

A Witness to the Light
John 1:19-34; 3:22-36
John Breon

"Now this was John's testimony..." (1:19).

"I have seen and I testify..." (1:34).

John the Baptist "came as a witness to testify concerning that light..." (1:7). "He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light" (v 8). His ministry of baptism was so that Jesus might be revealed to Israel (v 31). Some of John's followers refer to Jesus as "the one to whom you bore witness" (3:26).

Light is one of the themes in this Gospel. Jesus is the light and John the Baptist was a witness to the light.

Our grandson, Charlie, spent a couple of nights with us last week. One of his favorite things is for lights to be turned on. First thing in the morning, he went through the house, pointing at lights and saying, "On?" When we turned on a light, he would say, "Onnn!"

John the Baptist didn't turn on the light, but he pointed to the Light. He allowed the light to be seen. He was a witness to the light.

What was John's testimony, what was his witness to Jesus?

Some religious leaders come and try to pigeonhole or categorize John, demanding, "Who are you?" That's a question all of us are asked all the time. In our culture, it comes through commercial advertising: "Let us tell you who we want you to be." Marketers find out who we are so they can make us who they want us to be (Ellsworth Kalas). I like this line from the poet e. e. cummings: "To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting"

(http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/e__e__cummings/quotes).

John is outside their boundaries. He knows who he is and he knows who he is not. He's not the Christ or Messiah, he's not Elijah, and he's not the Prophet. By saying who he is not, John indirectly says who Jesus is. Then

John says that he is the voice calling for people to prepare for the Lord's coming.

As great a gift as it is to know who we are, a greater gift is knowing who Jesus is. Really, we know ourselves truly when we know God.

John first identifies Jesus in a negative or roundabout way. Now he speaks positively about who Jesus is. He announces, "*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (1:29). This would have startled and surprised the people listening to John. There are several things this could have meant, that he might be referring to. In apocalyptic literature, there's the image of a lamb coming in judgment to destroy evil. There's the Passover Lamb in Exodus. Some might understand the Lamb in terms of the Lord's Servant in Isaiah who gives his life. Abraham told his son Isaac that God would provide a lamb for sacrifice. In nearly all of these references we see sacrificial love. Jesus gives himself for us in a way that not only helps ease the guilt of our sin, but that actually takes away our sins.

John also says about Jesus, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me" (1:30). *Jesus Is the One Who Was Before*. This speaks of Jesus' pre-existence. The Word of God, God the Son existed in eternity before becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist probably didn't understand all that this meant, but he did understand that Jesus existed before him.

Jesus always comes before us. He's our Creator. He always is. He's always there.

Because of this, John the Baptist says Jesus is greater than he is and "he must become greater; I must become less," or, "he must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30). Jesus is above all and John's attitude is that of a model disciple of Jesus who prepares people to receive Jesus, who points to Jesus, and exalts Jesus while putting himself in the background.

If we can remember who we are and who Jesus is, we can lose some of our foolish pride. Our witness, our testimony—all that we do as a church and as followers of Jesus—is not to draw attention to ourselves, but to direct attention to Jesus.

Jesus Is the One Who Has and Who Gives the Holy Spirit. Jesus is uniquely anointed by God's Spirit. This sets him apart as the Ruler from David's line (Is 11:12) and the Servant of the Lord (Is 42:1; 61:1).

The amazing thing is that Jesus shares that anointing with us. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He immerses us in the life and presence of God. He fills us with the glory and power and grace of God.

And there's no limit to God's gift of the Holy Spirit. God gives abundantly, without calculation. The Holy Spirit rests or remains on Jesus. This isn't a temporary anointing, but a permanent sign that Jesus is the one who reveals God. The unlimited gift of the Spirit in Jesus relates to the full revelation of God we find in Jesus. Later, Jesus will speak of this gift as rivers of living water flowing through those who believe (7:38).

God's Spirit at work in our lives this way is part of the inheritance of God's children. It's ours by virtue of our faith in Jesus. And it's essential for Christian life. We'll see more of this as we go through the Fourth Gospel. Right now, remember that Jesus is the One who has the Spirit without measure and who gives the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives.

Finally, John testifies that *Jesus Is the Son of God—God's Chosen One.* This continues the theme of Jesus as the Ruler coming from David's line and the Servant whom God has chosen. As Son of God, Jesus is the image of God. He fully represents the Father. Later he will tell his disciples, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father" (14:9). As God's Servant and because he has the Spirit without measure, Jesus speaks God's words. He gives words of eternal life. Later he'll declare, "The words I speak are Spirit and they are life" (6:63).

