

The Essentials of a Good Witness - John 1:19-34 - Jn03

Today we get to meet the man who came to bear witness of the Light that had come into the world. John 1:6-7 introduced John the Baptist to us.

John 1:6-7

“⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

⁷ This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.”

John the Baptist was a very special prophet. In fact, in Luke 7:28, Jesus Himself says of John the Baptist:

Luke 7:28

“For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.”

Not Moses, not Elijah, not Isaiah – not any of the prophets. My prayer is that you get a glimpse of how great John the Baptist was, but more so, that you’d see very clearly the essentials of his “witness.”

John the Baptist had remarkable parents – Zechariah and Elizabeth, both Levites. His Dad was a Priest who ministered in temple. His Mom was a Nazirite woman. So John the Baptist was raised immersed in both the priestly ordinances of the temple and with the vows of a Nazirite. He never cut his hair, never drank wine, and never touched a dead body. He lived a pure and uncontaminated life, devoted to God.

In Luke chapter 1, where we learn about his parents, it also says John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his Mother’s womb. And there were a number of miracles attached to his birth, including Gabriel announcing John’s birth to Zechariah, similar to Gabriel’s announcement to Mary of Christ’s birth. We also see in Luke chapter 1 the events of the first time John and Jesus were in the same room together.

Luke 1:39-44

“³⁹ Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,

⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

⁴³ But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”

So clearly, John the Baptist was greatly anointed by God from his mother’s womb, and He spent his entire life, from conception to death, wholly devoted to God and as a great prophet. He wore camel hair and ate wild honey and locust, and he spent all his time either with God or in God’s

service. And when we are finally introduced to him here in John, He is the “Supreme Witness” of all time because God had prepared him for one thing only, and that was “to make straight the way of the Lord.” And so, if we want to learn the essentials of a good witness, then John the Baptist should be a perfect example. But before we get to our text today, we need to get just one more background scripture. In Mathew’s gospel, it says, speaking of John the Baptist:

Matthew 3:5

“Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him.”

This is a large geographical region, and people from all these areas were going out to hear John the Baptist and to be baptized unto repentance. So God was bringing “great fruit” to John the Baptist’s ministry. Lots of people were responding to his call of repentance and baptism, and he had plenty of reason to be very confident in himself and his ministry.

John 1:19

“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?””

The religious leaders sent a delegation to find out why so many people were responding to John the Baptist, and they asked him, “Who are you?” What a great opportunity for John the Baptist to “expound” a bit on just “who” he was. But notice his response in verse 20.

John 1:20

“He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.””

I love that John the Baptist ignores the opportunity to talk about himself, and instead, answers the real underlying question. He says, “I am not the Christ.” And so, they continue asking him questions about himself.

John 1:21

“And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.””

Where did these questions come from? In Malachi 4:5, we find the very last prophecy of the Old Testament.

Malachi 4:5

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

They were kind of close asking if he was Elijah because Jesus Himself said John the Baptist was “the same as” or “of the same spirit” as Elijah. But here, John the Baptist simply says “I am not” the actual Elijah. It may very well be that the actual Elijah, with Moses, shows up in Revelation 11 as one of the two witnesses that are slain and then resurrected in the tribulation.

Also, in Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses said:

Deuteronomy 18:15

“...God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear”

The Jewish leaders are trying to find out what “High and Mighty” title John the Baptist would take for himself, and so they say, “Are you Elijah?” “NOPE.” “Are you the Prophet?” “NOPE.” Finally, in John 1:22, they say, “Tell us something.”

John 1:22

“Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’”

I love this! When John the Baptist finally speaks, He simply quotes scripture to answer their question.

John 1:23

“He said: ‘I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ’ as the prophet Isaiah said.’”

In other words, “You should know me. Isaiah told you about me” (Isaiah 40:3). But there’s something more applicable to our daily witness here. John the Baptist says, “I am a voice.” The Greek word for “voice” is *phone*, and it literally means *a sound* or *a tone*. So the man that Jesus says is the greatest prophet that ever lived describes himself simply as “a tone,” pointing the way to the Lord.

So if you ever wanted a lesson in the essentials of “Witnessing,” here it is, delivered from the Supreme Witness himself. “I am only a voice, pointing the way to the Savior. LISTEN TO ME, BUT DON’T LOOK AT ME!” Now, as it often is today, the delegation of interviewers misses John’s point and goes right back to questioning him about himself.

John 1:24-25

“²⁴ Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.

²⁵ And they asked him, saying, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’”

Again, John the Baptist has a perfect opportunity to go into a lengthy explanation of why he’s doing what he’s doing. He’s got a lifetime of real qualifications and a very huge following. He could write a “bestseller” on the ‘why’s’ of his great ministry. But instead, He shows us exactly what we should do if ever someone asks about “us.” He points them right back to Jesus. And as long as they keep asking him questions, he’s going to keep pointing them right back to Jesus.

