

**A Witness for the Word**  
**John 1:19-34**

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*All Christians are called to be martyrs.* Now, before you start looking for another church, let me explain that statement. The word martyr comes from the Greek term *martus* which means “a witness.” The basic meaning of the term martyr is someone who bears witness. As Christians testified about Jesus, there were some who persecuted the witness, sometimes to the point of death. So, the more familiar use of the term martyr came to refer to a person who was killed because of their witness for Jesus Christ. Stephen is a good example. In Acts 22:20, Paul says that “as the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving...” Stephen died for his witness about Jesus Christ.

So, back to my statement, all Christians are called to be martyrs. I don’t mean that all Christians will be required to die for their faith, though some will be. I mean that all Christians are to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. All Christians are to bear testimony about the salvation that they have experienced in Jesus Christ.

This idea of witness is an important feature in the first chapter of John. Six times in vv. 6-34 John uses the words witness or testimony to speak about the role of John the Baptist.

- vv. 6-8 – John was not the light but was sent to bear witness of the light.
- v. 15 – John bore witness about him (Jesus).
- v. 19 – the testimony of John when asked about his role.
- v. 32 – John bore witness.
- v. 34 – I have seen and have borne witness.

Throughout the month of December, we have been considering the meaning of Christmas through the lens of John’s gospel. The eternal Word who was God became flesh and revealed the glory of God in an unprecedented and unrepeatable way. That is the staggering reality of Christmas. One of the implications of this reality is that it must be told. It must be broadcast to others. This means that the role of the Christian is one of witness. As we consider the witness of John the Baptist, we discover that...

*Believers must exercise the privilege of testifying about Jesus Christ with personal humility and theological clarity.*

**I. Focus on Jesus with personal humility (vv. 19-28).**

A. John is interviewed by the Jewish authorities.

1. John’s preaching and baptizing ministry had caused a stir.
2. Jewish authorities sent some officials to ask him what he was doing. From the narrative we understand that they asked three specific questions.
  - a. Are you the Messiah?
  - b. Are you Elijah? (the one who was expected by many to physically return to earth before the Messiah)
  - c. Are you the prophet? (probably a reference to Dt. 18:15 about a prophet who was expected before the coming kingdom)

B. John responds by humbly focusing on Jesus.

1. The officials ask him to give an answer. Who are you? What do you say about yourself?
2. John responds by putting the focus on Jesus.
  - a. I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness “prepare the way for the Lord” like Isaiah prophesied (Isa. 40:3).
  - b. I baptize with water but there is one among you (already here) that you do not know.
    - 1) He is the one that I am preparing for (he comes after me).
    - 2) I am not worthy to untie his sandal strap (something the lowest slave would do).
3. For more commentary on John’s humble witness, look at John 3:25-30.
  - a. John’s popularity is fading, Jesus’s is growing.
  - b. John’s response?
    - 1) Jesus’s authority comes from heaven.
    - 2) I am the friend of the bridegroom, not the bridegroom. My role is to rejoice when the bridegroom comes. My whole ministry is to point to him. (not about the best man, but the groom)
    - 3) He must increase, I must decrease.

Nicholas Zinzendorf was a leader among the Moravians, an evangelical missionary group in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote, *The missionary must seek nothing for himself, no seat of honor or hope of fame. Like the cabhorse in London, each of you must wear blinkers that blind you to every danger and to every snare and conceit. You must be content to suffer, to die, and to be forgotten.*”

How we need a resurgence of this kind of humility in the church! Jesus is not someone you use to build your brand, increase your followers, get more likes, build your platform, or extend your influence. Too many people are talking a lot about Jesus but not to promote Jesus. They promote themselves. It is a devilish reversal of John’s motto in which they must increase rather than Jesus.

You cannot be a faithful witness for Jesus Christ and make your image or reputation or success the main thing. The function of a witness is to focus on Jesus Christ.

So how do you know when you are beginning to drift into the spotlight and Christ is fading into the background? The example of John gives us some insight.

- John 1:19-23 - When you are asked about your identity, is it more about you or about Jesus? When people ask, “who are you? what do you say about yourself?” does Jesus figure into your answer?
- John 3:25-30 - When someone complains to you because they feel like you are not getting the credit you deserve, how do you respond? Do you make it all about you or do you consider how your response serves to make much of Jesus?

Even the instrument of personal testimony can be misused. John Stott once stated, *So much so-called "testimony" today is really autobiography and even sometimes thinly disguised self-*

*advertisement, that we need to regain a proper biblical perspective. All true testimony is testimony to Jesus Christ, as he stands on trial before the world.*

The first thing we learn from John's example is that we must focus on Jesus Christ with personal humility. Now, notice the second emphasis of our passage in vv. 29-34.

## **II. Focus on Jesus with theological clarity (vv. 29-34).**

A. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away our sin.

1. Lamb of God points to a sacrifice.

- a. It could be a reference to the Passover lamb. Passover was the sacrifice in Egypt in which the blood of the lamb marked the houses of God's people and they were spared from death and freed from Egypt. John presents Jesus as the Passover sacrifice in 19:31-36.
- b. It could be a reference to the Lamb in Isaiah 53:7 who suffers for the sins of others to bring them forgiveness and peace.
- c. It could be a general reference to the sacrificial system in which lambs were often sacrificed to atone for sin and restore fellowship between the sinner and God.

2. Jesus is the sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world.

- a. Through the death of Jesus, sin is taken away. Sin is removed through the death of the sacrifice.
- b. Note the scope of this removal of sin. It is the world. Edward Klink put it this way, *The sacrificial act has narrowed from many lambs to one Lamb, and yet its benefits have broadened from one nation to the whole world.*

3. John makes it clear that the Lamb of God is Jesus.

- a. He is the same one John has been saying would come after him.
- b. John's purpose was for him to be revealed to Israel.

