



**Being A Witness For Jesus  
John the Baptist  
John 1:19 - 34**

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As we discussed last time, the book of John is designed, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to prove to the reader that Jesus Christ is God. This means there must be eyewitness testimony. John does not waste any time getting into eyewitness testimony. He calls the first witness to the stand.

We have, starting in verse 19, the eyewitness testimony of John the Baptist.

We are going to learn from John the Baptist, that being a witness for Jesus means making the discussion all about Him.

The Jewish religious leadership will try and make it all about John multiple times, but he will teach us how to redirect the message back to Jesus. That is who he is here to talk about, that is his message, and no matter what the questions are, he will continually take it back to what it is his key message is all about – Jesus.

John 1:19–34

“This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites to him from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” And he confessed and did not deny; and this is what he confessed: “I am not the Christ.” And so they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Tell us, so that we may give an answer to those



who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am THE VOICE OF ONE CALLING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE THE WAY OF THE LORD STRAIGHT,' as Isaiah the prophet said." And the messengers had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, of whom I am not worthy even to untie the strap of His sandal." These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing people. The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He in behalf of whom I said, 'After me is coming a Man who has proved to be my superior, because He existed before me.' And I did not recognize Him, but so that He would be revealed to Israel, I came baptizing in water." And John testified, saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." (NASB 2020)

What is going on here? Why is John the Baptist being questioned by the religious hierarchy of the Jewish establishment?

It is specifically identified as a point in time, apparently Messianic anticipation was high since the current situation with Rome was less than tolerable for the nation. They hated the situation they were in, some knew the timeline from the book of Daniel, they had put two and two together and here this guy shows up acting a whole lot like an Old Testament prophet. Could it be?

And then there was that event that took place out here over a month ago. We have heard some reports about the sky being pulled open and a voice coming from it.

Let's send an exploratory committee to go and ask, so they Jewish religious establishment did.

Those who go to see him are part of the power base of Israel. This is not a simple fact-finding excursion; this is all about control. The pharisees are in power and they want to preserve that, so they want to keep tabs on what is going on in Israel in order to prevent subversive activity and preserve their base of power. The very fact that emissaries from the Jerusalem authorities show up on John's doorstep serves as a show of power and as a signal that the authorities will not tolerate in the long run a ministry that runs counter to their own purposes. (Köstenberger 2004, 59)

This also introduces to us, right at the very beginning of the book, the group that will oppose the Word. Jesus will identify just who they really are in John 8:44, but for now, not being sure of the mission, but concerned about politics, they are asking questions.

John 8:44

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies." (NASB 2020)

Ideological conflict between a wilderness prophet on one hand and Jerusalem temple functionaries and teachers on the other is probable should the latter have grown concerned enough about the former's reputation to investigate him with questions; and if John drew the crowds that both Josephus and the Synoptics should indicate that he did, the Sadducean aristocracy would want to investigate him before the Romans did. (Keener 2012, 433)

By the way, this is no different than what happens today. The recent revival that broke out at several universities was exciting news. Seeing the Holy Spirit move in power is always exciting.

But there are those who doubted and began their own investigations into what "really" took place.



It seems that sin sniffing is nothing new and has roots going back at least 2000 years.

The Pharisees got right down to it and asked John "Who are you." This was not a question about parentage and what town he was from, this is more to mission and more importantly, religious persuasion.

Who exactly are you?

After all, the Jewish leadership consisted of Levites, Sadducees, Pharisees, and then that weird conservative group out in the desert, like John, the Essenes.

John, as a witness, immediately points to Jesus. He makes it clear he is not the Messiah. Step one about being a witness for Jesus, make it clear it is not about you but is about Jesus.

I have learned over the years that a common tactic many unbelievers use is to try and get us emotionally involved. The enemy wants to distract away from Jesus and make it all about us. This is called a redirect. It too has been around a long time. It isn't, it never was, it is about Jesus.

I always find it interesting that folks love to talk with you about anything, until the "J" word comes up. It is a reminder to us of the spiritual warfare we are in the middle of.

With that question answered, the next one is, are you Elijah? Malachi 4:5-6 relates that Elijah was to appear before the day of the Lord and since the most Jews believed Messiah was coming to take over right now, this would be a logical question to ask. John also clarified that for them.

There was one more person they were looking for, the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18:15 by Moses. That was simple confusion on their part because that prophet would later be attested to be Jesus (Acts 3:19-26). Did you notice the short curt answers from John? He was here to point to Jesus, not talk about himself.

