

The Testimony of John the Baptizer

(John 1:19-34)

INTRODUCTION:

1. Today we want to return to our study of the Gospel of John, and particularly to John 1 and the testimony of John the baptizer addressed in 1:19-34.
2. This is not the first mention of John in this chapter:
 - A. 1:6-8 – “There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.”
 - B. 1:15 – “John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”
 - C. Both ideas are addressed again in John’s **testimony** that we are considering today, shedding light on the Christ who came to us in the flesh.
3. Today I want to examine John the baptizer’s testimony that focused on his...
 - A. **Position** in relationship to the Christ.
 - B. **Profession** in service to the Christ
 - C. **Proclamation** of the Christ.

BODY:

- **I. John’s position—who he was not (1:19-21):**
 - A. Sometimes one can more easily explain what is true by first eliminating what is false, which is what this first interaction does.
 - B. John emphatically confessed he was not the **Christ** (1:19-20 – “This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ And he **confessed** and **did not deny**, but **confessed**, “**I am not the Christ.**”).
 1. These men asked, “Who are you?” due likely to the public commotion John was causing and the concern it brought the leaders of the Jews. They wanted to know who he *thought* he was and what were his *intentions*.
 2. John emphatically confessed “I am not the Christ.”
 - a. John rightly answered this question in relationship to his **role in God’s plan**.
 - i. That is the proper way to consider our identity here in this world—who we are in relationship to God’s plan.
 - ii. Do we think of ourselves enough in this light, defining our existence by our relationship to God and His saving plan?
 - iii. We need to identify ourselves this way and ask if we living up to that identity?
 - b. John’s confession that he was not the Christ **took Himself out of the spotlight, which belonged to Christ alone**.
 - i. John knew he was not the Savior, not even of himself, and refused to allow his actions to be interpreted in any way that would rob Christ of His rightful glory!
 - ii. And that needs to be the goal of every person here—to live so that our lives put Christ in the spotlight and never rob Him of His rightful glory!
 3. John response puzzled the priests and Levites, seeing they likely expected him to claim to be the Christ, even as others had done.
 - C. John position in God’s plan was not that of **Elijah** (1:21a – “They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.”).
 1. This was asked because...
 - a. Malachi had promised Elijah would come (Mal. 4:5 – “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.”).
 - b. Israel was looking for the fulfillment of this, seeing they were looking for the Christ.

2. John replied that He was not *Elijah*.
 - a. John's answer is puzzling because **Jesus said John was Elijah** (Matt. 11:13-14 – “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, **John himself is Elijah who was to come.**”).
 - b. There are two reasons why John may have answered this way.
 - i. First, he may not have known at this point that he was the fulfillment of the prophecy, which would show his work was not *contrived* to fulfill that prophecy.
 - ii. Second, he could have been responding to the common idea of the day that **Elijah himself would be revived** and walk the earth again, which he knew to be false. For, John was said by the angel at his birth to come “**in the spirit and power of Elijah**” (Lk. 1:17), not as Elijah himself.

- D. John's position was not *the Prophet* (1:21b – “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”).
 1. This question referred to the prophet Moses promised would come (Deut. 18:15, 18-19 – “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him...¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.”).
 2. John rejected this position because that prophecy was fulfilled by the Christ, as Peter stated in Acts 3:19-23.
 3. Thus, John rejected these designations, **refusing to take upon himself the glory not rightly due him**, and which was **owed only to the Anointed One of God**.

- E. **Lesson:** Our position in God's plan is like John's! For...

- 1. We are not the Christ. We cannot save yourself.
 - a. That position is held solely by Jesus.
 - b. We are saved by faith in Him and what He accomplished in the flesh for our salvation!
- 2. We have no glory to claim as your own, but live to glorify God through Christ.
- 3. We must assure that your lives never detract from Christ's glory!

- **II. John's profession, or work (1:22-28):**

- A. Because John gave no answer they expected, the messengers pressed him to explain himself (1:22 – “Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”).
 1. Those sent to question him were becoming desperate because they were not getting the answers they wanted.
 2. Sometimes it is okay not to give people the answers they want depending on the situation (i.e., “Do you believe you have to be baptized to go to heaven?”). Better to ask for a study.
- B. John replied that his **profession** was that of a **voice** (1:23 – “He said, “I am **a voice** of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”).
 1. John spoke of himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 40:3-5 – “**A voice** is calling, “Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our **God**. ⁴ “Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; ⁵ **Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed**, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”).
 2. John **identified** himself *by how he related to God's plan*, having the profession of being a **voice** sent to *prepare the way for the Lord*.
 - a. His **profession** was not to glorify himself, but to prepare the way for the glory of the Lord to be revealed.

