

The GOSPEL of JOHN

SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

The Word in Our Voice

Scripture

John 1:19–28 (ESV)

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”²² So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.)²⁵ They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know,²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Introduction

John presents a sequence of days that truly shook the world, seven days that began the ministry of Jesus Christ. These are days that will never lose their earth-shaking significance. This is the first major division in the Gospel of John. The material of the prologue goes through verse 18. With verse 19 the reader is launched at last into the events of the first momentous week of Jesus’ ministry.

John presents the coming of Christ in seven days. First are three days in which John the Baptist bears witness to Christ, followed by Jesus’ first three days with his disciples. This culminates on the seventh day with Jesus’ first miracle, the turning of water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana.

Sermon Guide

Four Key Elements of John’s Witness

1. A LIVING WITNESS

John’s first witness to Jesus was prompted by the arrival of a delegation from Jerusalem: “And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’” (John 1:19). These religious leaders came because they had heard about John and his ministry.

John’s witness to this delegation rose from their knowledge of his life and ministry. The same should be true of our witness. An effective witness to Jesus begins as a living witness. John led a holy life and taught God’s truth.

The way to start witnessing is to start witnessing with the manner of your life.

2. A WITNESS NOT TO SELF

In John the Baptist’s answer to the religious leaders’ questions we see the second element of a successful witness. “*Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah or the Prophet?*” they asked him. John said, “No.” John’s witness was not to himself. He was not a savior. He was not the man they should admire or trust for salvation.

It is important for us to follow John’s example in refusing to focus our witness on ourselves. John was a witness to the Savior, not a savior himself. Whenever a Christian starts thinking that what he is doing is important, he “will always cease to be effective as Christ’s witness. The testimony [to Jesus] will stop.”¹

“Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah or the Prophet?” they asked. “I am not the one you should be focusing on,” John replied. “Who are you?” they pressed. “We need to give an answer to those who sent us.” John answered, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” (John 1:22–23). That is John’s witness, and it should be our witness. We should say, “I am here to show that you need a Savior and to point to Jesus as the One you should worship and trust.”

3. A WITNESS TO CHRIST

John went on to speak about Jesus.

- **He identified himself as a “voice.”**

In John’s Gospel Jesus is called “the Word.” Now, John is “the voice.” A voice is the vehicle by which a word is made known. Jesus is the eternal Word, but he enters our present world in part through our voices. We are to be the voice that presents the Word, Jesus Christ.

- **John’s witness was not complete until his disciples had become the followers of Christ.**

In John 3, some of John’s supporters expressed concern when people began deserting John and flocking to Jesus. But John was elated, and he reminded his hearers, “*I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him*” (3:28). Just as John did not bear a witness to himself, so also he did not ground his right to baptize in himself: his authority to witness would be understood and accepted only by those who came to see the truth about Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist shows that when Christians are challenged about our right to proclaim Jesus as Savior, we must not back down but rather must stand on Christ’s own authority.

- **John does not get tied up in a personal defense of his actions. Instead, he directs the challengers to Jesus.** “*The reason you ask me these things,*” he says, “*is that you are not aware of the One who has come.*” John’s baptism was all about Jesus, the true Messiah, and their hostility toward John and his ministry arose from their ignorance of the Savior.

The same is true today. People are hostile to our witness because they do not know Jesus.

This means that when people argue against Christianity or different teachings of the Bible, it is less important for us to debate the issues and more important to tell them about Jesus. Teachings that are outrageous to the worldly mind are made clear and lovely in the light of who Jesus is and what he has done.

if you convey to people what a thrill it is to know and serve the Lord Jesus, your witness will be that much more effective. Far from decrying the fact that he might have to perform menial service on Jesus’ behalf, John was overwhelmed with the privilege of giving even the lowliest witness to so great a Lord as Jesus, God’s true Son and Messiah.

The Application

if you have come to Jesus as your Savior, and if you are just starting to understand biblical doctrine, don’t let what you don’t know keep you from witnessing about what you do know.

4. A CALL TO REPENTANCE AND FAITH

An effective witness includes a call to repentance and faith. John said that he was a voice “*crying out in the wilderness*” (John 1:23).

We must be candid with people about the real misery, emptiness, or bondage they experience. The world devotes itself to denying these realities; Christians must point out the truth. *John cried, “Make straight the way of the Lord” (1:23).*

Like John the Baptist, we must humbly point out to people the shocking truth that they are guilty before God, that they have broken God’s law, and that they are worthy of just condemnation. Their greatest need is to be washed not with water but with what the water symbolized: cleansing from sin by the saving work of Christ.

Such a witness might arouse hostility. But this is the only way that Jesus comes as Savior to the sinner’s soul. The royal road for the King of kings is paved with humble penitence and trusting faith. John said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘*Make straight the way of the Lord*’ ” (John 1:23). To be effective, our witness must include this same call to repentance and faith.

NO WITNESS WASTED

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to our usefulness as Christians is the false belief that our witness does not matter.

Conclusion

You may think that you are just one “voice” and that your witness doesn’t matter. But if Jesus is the Word that your voice brings—and if he is One you know and who is living in you—then your witness is mighty to cast down strongholds and lead dying sinners to salvation.²

An acceptance of this task was, many believe, the single most important factor in the astounding outreach and expansion of the early Christian church. It was not simply that Paul and the other leaders carried the gospel to the farthest corners of the Roman world. In fact, many of the early leaders were not particularly zealous about the missionary effort. It was rather that all Christians—small and great, rich and poor, slaves and freedmen—made it their consuming passion to tell others about the Lord.

¹James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1:53.

²Phillips, R. D. (2014). *John*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 75–84). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.