I have caught myself rolling my eyes when those I am talking to keep wanting to change the topic. A common smokescreen is, "You know the Bible is full of errors." Or it could be something else intended to draw you off the major point, Jesus and what He has done in your life.

The religious leadership all know that the people consider John to be a Prophet. Based on the prophetic timeline, which they know, and current events, there must be a reason he is here. Some of the older members still remember that group of men with a serious armed escort from Parthia coming through 30 or so years ago looking for the King and they were not talking about Herod.

Just like the prophets before him, John was dealing with a group of unbelieving believers who were looking for reasons not to listen to him. So once again they asked who he was.

John's response is startling. He will clearly show he is not only a prophet, but also, he is here because God called him, and this is all about Messiah.

John 1:23

"He said, 'I am THE VOICE OF ONE CALLING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE THE WAY OF THE LORD STRAIGHT,' as Isaiah the prophet said.'" (NASB 2020)

John clearly and specifically identifies himself as the anonymous voice heard in the divine council in Isaiah 40:3.

Isaiah 40:3

"A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (ESV)



The context of Isaiah 40 is the announcement of a new beginning for Israel. This is a new beginning already announced with the coming of the Word, Jesus Christ.

Jesus has come to begin a new Exodus, to begin the Kingdom and when the announcement is made to make way for the King, John the Baptist claims he is the one making that statement.

By claiming to be that voice, John is making a statement to the religious leaders that they would fully understand. Yes, he is a Prophet and is here, now, because he was called by YAHWEH. "To a Jew familiar with the Old Testament, the pattern would not be lost. As had been the case at the time of Isaiah, Yahweh's council had met in regard to the fate of an apostate Israel. Isaiah had been sent to a spiritually blind and deaf nation. The calling of John the Baptist tells the reader that Yahweh's divine council is in session again, only this time the aim is to launch the kingdom of God with the second Yahweh, now incarnate, as its point man." (Heiser 2015, 273)

Understanding that answer, the Pharisaic representatives avoid dealing with him over it and instead change the subject. This is not the conversation that they wanted to have. If this continues, they will be challenged about where they stand on this topic and since they are to listen, to "fact find," that is not a fact they want to deal with.

This is no different than what you and I encounter when we speak out for Jesus and begin to tell our story of what he has done for us, how He has changed our life. Your listener, at some point, will begin to get nervous, they will avert looking you in the eye as they are beginning to realize that if Jesus did that for you, they are going to have to make a decision and that is not where they want to be going at that moment. The enemy is working overtime at that exact moment to get them to stop the conversation and leave...now.

C. S. Lewis has written a great book about the schemes of the devil. It is couched as a series of letters between a senior devil and a junior devil who has allowed his charge to go off and get saved. The Screwtape Letters.

In his encouragement to his charge to keep someone from Christ he tells him "to give him a grand general idea that he knows it all and that everything he happens to have picked up in casual talk and reading is 'the results of modern investigation'. Do remember you are there to fuddle him." (Lewis 2009, 4)

Yes, that is one of the schemes of the devil, to befuddle and confuse. The Holy Spirit will take what we say, and He will always use it to drill the point home. But that does not stop redirects and misleading questions to try and get one off the topic of Jesus.

The representatives from Jerusalem change the narrative away from Jesus and away from Messiah talk. They ask why John is baptizing since the Old Testament texts are silent on this. The question is asked and by the manner in which they ask, they are at the same time they are also challenging his authority to even be baptizing.

This is similar to someone telling me when I was in High School that having a New Testament with me at school was illegal.

John can use this question though and redirect back to Jesus.

By the way the logical question is not the one they asked. They should be asking, "Then who and where is the King you are preparing the road for." Or "That must be the Messiah, is He here." "How do we see and meet Him?" Those were not questions they wanted to ask. It would imply a willingness to follow Him. Instead, they were concerned over John treating Jews like they are gentiles who are coming into the Jewish faith. They missed out on what was happening and got all wrapped up in baptism. About that.



“The baptism of John stood midway between the Jewish baptism of proselytes and Christian baptism. It differed from the former because it was more than a symbol of ceremonial purification; it was a baptism of repentance, a confession of sin and of the need of moral cleansing, and was a symbol of forgiveness and of moral purity. All men, Jews who were ceremonially pure and Gentiles who were not, had to submit to this baptism of repentance and pardon. It differed from the latter because it only symbolized preparation to receive the salvation, the kingdom of God which John heralded, and did not imply entrance into that kingdom itself. Those who had received it, as well as those who had not, had to enter the Christian community by the door of Christian baptism (Acts 19:3–6).” (Dau 1979-1988, 418)

When we do baptism here at Calvary, we are not doing it like the Jews did or even like John the Baptist did. We are doing it per the commands of Jesus Christ. We are baptized after we have placed our trust in the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

For us, it is a declaration to the world that we now identify with and follow Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for us and then rose from the dead.

