

John 1:6-9, 15, 19-26 The Testimony of John the Baptist: A Faithful Witness

Today, I want to highlight the testimony of John the Baptist. In v. 6 John the Apostle introduces John. And we know this to be John the Baptist. The Apostle's emphasis is that he came as a WITNESS to the light of the world, the WORD of God (See vv. 1-5). In v. 7 we find the main truth of our text today: **"He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him."** This is important because, if you remember from last week, this is John's purpose for writing. In 20:30-31 we read: **"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."** In v. 7 we see the "witness" in both a noun and a verb form. It is the word "*martyr*" which means to bear witness, or to give testimony about someone or something. With this in mind, I hope we can learn what it means to be a faithful witness. I have three truths: 1) Our testimony is not our own; 2) Our testimony is about Jesus as revealed in Scripture; and 3) Our testimony results in belief.

1. Our testimony is not our own. Look at v. 6: **"There was a man 'sent' from God."** John, the author, wants everyone to know that John the Baptist was SENT by God to bear witness. To say that he was "sent" by God in this context was to say that he was a prophet. In the same way God sent Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, etc. to testify and speak the words of God, so John the Baptist was God's prophet. In fact, he was the last of the OT, OC prophets.

Just for a moment, let me recall the story of John the Baptist. He was the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. If you remember, Zechariah was a priest and during his temple duty an angel appeared to him and said *"Your wife, Elizabeth will have a son. AND, he will be great before the Lord . . . he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And, he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God . . . He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah . . . to make ready for the Lord a people prepared . . . And you will call him John"* (See Luke 1). Zechariah did not believe the angel because both he and Elizabeth were too old to have children. So, Zechariah's ability to speak was taken away from him. Later, when Elizabeth finally gives birth to the boy, she names him John. And Zechariah's speech comes back.

It is also interesting that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a relative of Elizabeth. And once she visited Elizabeth and we are told that the baby in her womb jumped with excitement. This same John who leaped in the womb through the power of the Holy Spirit is the SAME John who came preaching and teaching about the Messiah. Isaiah prophesies of him saying, **"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken'"** (Is. 40:3-5). In fact, in John 1:23 John quotes these words from Isaiah to validate his testimony. Also, I want to mention that John the Baptist was probably a Nazarite. Back in Num. 6 we see that a

Nazarite (like Samuel and Samson), took certain vows dedicating him/herself to God which included a strict diet and no alcohol. They were set apart (during their time as a Nazarite) as "holy." I think this fits the description we see of John the Baptist in the NT (see Luke 1:15). Now, back to our truth: His testimony did not originate with him. Everything in the prophecies about him, his birth, his life and practices, his message . . . display that He was SENT by God.

So, how does this apply to us? Today, we are not OT prophets. We are not Nazarites. There were no miraculous prophecies associated with our births. We are not on such strict diets (well most of us). Nor, do we dress so radical as John. And, we aren't gathering the crowds over in Enochville. But, our message, like John's, comes from God. This means the truths we share about the Gospel have been given to us with the SAME authority. I think of James 1:17: "**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.**" Thinking of Kristen as God's gift to me on our wedding day as we had this verse printed for all to see, in the same kind of way there is no true message if it does not originate with God. This should be very humbling to us . . . as the world looks around, makes judgment calls, and preaches their messages about truth, we KNOW what is true and we are sent into this world to bear witness to the truth. Our testimony does not originate with us.

2. Our testimony is of Jesus as revealed in Scripture. John the Baptist did not come preaching and teaching in the wilderness making up his own stories, testifying to that which was not true. As we saw last week, he came as a witness to the WORD, the ONE who was with God in the beginning, the ONE through whom all things were created. His testimony was about the ONE who is LIFE, the ONE who is LIGHT, the ONE who is the GLORY of God. This is Jesus, the ONE who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14). Look at vv. 7-9: "**He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, who was coming into the world.**" Look over at vv. 19-28: "**And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 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?" 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." (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."** These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

Here we see priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem by the Pharisees to find out WHO is this man is, WHAT he is preaching, and from WHOM does he get his authority. Great crowds were

coming to him. And most everyone knew he was a prophet sent by God. And as they understood the OT Scriptures, they knew the Messiah was coming, they believed Elijah or someone in the “spirit” of Elijah was coming. They knew Moses spoke of another “prophet,” more mighty than him was coming. So they thought, “*Could this be John the Baptist?*” And John says in vv. 26-27: “*There is one coming after me of whom I am not worthy to even stoop down and unstrap his sandals.*” My testimony is about HIM! Look down at v. 31: “**I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel . . .**”

Now, from these passages, John the Baptist was not confused about his message. His testimony, his witness, was of Jesus. And it is also clear from the NT that his message was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit (also see Luke 1:15). But, through what means did the Holy Spirit reveal these things to John? Well, there were various means God used in the OT to speak to his prophets, dreams, visions, the spoken words of angels, etc. And, as John preached before the fulfillment of the new covenant in Christ, we must assume God spoke to him in the same ways. But, it is important that John comes at the end of all the OT prophets. And, he had access to the entire OT Jewish Scriptures. So, I believe more than any other prophet before the coming of Jesus, he would have understood all the words of the OT as pointing to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, who would eventually come to him for baptism. In this regard, the Holy Spirit took those words and gave John understanding of their fulfillment in Christ.