John 1:26-27

“²⁶ John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.

²⁷ It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.’”

Again, He uses their question as a “springboard” to point them to Christ. “I am a voice (*tone*), simply pointing to the Lord” (verse 23).

In John 1:28, we have the geographical reference.

John 1:28

“These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.”

Now we move from the “Messenger” to the “Message.” Chronologically, this next event most likely occurred after Christ returned from the Temptation in the wilderness. This is not the account of the baptism of Christ. John had baptized Jesus earlier. Then Jesus was led away by the Spirit to the temptation. Then the Pharisees sent this delegation to John, and now, Jesus is returning from the wilderness, and there’s a very good chance the Pharisee delegation was still there when this occurred.

This time, when John sees Christ, He proclaims the essence of the gospel in a single sentence.

John 1:29

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Now this is a very powerful statement to you and me, but to the Jewish people, it was overwhelmingly significant. In Genesis 22, 1900 years earlier, God tells Abraham to take his only son Isaac to Mt. Moriah and offer him there as a sacrifice. Mt. Moriah is a ridge in Jerusalem and exact locations are unknown, but this ridge called Moriah is where both Solomon’s Temple would be built, and it’s on this same ridge where the place of the Skull, or Golgotha, is located, where Jesus became our sacrificial Lamb. As they walked up Mt. Moriah, Isaac says to his father Abraham in Genesis 22:7, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” And Abraham answered Isaac in verse 8:

Genesis 22:8

“...My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.”

And every God-fearing Jew knew this Old Testament scripture, and knew it was a prophecy. Not only that, but in Exodus 12, God instituted the “Passover” by having each family first care for a spotless lamb as part of their family, and then sacrifice that lamb to use its blood to cover over the home so the Angel of Death would spare the family from the judgment of God. And not only that, but Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 53:6-7 of the Savior, and he said:

Isaiah 53:6-7

“⁶ ...And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”

And not only that, but “Twice Every Day” a lamb was sacrificed in the temple to cover over the sins of Israel. So to say that the Jews understood the concept of an Innocent Lamb being slain to cover their sins is a major understatement. Now, with centuries of preparation by Prophecy, by Example, and by Training, John the Baptist hits them with a single statement that ties 2,000 years of history and tradition to one man.

John 1:29

“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

In our last study, we said the definition for the word “behold” is *to view attentively for a purpose*, or *to gaze at in admiration*. “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” This statement has got to be our central and eternal message. Abraham and Isaiah prophesied of this Lamb. The Passover and the Temple offerings taught the principles of this Lamb. John the Baptist identified this Lamb. And Revelation chapter 5 reveals who this Lamb really is.

Revelation 5:8-13

“⁸ Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,

¹² saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

¹³ And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!””

It is dangerously easy to move away from this statement as the absolute central focus of our witness to the world. It’s true there are many benefits that spring from our salvation, but each and every one of them is a “by-product” of this one statement – “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” This is the essential of the essentials of a good witness for Christ.

In the remainder of our text, John the Baptist continues his focus on the essentials of a good witness.

John 1:30-31

“³⁰ This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’

³¹ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.””

There is a very powerful application here. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance, and he says here he knew the Savior would be revealed to Israel, “therefore” he came with a baptism of repentance. Why? Because repentance is an inescapable part of salvation. Repentance and Salvation are so joined together that we use signs of repentance as evidence that salvation has occurred. Why? Because believing that Jesus existed isn’t enough. Even believing He is who the Bible says He is isn’t enough. The demons believe that. Jesus must become your personal Savior and Lord. You must personally receive His free gift of Salvation, and it must be coupled with a repentant heart. Grace without repentance is “Cheap Grace,” and I’ve never seen a Disciple made with cheap grace.

Now John the Baptist finishes his Essentials of a Good Witness with his personal testimony, which is how we should finish our witness.

John 1:32-34

³² And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.

³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’

³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

John’s describing the events that occurred previously when Jesus came to be baptized. God had told John the Baptist how he would know who the Messiah was, and when John saw it happen, there was no doubt in his mind. Jesus of Nazareth, whom John might well have known growing up, was the Son of God come to bring the light of life into a dark world.

So we’ve seen the Essentials of a Good Witness put forth here by John the Baptist.

First, although Jesus would say that John the Baptist was the greatest prophet ever born, John knew that he was nothing, and Christ was everything. As the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians:

2Corinthians 4:5

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.”

Second, because of this, his only interest was to be a “voice” or tone to point people to the only One that matters – “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Third, He knew the best way to prepare people to see the Savior was to show them their need for repentance.

So maybe today God is calling you to be a witness, and maybe today God is witnessing to you. And if He is witnessing to you, please respond to Him. “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”