The act of being baptized has us symbolically being buried, the old man put to death, and then being resurrected, raised to new life in Jesus Christ. It does not save us, but it tells the world and the unseen realm that we are under new management.

We have chosen sides. We stand with Jesus. We have switched our loyalties from Satan to the Lord. When we are baptized, we are declaring to the unseen realm that we have chosen to be on the Lord's side in the ongoing cosmic battle taking place. Each baptism is a reminder to the fallen angels that they have already lost the war and are doomed. Jesus has won it all and you stand in His victory clothed in His armor ready to take move forward in His power and strength. After all, the Holy Spirit has been living in you from the moment you came to Christ.

John answered their question about baptism, because it went to the heart of his ministry, pointing to Jesus.

John 1:26–27

“John answered them, saying, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, of whom I am not worthy even to untie the strap of His sandal.”” (NASB 2020)

John answers as a witness, he once again points to Jesus. His answer is a redirect, he really doesn't answer the question. He says I am following someone else's direction whom you do not know. In other words, they are not believers.

This one that they do not know, John does. And he tells them that he is not even worthy to be His slave. John has identified that he is a prophet. That means that per the spiritual vocational food chain, he was at the top of the vocational ladder. He is saying to the professionals, who understand what he is saying, that he is not worthy to even untie His sandals.

There's a cultural practice of significance that's at work here. In Judaism, Jews were not supposed to become slaves, but should they become slaves, [there] was one thing it was said they should never do, and that's to unstrap the strap of the sandal in order to wash their master's feet. It was viewed as beneath the dignity of a Jew to do something like this. John is saying it's not beneath his dignity to do this for the one who is to come; He is so great that he's not even worthy to do this most demeaning of things, from a Jewish point of view. (Block 2018)

They believe they are taking the high road as the religious experts, but John is in effect telling them they are part of the world and do indeed need the baptism of repentance. (Osborne 2018, 43)



The conversation ends with us learning this took place on the eastern shore of the Jordan River in Bethany. This is not to be confused with the Bethany we see later which is a suburb of Jerusalem.

How did John do? He kept on point and did not allow the questions to distract him from his primary goal which was to talk about and be a witness for Jesus. He would always go back to the message he wanted to communicate...Jesus.

The enemy tried to distract and get John to talk about himself instead. That didn't work as John kept redirecting back to Jesus. The lesson I take from that is simple, when we talk to others about Him, stick with the message. It really is all about Him. What did He do for you is hard to refute since it is your story, your witness of what Jesus has done for you and in you.

When John drilled in with what Jesus was doing in and through him, the enemy tried to change the subject with what he thought would be a rabbit trail...baptism. John used that to also talk about Jesus.

For us, as we go about our day-to-day activities in the world, when the Lord gives us one of those God moments and we get to share our story, these are all things we need to remember. And the beautiful thing is this, the Holy Spirit will indeed keep us on point.

So, in our text we move to the very next day. The delegation has left. Jesus shows up.

John 1:29–34

“The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He in behalf of whom I said, ‘After me is coming a Man who has proved to be my superior, because He existed before me.’ And I did not recognize Him, but so that He would be revealed to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” And John testified, saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.” (NASB 2020)

Jesus comes to where John is working. Based on the context in this section of scripture, this is not to be baptized, but appears to be after the forty days of testing in the wilderness. Jesus has already passed through the water.

As He approaches John, John introduces Him. But the delegation is gone, who is John introducing Jesus too? It is in the present tense, so he has to be talking to someone. Is John talking to his disciples? Possibly.

Let's consider the timing and the announcement made here.

Jesus has been in the wilderness for forty days, just like the nation was in the wilderness for forty years.

We know that the nation was unsuccessful in remaining obedient while in the wilderness as they failed time after time. They were supposed to reflect YAHWEH to the nations, and they failed. Jesus did not fail. He is returning in victory. He will succeed where Israel did not. He will cross over the Jordan in power.

We also know, based on his own testimony, that John the Baptist is the voice calling out in Isaiah 40:3. What we have here is a dramatic revisitation of YAHWEH's call in Isaiah 40 to the divine council to send someone to announce the appearance of Messiah.

