

God Sent a Witness

John 1:6–8

Before we move a little further in the Gospel's prologue, I want us to be mindful of our natural spiritual condition apart from Christ. In **Matthew 6**, Jesus says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matthew 6:22–23) If your eye is bad, says Jesus, how great is your darkness. If he does not cause our eye to see, to be healthy, it is bad. The human eye is spiritually blind to the light and beauty of Christ. However brilliant nature's sun, skin may feel its heat, but a blind eye cannot perceive its brilliance. Speaking of our hopeless condition apart from Jesus, he teaches that man's eye cannot perceive or understand the radiant glory and goodness of God. When he makes your eye whole and it opens to see Christ, the world, your values, your loves are radically transformed so that what you loved and pursued in darkness now becomes what you hate and turn away from in the light. As the hymn writer put it, "the things of earth become strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace." If the values and pursuits of a dark world remain in the center of your heart and affections, it is you that the Savior is speaking of when he says, "how great is your darkness." The natural bent of the human heart is that it does not perceive how dire its own blindness any more than a sightless man perceives the danger of walking over the edge of a skyscraper while thinking it's just a single step down. But the diagnosis of the One who made you is, "how great is your darkness." There is no reason for you to stay like this. There is life-changing, soul-saving Good News for those still in the dark: In Christ is life, and his life is light. Please do this: Ask God to open your eyes and make them whole to see and believe him.

Now to the Gospel of John. We have already seen that the mega-themes of life and light are prominent throughout the Gospel. The battle between light and darkness is front-loaded as he writes, and it will play out all the way to the cross to an open tomb. He puts a spoiler in the opening verses so there's no question about the outcome. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The darkness has not and cannot overcome light. As we now look at the ministry of John the Baptist, we see the kindness of God in pointing people to the only hope they have of seeing, the only hope they have of perceiving light, the only hope they have of escaping darkness and knowing truth—that is Christ. And that is the ministry of John the Baptist. Let's read.

John 1:1–8 — ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was

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not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

PRAY

I. Why does John the Apostle turn our attention to John the Baptist after this soaring, soul-stirring, revelatory paragraph about the eternally existent Son of God through whom everything was created, and in whom is life and light? Then, “There was a man— a man sent from God.” Then returns to the Baptist two more times in an interrupted way in the first chapter. Well, John is sent by God on mission. Whatever God sends out in his power and authority accomplishes what He intends. (We saw that in the Call to Worship: He sends out his word and it accomplishes the purpose for which he sent it.) God sends John, and immediately introduces him here for at least 2 reasons, and they both flow from the purpose of the Gospel. You remember he tells us precisely at the end of **Ch 20** why he wrote this Gospel account: 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. He writes to stir up belief in Christ, that he is the Son of God, and we see that in our text in **v 7** — that all might believe.

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that point to, and validate Christ when he appears. Matthew is particularly careful about connecting what he writes to prophetic fulfillment, so there you frequently see the phrase, “This was to fulfill what the prophet wrote.” There is an unusual prophecy that the apostle highlights to stir up belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and it concerns parallel prophecies in Malachi 4 and Isaiah 40. *First*, Malachi 4:

Malachi 4:5–6 — “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Second, **Isaiah 40:1–5** — Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough

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places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

The opening verses of Mark’s Gospel account tell us the prophecy is fulfilled in John the Baptist. Jesus says it directly in Luke 7:26 ff — ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ ²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.

So the first reason John is introduced so early is that God said he would send him in the spirit and prophetic office of Elijah to tell people that the Messiah was now entering the world. Knowing that this is a prophetic requirement, introducing the herald prophet John, the last of the OT prophets, certainly kindles faith in Jesus to be ignited. We will study more about John’s specific ministry in the weeks ahead, but for now we see God kept his word about announcing the Messiah, and John the Baptist is the agent he sent to fulfill the promise.

The next reason the Baptist is inserted in the flow of Messiah’s incarnation develops in v 7. The apostle makes it very clear that the Baptist is not the light, but he is only bearing witness of the light.