As John 1 unfolds, the message becomes clearer. The eternal Word became flesh, tabernacled among us, and we saw his glory. He is also the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. He came into this world to die as a sacrifice for sinners so that we could be restored to fellowship with God.

This is important theological clarity. It is not enough to talk about Jesus coming into the world. We must talk about why he came. He came as the Lamb of God. If we want our sins to be taken away, they can only be removed through the sacrifice of Jesus. The apostolic proclamation about Jesus makes this crystal clear.

- Christ gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:2).
- We are redeemed through the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Peter 1:19).
- Christ bore our sins in his own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).
- Christ's blood, not that of animals, was offered by Christ himself on our behalf (Heb. 9:14).
- Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Cor. 5:7).

B. Jesus is the Son of God who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit.

1. John saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove. This took place at Jesus's baptism. There was also the voice of the Father from heaven that said, "This is my beloved Son."
2. The Spirit remained on Jesus. This indicates the empowering of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. This indicated to John that Jesus was the One who would baptize his people with the Spirit.
  - a. The OT prophesied that the Messiah would be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. (Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1).
  - b. Jesus is the Messiah who will pour out the Spirit on God's people as foretold by Ezek. 36:25-26.
  - c. So, Jesus is superior to John and his baptism is superior to John's baptism.
3. Jesus is the One who gives the Spirit to people transforming them and making them part of his kingdom.

Again, we have theological clarity. Jesus is the Messiah who gives the Holy Spirit to his people. The power to renew and transform people – the Holy Spirit – is given by the Son of God to those who believe in him. New life is impossible apart from Jesus who gives the Spirit. Again, the apostles are clear on this.

- Acts 2:38 – Peter told his audience to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Eph. 1:13 – when you believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.
- 2 Cor. 1:22 – God has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee of our salvation.

The need for theological clarity about Jesus has never been greater. Kevin DeYoung addressed this in a piece he wrote a few years ago. He writes:

The question is doubly crucial in our day, because [no one is as popular in the U.S. as Jesus]—and not every Jesus is the real Jesus. ...

There's the Republican Jesus—who is against tax increases and activist judges, for family values and owning firearms.

There's Democrat Jesus—who is against Wall Street and Wal-Mart, for reducing our carbon footprint and printing money.

There's Therapist Jesus—who helps us cope with life's problems, heals our past, tells us how valuable we are and not to be so hard on ourselves.

There's Starbucks Jesus—who drinks fair trade coffee, loves spiritual conversations, drives a hybrid, and goes to film festivals.

There's Open-minded Jesus—who loves everyone all the time no matter what (except for people who are not as open-minded as you).

There's Touchdown Jesus—who helps athletes run faster and jump higher than non-Christians and determines the outcomes of Super Bowls.

There's Martyr Jesus—a good man who died a cruel death so we can feel sorry for him.

There's Gentle Jesus—who was meek and mild, with high cheek bones, flowing hair, and walks around barefoot, wearing a sash (while looking very German).

There's Hippie Jesus—who teaches everyone to give peace a chance, imagines a world without religion, and helps us remember that "all you need is love."

There's Yuppie Jesus—who encourages us to reach our full potential, reach for the stars, and buy a boat.

There's Spirituality Jesus—who hates religion, churches, pastors, priests, and doctrine, and would rather have people out in nature, finding "the god within" while listening to ambiguously spiritual music.

There's Platitudes Jesus—good for Christmas specials, greeting cards, and bad sermons, inspiring people to believe in themselves.

There's Revolutionary Jesus—who teaches us to rebel against the status quo, stick it to the man, and blame things on "the system."

There's Guru Jesus—a wise, inspirational teacher who believes in you and helps you find your center.

There's Boyfriend Jesus—who wraps his arms around us as we sing about his intoxicating love in our secret place.

There's Good Example Jesus—who shows you how to help people, change the planet, and become a better you.

And then there's Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. Not just another prophet. Not just another Rabbi. Not just another wonder-worker. He was the one they had been waiting for: the Son of David and Abraham's chosen seed; the one to deliver us from captivity; the goal of the Mosaic law; Yahweh in the flesh; the one to establish God's reign and rule; the one to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, freedom to the prisoners and proclaim Good News to the poor; the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

## **Conclusion**

I want you to consider how two big questions are asked and answered in our passage today. The first question is who are you? The second is who is Jesus? John answers both questions. This is the key to being a faithful witness. We must answer these questions correctly.

**Who are you?** I am a servant of Jesus Christ. He is great, I am not. He must increase, I must decrease. The purpose of my life is to help you know him and recognize him and follow him.

**Who is Jesus?** Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away our sins by his sacrifice on the cross. His death in our place removes our sin, cleanses our guilt, and restores us to fellowship with God. Sins cannot be forgiven apart from Jesus.

Jesus is the Son of God who gives us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us new life and makes us part of God's kingdom. The Holy Spirit changes us from the inside out and guarantees that God will complete everything he has planned for our salvation. Jesus is the only one who can give us the Holy Spirit.

All Christians are called to be martyrs – witnesses for Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh.

To be a witness you must first know Jesus Christ. Have you trusted in the Lamb of God, the Son of God to forgive your sins and give you the Holy Spirit? If not, why not today?

To be a witness you must commit to answer the two questions faithfully – who are you? who is Jesus?

Let's commit ourselves anew to making sure we focus on Jesus with personal humility and theological clarity.