- b. Everything John has testified deflected glory away from himself on to the Christ.
 - 3. **Lesson:** We should ask if our **profession** is that of being a **voice** in this world preparing the way for the glory of Christ **to enter the lives of others**. Do we think about how we are to do this daily? We should!
- C. John was further questioned concerning his work (1:24-28).
 - 1. They asked specifically about his baptizing the people (1:24-25 – “Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, and said to him, “**Why then are you baptizing**, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”).
 - a. It is interesting to me that they specifically asked about his **baptizing** others.
 - i. It seems they could not imagine why John would *baptize* if he were not one of these men prophesied to hold a significant role in God’s *redemptive* plan!
 - ii. Thus, they saw great importance in the act of baptizing other—that it had significant meaning!
 - iii. Yet, amazingly, the religious world today sees little *importance* or *significance* in water baptism within God’s redemptive plan, despite the GC including it in relationship to discipleship and forgiveness of sins.
 - 2. John’s answer pointed them to Jesus’ superiority (1:26-28 – “John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, but **among you stands One whom you do not know.** ²⁷ **It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.**” ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.”).
 - a. John again **redirected the focus off himself onto the Christ**.
 - i. For though John baptized in water, the focus was Jesus—the One infinitely superior to John—the One among them whose sandals John was not worthy to unloose!
 - b. This has to be understood in our work—that salvation is not about just getting people baptized, but getting people to see the glory of Jesus and their need to bow before Him!
- D. Do you know your **profession**, your **work** in God’s plan?
 - 1. We must all...
 - a. Live good and holy lives (Mt. 5:14-16)
 - b. Worship the Lord (Heb. 10:24-25)
 - c. Forgive and comfort others as God has forgiven and comforted us (Matt. 6:14-15; 2 Cor. 1:3-4).
 - d. Make disciples by preaching the gospel to the world and baptizing those who will believe (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). Etc.!
 - 2. Yet, we must understand that our **profession**, our **work**, in all these things is the same as John’s—**to glorify God through Jesus the Christ!** (1 Pet. 2:9-10 – “But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, **so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;** ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”).
- **III. John’s proclamation (1:29-34):**
 - A. John proclaimed Jesus to be “the Lamb of God” (1:29 – “The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”).
 - 1. When John sees Jesus, he expresses his faith in God’s promises and his recognition of the place of Jesus in the divine plan as the “**Lamb** of God who takes away the sin of the world.”
 - 2. There are several lambs to which John could be referring of which Israelites were familiar.
 - a. There is the “Passover lamb” that protected Israel from the angel of death (Ex. 12:11-13) and which Paul considered Christ to be (1 Cor. 5:7).
 - b. The Lamb of the daily offering sacrificed morning and evening (Ex. 29:38-42).

- c. The Lamb of prophecy that was like a sheep led to the slaughter which the prophet Philip said was fulfilled in Christ (Isa. 53:7; Acts 8:32-35).
- d. Conquering Lamb, or the Lamb of Judgement against sinners.
 - i. Matthew's account of John the baptizer's testimony included Jesus's judgment (Matt. 3:11-12 – "...He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and **fire**.¹² His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will **thoroughly clear His threshing floor**; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will **burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**.").
 - ii. The apostle John refers to Christ as this Conquering Lamb, or Horned Lamb, some 29 times in the book of Revelation.
- e. It is possible that John the baptizer had all these ideas in mind, seeing combined they present a true picture of Jesus as God's Lamb that takes away the sin of the world, whether by *forgiveness* through His sacrificial blood, or by His *judgment*.
- 3. It is important to note that John's testimony broadens the work of the Lamb to include taking away the sins of **the world**, not just the Jews.
 - a. Even Peter and the other apostles struggled with this long after Jesus had died and ascended to heaven and had to be specifically led to this truth (Acts 10 – conversion of Cornelius).
 - b. It is something we struggle with in our daily life—that our position, profession, and proclamation concerns seeking to get the world to know the Christ and his salvation!
 - c. And, we will be far more effective in bringing others to Christ when we realize this!
- B. John proclaimed Jesus' **superiority** because of His **pre-existence** (1:30-31 – "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'³¹ I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water."").
 - 1. Though Jesus' birth and ministry came about "after" John's chronologically, John's testified that Jesus was **greater** than him because He **existed before** John.
 - a. This referred to Jesus being the *eternal God*, as was stated earlier (Jn. 1:1-3).
 - b. No human has ever existed before they were conceived. Only **God** who is responsible for all creation has pre-existed in eternity before being born into this world as a man.
 - c. John emphasized this so all would know Christ's glory!
 - 2. John did not recognize, or know Jesus, which likely refers to not knowing him as the Messiah, but had it revealed to him so **that he might make it known to Israel**.
 - a. Note that John here answers their question about his baptizing, which was that it was part of his ministry *to make known the Christ to Israel!*
 - b. Thus, there was a definite connection between knowing Christ and John's baptism, which continues to be true today (Rom. 6:3-5 – "Or do you not **know** that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ Jesus** have been baptized into His death?⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection").
- C. John proclaimed Jesus to be "**the Son of God**" (1:32-34 – "John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.³³ 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**.'³⁴ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is **the Son of God**.").

1. John again admits to not recognizing, or knowing Jesus' role in God's plan, but through the word of God came to know Jesus as the One who...
 - a. "Baptizes in the Holy Spirit," indicating He would bring about the fulfillment of the O.T. prophecies of the pouring out of the Spirit, as well as Jesus' superiority over John who "baptized in water."
 - b. Is "**the Son of God!**"
 - i. That is John's, and ours, ultimate statement of faith in both Jesus, the Father, and the plan of God to save the world.
 - ii. For, to confess this is to confess faith in **God** who sent His **Son** into the world to take upon Himself **flesh** so as to die on the cross to take away the sins of the world!
- 2. What is your proclamation to the world?
 - a. If those of the world who are around you most were asked, what would they say your proclamation in life would be?
 - b. Do they know it to be that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

CONCLUSION:

1. If we want to be disciples of Jesus, then our testimony must be like John concerning our...
 - A. **Position** as humble servants seeking to direct all true glory to Christ.
 - B. **Profession** as a *voice* preparing the way that Christ might enter the lives of the lost of this world.
 - C. **Proclamation** of our faith in Christ as God's Lamb, the eternal Son of God, sent into this world to become flesh that He might sacrifice Himself to take away the sins of the world.
2. But let's not ignore that John's testimony of Christ came amid His ministry of "baptizing in water."
 - A. Though many claim to be Christ's today without baptism, you cannot claim to have a proper **position, profession, or proclamation** of Christ without trusting Christ enough to repent of your sins and be **baptized in water** for the **forgiveness of sins** as was commanded in Acts 2:38 and addressed in Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 22:16, Col. 2:12.
 - B. Will you come to Christ today?