

Sermon- The First Witness and the Light that transformed the World

Scripture: John 1:6-13

October 18, 2015

Today we are continuing our journey through the Gospel of John. Actually we are still in the prologue which is the introduction of all the key themes that are going to be unfolding before us through the entire book. We started with looking at Jesus as the one who existed before even time existed. We then looked at Jesus as the one who created all things. Today we are going to touch upon two more themes that are important to the entire Gospel of John. The theme of being a witness to Christ and Christ as the Light of the world. So let's get right in.

Now the opening verses of the passage that we are working with today go like this.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

As you know John the Baptist is someone who fascinates me a lot. Some of you may remember that I preached on John the Baptist for my very first sermon here. Still I think John the Baptist is important enough that I am going to talk about him again this

morning in this introduction to the gospel. And then as soon as the prologue is done we will encounter him again in verse 18 in the main body of John.

Now in the prologue we have just this much about John, that he was a witness to the light and not the light itself. Some scholars have argued that there were a group of people even at the time of the writing of John which we said was around 90 AD who were still part of the John the Baptist group and not followers of Jesus. That is why John makes such a sharp statement contrasting him with Jesus. There is after all no one else in the Bible who is specifically mentioned as not being the light in the same way that Jesus was. We don't have too much hard evidence of the existence of John the Baptist followers creating their own sect but we know this, that if such a sect existed, John the Baptist cannot be blamed for their existence in any way, because John was very clear in his teachings and sadly a small group of his followers had completely missed the point of his teaching and deserve to be pitied. I think the Baptists' left over followers too teach us an important lesson about the receiver's role in communication misunderstandings and how we perceive information that we want to hear and don't want to hear.

Moving back to the Baptist, he was very clear and open about his role as a witness to the Messiah. It is interesting that in the gospel of John there are 10 instances where the Baptist is portrayed as a witness to the Messiah. One of the commentaries says that it seems like the Gospel writer would have preferred to refer to the Baptist as John the Witness instead. Now even though in the prologue the Baptist is described as being not

the light, he is described as being a witness to the light. Even though this seems a bit sharp to some ears, being described as a witness to the Light by the Word of God is a huge complement that Scripture bestows for the very first time. What an honor! Now whenever you see the Bible complementing an individual, you have to pay close attention to what they did so you too can receive the same complement from God. So what did John the Baptist do that was so significant? If you look at verse 7 you get the answer. John the Baptist, had a one point agenda, to point the Jewish people to who the True Light of the world. Why did he want to point people to Christ? Now our translation puts it this way, so that I quote, “everyone might believe because of his testimony”. End quote. Both pointing to the Messiah and believing in the Messiah need further explanation so let us tackle it one at a time.

We will begin with the Baptist’s first desire of pointing people to the Messiah. To understand the challenge involved in the Baptist’s task we have to understand the larger context presented in the prologue itself in verses 9-11. Let me paraphrase this section for you. The True Light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world, in fact he was in the world, the very world that he made, and yet the world did not recognize him. You see the problem was that if the world was as it was just when Christ had made it, the world would have recognized Him. Remember back in Genesis when God breathed life into Adam and Adam woke up, he did recognize God. In fact God and Adam and Eve had many conversations and Adam received a lot of instructions from God and they had

a great relationship. Then things get difficult. You see up until that point it was only the voice of God that had fallen on Adam's ears. There was no competing voices for him to discern though and make decisions on life's big questions. When you look at the spiritual history of the world, you will find that as soon as Adam and Eve were exposed to a competing voice their ability to recognize what was truly good collapsed and they went with the suggestion of the serpent over the voice of God. Now since that point, human beings have been following the voice of the serpent on every occasion sometimes out of ignorance and sometimes willfully. So when you look at the world as a whole you have the sad fact that every human being has sinned and humanity has lost its capacity to recognize what is truly good. Now the problem is, if human beings don't have the capacity to recognize what is good, how is anybody going to recognize the Messiah and put their trust in him? There is one thing though about the connected of humankind. Even in the fallen state, human beings place great weight on the testimony of other human beings to make big decisions. Of course if no human being were to recognize Jesus, Jesus' mission would not be possible. So here God steps in and without overriding human free will, God gives the Baptist from the time he was in his mother's womb to have that special capacity to recognize the Messiah. Now the Baptist not only had the capacity to recognize the Messiah, but God also gave him special credibility within their culture. You see the Baptist was well known and respected in his culture as the son of a Jewish priest as well as being Jesus' first cousin. Not just that the Baptist

was not in a slightest bit tainted by worldliness as he lived in the wilderness eating food from the wilderness. No one could accuse him of being influenced by any lobby or sinful world system. You see John the Baptist had the capacity, the credibility and completely clean hands to point people to the True Light of the world.