John the Baptist is presenting, announcing, Jesus Christ, the Messiah to Israel and to the world. He is indeed the voice calling out in Isaiah 40:3. Jesus is the prophet referenced by Moses being looked for by



the delegation. He is entering into the ministry He is here for and in power preparing to cross the Jordan and start. He is coming from the wilderness, from the desert and about to go into the land in order to remove the usurper, Satan. This is a picture we first see in the book of Joshua.

Now it is not the army of Israel being led by Joshua, now it is the incarnate Word who is entering the land.

Now take another look at how Jesus is referenced by John. John introduces Him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” We read this on this side of the cross and accept that John is talking about the sacrifice that Jesus Christ would make on the cross for all of us.

John says that Jesus is “the,” not just “a” lamb (ἄμνος, amnos) of God: he is the lamb par excellence. And he is God’s lamb, that is, the lamb especially provided by God for the sins of the world. (Köstenberger 2004, 66)

John’s statement points us to an event still three years in the future, when Jesus becomes our lamb and His blood covers us and saves us just as the Passover lambs blood saved the first born of Israel in Egypt. But the blood had to be applied to the door for that to take place. In faith, an action took place trusting in the blood to save them.

When we come to Christ, we too are applying the blood, trusting Him and by faith trusting that the blood will save us.

This also points to an event in the life of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham, in obedience was preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac and as they walked together, Isaac asked a question.

Genesis 22:7–8

“Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father?” “What is it, my son?” he replied. “Here is the fire and the wood,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” “God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son,” Abraham replied. The two of them continued on together.” (NET 2nd ed.)

John the Baptist’s reference indicates prophecy is in the process of being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one Lamb of God. “The genitive is a true possessive: the Lamb which belongs to God, his Lamb, i.e., which he ordained as a sacrifice for himself.” (Lenski 1961, 126)

When Jesus Died on the cross, He died for the sin of the world. This is not a get out of jail free card for everyone no matter what, but it is if we do a simple thing...believe.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.” (NASB 2020)

John’s statement is also a declaration of war restating the declaration in Genesis 3. Jesus is here to take the land, not just Israel, but the entire planet. He is here to remove the usurper from the land and take back what had been taken in Genesis 3.

The coming of the incarnate Yahweh was the beginning of reclaiming those nations as well. But the gods of darkness were not going to surrender their domains without a fight—and the battle began so quickly that Jesus barely had time to dry off. (Heiser 2015, 276)

Jesus Christ, the Word, the incarnate God of the Universe, the Messiah, is on the earth. This changes everything forever. He is here on a much broader rescue mission than the Jews ever had considered.

After announcing to all who Jesus is, John provides additional context for us.



John is older than Jesus in terms of physical earthly age, but he tells us in verse 30, Jesus is superior because He existed before him. Makes sense, Jesus is God, we talked about that last time.

John 1:31–34

“And I did not recognize Him, but so that He would be revealed to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” And John testified, saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.” (NASB 2020)

John knew who Jesus was prior to Jesus coming to be baptized, but when the Holy Spirit descended onto Him as a dove, he knew Jesus was the Son of God.

This is a confession coming from John. Yes, John was looking for the Jews to repent of their sin, but “John makes clear that his baptizing with water had as its primary purpose the revealing to Israel of the one who was previously unknown (cf. also 1:26). The one whom the narrative depicts as the Revealer must himself first be revealed, and it is John’s baptismal activity that is the initial catalyst for this revelation to God’s own people, Israel.” (Lincoln 2005, 113)

The one that John saw the dove descend and remain, He is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. John concludes by once again telling us he has seen, and he is also providing testimony that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God.

The scene we have just had presented to us is clear. Jesus has returned from His 40 days in the wilderness fully empowered by the Holy Spirit, ready to cross the Jordan and begin His ministry.

John has taught us what it means to be a witness for Jesus Christ, and he also gave a few pointers along the way about staying on message when others want to draw you away.

Now begins the ministry of Jesus Christ. He will be putting together a group of people that He will pour His life into teaching them how to live. They will witness someone who truly lives each and every day by faith.

We have talked about the witness of John and how he kept it about Jesus. Let me ask a question, do you know Jesus? Not stuff about Jesus but know Him personally. He came, as we have talked about, to provide a way out for our sin. Here is the thing, He has also made accessing that easier than any of us could have ever imagined.

Romans 3:21–24

“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” (NLT)

Romans 10:9–13

“If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.” Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.” (NLT)





### ABC's of Salvation

- A. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, tell Him that.
- B. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and that He rose from the dead.
- C. Confess that Jesus is Lord. Tell someone about what you have done.

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