So John the Baptist's witness is that Jesus is the Messiah, he's *a* prophet, and he's *the* Prophet like Moses that God would send. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the One who was before us all. Jesus has the Holy Spirit without measure and he's the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is God's Son and Chosen One.

As you think about John the Baptist's witness, think about your testimony. How do you witness to the Light? Here are a few examples of people witnessing to Jesus who is the Light.

An African woman who was blind had a Bible in French—and she didn't speak French. But she got a friend to highlight John 3:16 in that Bible. She'd wait outside a school and as the students came out, full of new knowledge and anxious to demonstrate it, she'd ask them to read to her from her French Bible. Then she'd simply ask if she could tell them what it meant to her. Many of those students were converted and some went into ministry (from an ORU Chapel sermon by Jim Buskirk in the early 80s).

E. Stanley Jones was speaking at a women's group. After his talk, a woman said to him, "If I had what you have, my life wouldn't be such a mess." Her marriage was about to break up. She and her husband were holding it together till after Christmas for their children's sake. Jones talked to her about how she could ask God for help. Later she wrote to him and said she didn't know how to pray, so she wrote a letter to God. In language she understood, she wrote, "God, life has dealt me a bad hand and I don't know which card to lead. If you'll show me which card to lead, I'll lead it." Her life was changed. Her marriage held together and thrived. Later she began traveling, leading seminars on marriage and family. "She was a mess, but she became a message" (*Conversion* 89-90).

Here's a more recent example. Gabe Lyons, in his book *The Next Christians*, tells about Renee, a nineteen year old who was entangled in drug addiction and was a victim of sexual abuse. She was sharing a house in a rough part of town with friends who provided all the wrong influences. One night, high on pot, painkillers, alcohol, and cocaine, in a moment of desperation she reached out to another group of friends—Christians she once knew who always treated her differently. She was frantic for help, for hope, for a new start.

Jamie Tworkowski was part of that group of Christians. He was single, clean-cut, artistic. He didn't pretend to have all the answers to life's toughest questions, but he was convinced that following Jesus is about restoring the broken.

On the bottom floor of Renee's home, Jamie and friends listened, prayed, and pleaded with her to get help. She finally committed to going to rehab the next morning, but asked for just one more night. They struggled to leave, but honored her request.

After the group of friends left, Renee felt intense desperation. Tears running down her face, she ran for an old razor blade. After fifty previous cuttings, one more scar wouldn't matter. Locked in a bathroom, she carved an obscenity across her left forearm, making clear to everyone what she believed about herself.

The next morning, Jamie and friends picked up Renee with her bandaged and bloodied arm. They took her to a small clinic to get her help, but the nurse realized how deep Renee's addiction was and knew the clinic didn't have the resources to handle her detox. She was turned away as "too great a risk."

That night, Jamie and friends became Renee's immediate rehabilitation plan. Their mission of love deepened and they showed her basic human compassion, acceptance, and grace. In Jamie's words, "For the next five days, she was ours to love. We became her hospital, and the possibility of healing filled our living room with life. It was unspoken and there were only a few of us, but we would be her church, the body of Christ coming alive to meet her needs, to write love on her arms."

They loved Renee and saw her through that time and helped her come back from the ledge. "...Jamie is a textbook *restorer*. He sees brokenness and seeks out ways to address it. He spots darkness and shows up with whatever light he can bring." (71-73)

What about us? What does our witness say about Jesus? What does our worship, our ministry, our service, Christian education, everything we do as a church say about Jesus? Are we witnesses to the Light?

Have we experienced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away sin? As the One who existed before us, the greater One who meets our needs? As the One who has the Holy Spirit without limit and who plunges us into the life of God's Spirit? As God's Son and Servant who shows us the Father and speaks God's words to us?

Is our church the kind of place where people can experience Jesus this way? Do we want it to be? Are we willing to go out from the church building to where people need Jesus and be witnesses and servants?

John 1:6-7 says, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light...." Can someone

say about you, "There was a person sent from God whose name was _____. He or she spoke a good word for Jesus, showed love and compassion, witnessed to the Light"?

Would you be willing to pray for God to show you someone that you can be that kind of witness to? And when God shows you that person, would you be willing to pray for them, love them, invite them, share the good news with them? Can we announce to the world that the Light is on? Jesus, the Light of the World, is present and available to change lives, to transform the world.

Maybe this call from Isaiah is a good invitation to us and for us to share: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you" (60:1).