

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The message today is called “A Witness.” A witness is someone who has knowledge relevant to an event or a matter of interest. But not only does the witness have the knowledge, they also give testimony to what they know. A true and honest witness, therefore is one who both has knowledge and testifies to it. When it comes to the Christian faith, it is vitally important that there be witnesses to what we believe.

Today we will be looking at a portion of John chapter 1. John states the purpose of his gospel near the end of his book in chapter 20:31: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” And so throughout his book, he calls on witnesses and give evidences in order to accomplish this purpose: that you believe in the DEITY of Christ. And that by believing in him you might also have what he offers, namely, the FORGIVENESS OF ALL YOUR SINS, life and salvation.

I would encourage you to read the whole gospel of John... maybe you could do that during the course of this week. It would take you a little over two hours to read John’s Gospel. If you split that up over the next 6 days, you could get through all of John’s Gospel reading about 20 minutes per day. As you read, look for the evidence he provides that proves that Jesus is truly the Son of God our Savior. At the end, ask if he has convinced you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

But today we will limit our discussion to the first “witness” John calls to the stand: John the Baptist.

Listen to the first part of our reading: John 1:6-8. **“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.”**

So this is the introduction of the first witness, John the Baptist. Then verse 19: “This was John’s testimony...”

Credible

- 1) Sent from God... a **prophet**. The last of the O.T. prophets. He was the first prophet to come along in 400 years. Everyone knew him to be a prophet. This is important because if you’re going to have a human testimony about Christ, then he must be credible and reliable.
- 2) He came from a **priestly family**. (Character of a witness is always called into question. If you examine his family, you will find no character issues, but only the most devout and upright parents.)
- 3) **His birth** was extraordinary / miraculous. Barren and in their senior years, but Elizabeth gives birth in her old age to this son.
- 4) His **birth was a prophesied**... first by Old Testament prophets, then by an angel from heaven who appeared to Zechariah when he was ministering in the temple. He was told

that he would have a son, and who that son would be and what that son would do. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit, in the spirit and power of Elijah who would turn the people's hearts in preparation for the Messiah.

- 5) He lived completely **apart from the religious system** in Israel. He lives like a hermit in the desert. He is so alien to the religious system that when the leaders come to him, he calls them a brood of snakes. He does not recognize their authority because they are apostate. He speaks prophetically against them.
- 6) A witness is more credible when they have **nothing to gain** from their testimony. John did not gain wealth. He did not gain political influence, but lost it. John did gain some attention for a while, but ultimately lost it with his imprisonment. If John was in it for himself, he did a horrible job of it. He gained nothing from his testimony... which lends to its credibility!

So this is the man John draws on as the first witness to Christ. He is the most credible person. He testifies that Jesus is the Christ that by believing you may have life in his name.

Next we read: **“Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.”**

So again, since John the Baptist was not an insider and was unknown to the religious leaders, they sent a delegation out to find out more about him. The religious establishment did not know this guy. They did not train him. They did not work with him. They did not ordain him or anoint him as priest or prophet. Yet he was daring to speak for God, baptize people and point people to the long-promised Christ. So they came to him to inquire about him. They asked who he was.

20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Christ.”

We have to make sure we get the inflection right. The English is somewhat ambiguous and it could be read a number of ways. But the Greek is not ambiguous. It is a strong negative and so we must read it: “I am NOT the Christ!” His confession, his testimony was clear and public for all to here. If you're looking for the promised Christ, John made it clear that it most definitely was not him.

21 They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.”

The reason for this question was a prophecy by the prophet Malachi some 400 years earlier. The very last words recorded in the Old Testament are these: **“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse”** (Malachi 4:5). You may remember that Elijah was a great prophet of God and at the end of his life he did not die, but instead was swept up into heaven alive. Now what is confusing is that Jesus said of John, “Elijah has come.” But here, John himself says, “I am not [Elijah].” Is this a contradiction? No. The people talking to John were asking if he was Elijah. Are you the very same prophet Elijah who was swept into heaven decades earlier? No. He was not. When Jesus later says that “Elijah has come” he meant that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, just as the angel foretelling John's birth had said. So... John emphatically denies that he is Elijah.

“Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.” In Deuteronomy 18 during the time of Moses, a prophecy was given: 15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. ... I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. 19 If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.” This actually was a prophecy

about Jesus, the perfect prophet. So John was just as emphatic: He was NOT that prophet foretold 1500 years earlier.

2 Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” So, our superiors sent us here to get some answers, and they won’t be overly happy if all we can tell them is who you are not. So answer in the affirmative: Who are you?

23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’ ” So John makes it clear that he is the one foretold by the prophet Isaiah 700 years earlier. He is the one who was called by God to prepare the way for the Lord. John is doing everything he can to divert the attention from himself and to the whom it right belongs: Jesus.

24 Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

They will not be deterred. They keep forcing the conversation back to John, back to John, back to John. So why does he baptize? John answers:

26 “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” John wasn’t saying his baptism was unimportant. John’s power and authority came from God. But Jesus’ power and authority came from himself because he is true God. So John was saying, “I am a servant doing God’s will. Jesus is the master before whom every knee must bow.” John was a humble witness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So despite every attempt to keep turning the discussion back to John, John again and again turned the conversation away from himself. We talked about this last week. John knew that it was not all about him. It was all about Jesus.

And we have the first witness to the deity of Jesus, the first witness to the fact that he is indeed the promised Christ mentioned over and over in the Old Testament.

So what can we say of John the Baptist, this first witness?

- 1) He is credible and reliable. Sent by God in fulfillment of Scriptures, this is a witness you can believe.
- 2) His witness was clear and unequivocal. He never wavered. He never waffled. He never changed his position, or altered his message for the audience.
- 3) His witness was public. What he testified about Christ was not done in secret or passed along by hearsay. He boldly and publicly declared that Jesus is God’s own Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- 4) And finally, we can say of this witness, that his focus was all on Christ. He was completely humble and refused to take center stage as people tried again and again to put attention on him. He kept shifting it back where it should be: On Jesus.

Now here’s what this has to do with you and I. John the Baptist continues to be a powerful witness for Jesus even today. We just heard his testimony and were strengthened. However, John the Baptist has been dead for a couple thousand years, so he is no longer here in the flesh to testify. *But you are.*

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8. Jesus also told his disciples, “You also must testify.” Although we are not eye

witnesses, through the eyes faith we have become convinced that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God.

In fact, let's pause right now and have you confess what you believe. It's the same thing believers have believed since the time of Jesus. We summarize it with a creed, a statement of belief, that was already in use a little over a century after Christ ascended into heaven and has been confessed by believers since. **The Apostles Creed.**

Yes, you believe! And now God has made you also a witness to these truths you confessed. Like John the Baptist, make sure your witness is **credible** and reliable. What destroys your credibility? When your confession and your life don't line up. When you say one thing, but do another. When the love of Christ is hard to see in your relationships, in your family life, in the way you treat co-workers... or even a waiter / waitress. How will anyone listen if you say, "Let me tell you about the love of God!... But the love of God is no where to be seen in your daily living." Strive to be a credible witness.

Second, make your witness **clear and unequivocal** just like John the Baptist. We don't change our message depending on the audience. We don't cater to certain crowds or certain people. The truth of God is the truth of God for everyone. Proclaim it clearly and boldly.

Third, make your witness **public**. Well, you can't mention Christ in the workplace. Says who? Don't be obnoxious, but when opportunities arise, testify to the truth about Jesus in every aspect of your life.

Fourth, make sure **Christ** remains the center and focus of your witnessing. Just like with John, people will try to sidetrack the discussion and make it all about you... sometimes highlighting the bad, sometimes the good. Either way, remember it's not about you. Jesus must remain central to our witness. Always be thinking, how can I steer this back to Jesus.

Friends as Christmas approaches, look for opportunities to testify. Lead people to Jesus. Tell of his life, death and resurrection. He is the Savior of the world. All who trust in him have eternal life. So boldly be what God has called you to be... a witness! Amen.