Now, WE are not OT prophets. I believe the Scripture, the Canon, is closed. We are not given new visions, new dreams, new revelations as we have in Scripture. However, like John, we have the Scriptures. And the Scriptures are crystal clear on the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, unlike John the Baptist, we have the ENTIRE message, we are not adding to the Bible as many do today. Our testimony is of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture! It is not rocket science! So, what is our message? Well, it is in essence the same as John’s. What was his message? I think we can break it down to two things: 1) John preached the forgiveness of sins. And 2) He preached that in Jesus, God’s people would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. To show the first part of his message look down at 1:29: “**The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’**” John’s message of repentance was not based on false principles of righteousness, but upon the WORD who took on flesh and made his dwelling with us. And our repentance is made SURE because when we are sorry for our sins, knowing our sins have caused our separation from God, our coming death, knowing we deserve to spend eternity away from God under his wrath, we look unto the LAMB of God, the sacrificial LAMB of God, the sinless ONE who laid down his life as a sacrifice for sinners (ALL of them if you are in Christ!). If you are a Christian, God punished HIM in your place! And if you look to him in faith and repentance, it will be “*well with your soul.*” Though John did not know what we know, this message was the same.

I am sure he looked to the OT and read the words of Zechariah with rejoicing: “**On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness**” (Zech. 13:1) Or Isaiah, who said “**Surely he has**

borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” Or Jeremiah, who looked to the new covenant saying, “**And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more**” (Jer. 31:34). Brothers and sisters, with John the Baptist, we are the recipients of such forgiveness. “All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved!” And our message to sinners is the same!

Also, John the Baptist preached that God will bring about these things through the power of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus is the ONE who do this! Look down at vv. 33-34: “**I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.**” Brothers and sisters, Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works powerfully in us as Paul says, “**No one can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Spirit**” (1 Cor. 12:3). The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, of judgment (16:7-11). The Holy Spirit takes the Word and gives us understanding. The Holy Spirit unites us to Christ (See John 14-17), who is united to God. The Holy Spirit gives us peace, joy, patience, kindness, etc. If there is any fruit that will last, it will be because the message of the Gospel has come to you in power (1 Thess. 1:5). How beautiful is this message! How beautiful is the WORD behind the message! This is the message of Jesus Christ that has been revealed in the Scriptures and applied by the Holy Spirit. This is our testimony! To this we bear witness!

So what are some applications?

Application: Our witness must be clear! We don’t have to say much. We can be very simple about our message. (See the sermons in Acts). This means that as a church, we must get the gospel right. We must be clear. I must be clear from the pulpit. Our elders must be clear in our teaching. This is why we have a confession.

Application: John suffered. John died for this message. With this truth, what kind of motive is displayed for us in the life and death of John? I think of the words of Paul to Timothy: “**For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe**” (1 Tim. 4:10).

Application: Often, those who hear our message, will find it offensive. And, they will always associate us with our message. Most of the Jewish leaders found John’s message offensive. Nothing has changed today. But, we must still preach the gospel; for it is the only way for a person to be reconciled to God.

Application: At the end of the day, what is the motive with which bear witness and give testimony about the gospel? We preach Christ because we KNOW HIM! We have received these

words! The Love of Christ compels us. We see this in John the Baptist's words "***he must increase, I must increase***" (John 3:30).

3. Our testimony results in belief. The entire Book of John was written so that those who read it would believe in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, and believing have eternal life. (See John 20:31). And this is what we desire. But, we also know that if we do not preach this message there will be no belief. For "faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God" (See Rom. 10:14-17). And, we have FULL assurance that God is building his kingdom through the person and work of his Son as we BEAR WITNESS. And when we go and preach and share the message of the gospel, the Holy Spirit will use our words in power to change hearts. This is why we testify. And we are given this message of reconciliation. As Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:18-19: "**All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.**"

Let me end with the words of Isaiah 55:1-11: "**Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."**"

As Christians in this world we are sent by God, and given the same gospel message as John. And, as we go, our message cannot fail.