So yes, the Baptists qualification and lifestyle did make him an amazing witness of the Messiah. But just because you are drafted number one in the NFL does not automatically mean you become a great player. Potential does not automatically translate to results. And the Bible is full of examples of people with great potential who blew it big time, King Saul, Samson and even King Solomon took great potential and blew it. So how did the Baptist do with all his potential? Turns out he aced his job. The Baptist turned out to be a perfect witness. And he was perfect because he resisted the temptation to be more than just a witness. You have heard the phrase “less is more”. The Baptist was the classic example of a person who was more by being less. You see there were many people during that time who claimed to be something great and went around acquiring followers. The Baptist resisted that temptation to hang on to his followers and as soon as Jesus came on the scene he actually directed his followers to Jesus. If you bring this into our world I think John the Baptist is the most relevant prophet for American Christianity, because the American culture is one of self-promotion. It is very easy for that culture of self-promotion to creep into the church as well. It is not easy but every single Christ follower should be mindful that our primary

task is to testify about Jesus Christ and point people to him. On the other hand some of you may be saying, great I am shy anyway so I will just stay behind the scenes because that is where I am most comfortable. To those of you who are on the shy side let me just say this. It is not as simple as that. Yes there is much work to be done behind the scenes. However Jesus in Matt 5:14 said this about his followers, “You are the Light of the world”. And the light that you have should never be covered or hidden. If you always hid yourself you may also be hiding the Light of Christ in you. On the other hand, other people who function in a more upfront role like me need to be very cautious that even as the light of Christ shines visibly in the world, we need to take great pains to point out that, this light is not our light but the light of Christ who is the only True Light of the world. In other words, what we really need to do is shine bright like the moon and then tell everybody about the sun. There are times when people will come up and praise you for the outstanding job you did in your home or school or workplace. Yes, the light is shining through you. This is a good thing. But make sure to not claim this as your own light but as the light from Christ reflecting of you. You and I may never have our head cut-off for being a Christ follower. But all of us have been given the privilege of being a witness. And you can ace your witness by being nothing more than or even less than a witness to Jesus Christ.

There is one more thing that John cared about besides directing people to Christ. The Baptist wanted people, as verse 7 in the NLT translation says “believe” in Jesus. Now this

idea of “believing” in Jesus is so central to this Gospel and also greatly misunderstood, so let’s work through this carefully. When we hear the word believe in English, we think it means we have to accept a certain statement about who Jesus is. In theological schools scholars like to use the technical term Christology. Christology is a specific branch of theology devoted to studying the person and work of Christ. So the concern of any good theological school naturally is that their students get the Christology right. Knowing what you believe is no doubt very important. But if you remember in my introduction to this sermon series I mentioned that it is important to know that one of the purposes of the Gospel of John was to correct the belief system of the Gnostics. And if you remember what we said about the Gnostics, the Gnostics were people who taught that you would be saved simply by having the right kind of knowledge. There are major world religions even today that also teach the same thing. So when the Gospel of John uses the word “believe” you know that he definitely does is not presenting a Gnostic idea about some special secret head knowledge. In fact when you look at the Greek you find a very interesting pattern in the way to know and to believe is used. In verse 6 or 7 depending on the translation when you see the word “believe”, the evangelist could have very easily used the noun form, specifying “belief”. Instead, the writer takes great pains to use the verb form, “believing”. Later in verse 10, after Jesus came into the world, when it says the world did not know him, again instead of using the noun for knowledge (gnosis) he uses the verb form (ginoskein) which is knowing. In verse 12

which read, “All who received him and believed in his name”, again instead of using the noun form “belief or faith”, the writer uses the verb form (pistueuein) “believing”. What does this mean? Well, what it means is that the evangelist here is taking great pains to point out that salvation comes not by the perfection of one’s belief, because even the demons believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Salvation comes by knowing Jesus Christ on a personal level. It is the relationship with Christ that is the key and by pointing people to Jesus what the Baptist really wanted was that people get to personally know the Savior of the world.

And when you have a personal relationship with Christ what does that make you? To answer that lets look at the last two verses of our passage. Let me read this section for you. ESV | [Jn 1:12](#) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13](#) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

So here is the Good News, to those who responded to the True Light of the world, they were given a new relationship with God, as his children. The Verse goes on to say, this unique status is very different from anything you know in the human world. Because verse 13 says “who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Firstly, “who were born, not of blood” is referring to blood lines or pedigree. Your relationship with Jesus has got nothing to do with your family connections or ancestry.

Secondly, it says, “nor of the will of the flesh”. In other words the new birth cannot be counted as a human achievement. Finally it says, “nor of the will of man”. This expression referring to human will or human determination or will power. So this relationship with God is not because of a special human bloodline, or human will power or to be considered a human achievement. In other words, this relationship with Jesus is nothing we can get by human effort and when we get it it is nothing we can take credit for. The Good News is God wants to have a relationship with you and Christ has already done all the work to make it happen. Now you simply have to be willing to let Christ come into your life and take the driver seat. If you have never asked Christ into your life, now is the chance to do it. If you already have a relationship with Christ, go be a witness like the first witness, John the Baptist. Nothing more, nothing less. Let us prayer.