As John’s gospel references Genesis 1:1 in revealing and defining the Creator and his creation, he continues on to identify the only source of light as Genesis 1:2 does: The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. There was no light in creation apart from God as the source of light speaking his word to overcome the darkness. John is likewise clear that there is no source of light, except God himself – not prophets like Isaiah or Elijah, not kings, not smart enlightened people. Not even the Baptist prophet — among those born of women, there is none greater. God has used prophets to point and reveal, but they are always reflections and not the effulgence. Jesus is not a light source; He is the singular light source — just as in v 1, the Word was not a God; the Word was God.

We need to know at the front end of the Gospel the magnitude of Christ’s coming and the end it brings about for all other idols that promise life. All searches for light, and truth, and religious efforts,

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and glory, and fulfillment are to be directed to the eternal Christ, alone. John, the final OT prophet, points us to, witnesses about him that we may abandon hope and trust in anyone or anything else. Consider the preposition through him at the end of v 7 — then see it in

v 3 — All things are made through Christ. (Not some demi-god or any other created thing)

v 7 — All might believe through Christ. (Believing in your religious efforts or morality is worthless)

v 10 — The whole world was made through him.

v 17 — Grace and truth came through him. (Jesus is not a peer among gods, or perhaps one option. Grace and truth come through him)

So prophetic fulfillment and the futility of all other sources of hope except Christ are critically important for us to grasp in the Baptist's role.

Verse concludes this short paragraph by stating plainly: John was not the light. He came to bear witness about the light. Nothing that we have, and nothing that we need is sourced from John. It is all through Christ. So the Baptist fulfills his assignment by pointing us to the only source, the only provider, the only hope. There is meaning, purpose, supply, grace, truth, and salvation nowhere else than in Christ, who is the light. This is John's purpose.

Consider how John stands on the foundation that Isaiah laid in Isaiah 55 — 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. ²Why 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. ³Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.

It's as though John says, "Here he is! The one through whom your soul may live! I can't give you what satisfies, and you'd be silly to seek it in me. But he is the Lamb of God who will take away your deadly sin and flood your soul with life and light in its place. The only fix for our world, our politics, our sexuality, our disorientation to truth, our ignorance, our immorality, our soul-hunger — the only fix, the only hope is through Christ, and he is coming into the world.

v 8 starts with the pronoun "he." He was not the light. Do you know what you could swap out with that pronoun, what you could plug it into its place and still maintain the integrity of that phrase? Anything. Anything other than Christ. John says he was not the light. Your bank account is not the light. Your

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family is not the light. Your children, your parents. Your job, your spouse, your intellect, education, or capacity to grasp things. Your notions about God as you imagine him to be. Your idols. Your vacation. The next promotion or raise. Your political party. Your social standing or social circle. Your reputation. Fame and recognition. The applause and approval of men. Plug anything into the beginning of the phrase and it remains true. Whatever it is is not the light. Only Jesus is the light.

Three days ago I stood at the head of a casket of a 22-year-old man who went looking for light and life and peace and fentanyl-laced drugs. I looked into the faces of a few dozen young adults who seemed pretty much to be pursuing the same path of escape into drugs. Darkness was profound. I don't know when the last time I felt such a heaviness of spiritual lostness and spiritual warfare. One of the songs his friends selected to be played at the Service had a repeating chorus that started with "I'm a lost cause. It's hopeless." The graveside gave me an opportunity to correct that lie. I spoke of the bad news of being dead in sins and trespasses and noted that we were seeing and living the worst of the bad news in that cemetery with a yawning grave waiting to receive the body. But as I worked my way through Ephesians 2, I pointed them to the light of Christ and bore witness that God, being rich and mercy makes dead hearts live again and blind eyes be opened through Jesus Christ.

It was John's assignment to point to him, and so it is our assignment in the same path as the Baptist prophet to bear witness about the light of Christ. May we be as obedient as John was, always pointing away from ourselves even as we call others to look away from themselves to Christ — for we are no more the source of life and light than John. Jesus must increase; we must decrease.

PRAY