

The Witness

John 1:6-29

Introduction

Every young student has learned about Isaac Newton's famous contribution. If you remember, he was sitting under an apple tree one afternoon, and a ripe apple fell from one of the limbs and hit him on the head. Isaac Newton then discovered . . . aspirin! No, Isaac Newton discovered the laws of gravity.

Few know, however, that if it were not for Edmund Halley, the world might never have learned from Newton. Halley:

- challenged Newton to think through his original notions,
- corrected Newton's mathematical errors,
- coaxed the hesitant Newton to write his great work, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*,
- edited and supervised the publication of that work, and
- financed the first edition, even though Newton had more wealth.

Historians call it one of the most selfless examples in the annals of science. Newton began almost immediately to reap the rewards of prominence, while Halley received little credit. The only reason we even know about Halley is because of the comet that is named after him and appears briefly once every 76 years, and then disappears once again into the vast heavens. One biographical statement about Halley was that he did not care who got the credit, his mission in life was to simply advance the cause of science!

If a reporter from the local newspaper were to approach you for an interview and ask, "What is your mission in life?" what would you say?

There is an ever growing problem in the church today, that reveals its widening disparity with the early church. The first Christians were confused on some fronts, but one issue remained crystal clear – why God had left them on planet earth.

Tertullian, a church leader who wrote in the year 200, declared of himself and fellow believers to his Roman world,

We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you – cities, islands, fortresses, towns, marketplaces, companies, palace, senate, forum – we have left no territory uncovered except inside the temple of your gods.

Gibbon noted in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, that the most sacred duty of the new convert was to diffuse among his friends and relations the blessing which he had received.

Harnack, the church historian, used a phrase that jarred my thinking, when he said, "We cannot hesitate to believe that the great mission of Christianity was, in reality, accomplished by means of *informal missionaries*."

This phrase, "informal missionaries," was first coined by Justin, a second century church leader and defender of Christianity in Rome. He was martyred in 165 AD.

Now let us move into the this century. George Barna, in his book, *What Americans Believe*, revealed the results of a survey of people claiming to be born again believers. They were asked the question, "Do you have a responsibility to explain your religious beliefs to others who may believe differently?" Less than forty-five percent agreed that they needed to personally witness.

That reminds me of an old routine that was performed by the comedian Flip Wilson. Someone asked about his religion and he answered, "I am a Jehovah's Bystander."

"Jehovah's Bystander? Never heard of such a thing."

"Well," Flip retorted, "they asked me to be a witness, but I didn't want to get involved."

Now I could continue this line of reasoning and, I am sure, persuade us all. We could take a vote and unanimously agree that we are not witnessing to our world. What I would rather do, however, is give you an example to follow by taking you to an outdoor meeting where several thousand have gathered to listen to a man. This man was challenging the establishment and even had the world of organized religion on its ear.

John the Witness

He was known as John the Baptist, but I believe he could have just as easily been called, John the Witness. Let me show you why. Turn to John, chapter 1.

In the gospel by John the apostle, the word "witness" is related to this man more times than to any other character in the Bible, except Jesus Christ. You would think that God is trying to make a point. Well, get out your pencil and circle the seven times the word appears in this chapter.

It appears:

- Twice in verse 7a,
He came for a witness, that he might bear witness . . .
- In the last part of verse 8,
. . . that he might bear witness . . .
- In verse 15a,
John bore witness of Him . . .
- In verse 19a,
And this is the witness of John . . .
- In verse 32a,
And John bore witness saying . . .
- In verse 34,
And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

Witness, or martyr, means, "one who speaks on behalf of another".

Has it ever occurred to you that God never refers to us as His lawyers? If He had, we could have claimed a lack of ability and stayed out of the courtroom.

Instead, God has called us all witnesses. That is good news. I do not mean to insult you, but that means you and I do not have to be great thinkers or eloquent speakers – we are not attorneys, we are witnesses.

That does not mean a Christian should be satisfied with being an intellectual midget, but they do not have to take the role of an attorney, which is to argue their case; to prove their points; to try to influence others to agree with their position. Instead, they are to be a witness, who is called upon for one reason – to take the witness stand on behalf of another and to simply tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about what they have seen and heard . . . so help them God!"

Now, imagine John the Baptist standing on the witness stand in the courtroom of history – flanked by the jury of Gentile and Jewish skeptics alike. The gallery is packed with people sitting on the edge of their seats. The attorney asks the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?"

What does John have to say? What kind of witness will he be? In any courtroom drama, you do not necessarily need good lawyers, but you must have good witnesses.

Allow me to give three major exhibits, or pieces of evidence, that John the Baptist presents in this outdoor drama, to witness for the deity of Christ.

Defense Exhibit A

Jesus Christ is the Revealed Light From God

1. Defense Exhibit A is that Jesus Christ is the revealed light from God.

Look at John, chapter 1, verses 6 and 7.

There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him.

Now, note carefully the words in verse 8.

He was not the light but came that he might bear witness of the light.

An illustration of John is found in the relation of the moon to the sun. The moon:

- is a dead world in space, a massive chunk of lifeless rock that has not one spark of fire nor one glimmer of light-producing quality;
- is simply a giant reflector in the sky, which picks up the light of the sun and relays that light to the earth;
- *is not the light*;
- has a function that is only temporary, for the day is coming when that reflection is no longer needed.

In the same way, John the Baptist was not the light, but was sent to reflect the truth of the light and point to the coming of the light.

Notice, in verse 9, that John’s witness stresses that Jesus was true – the true light.

There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

The original word translated “true,” is not the word “true” in the sense of true versus false. It is the word that could be rendered “genuine,” instead of counterfeit.

Jesus Christ is the authentic light! Other seeming “lights” in the world are counterfeits.

In the nineteenth century, men followed the light of “progress”. The belief that mankind would get better and better, more and more knowledgeable, more and more sophisticated – that utopia was just around the corner.

In a different vein, yet in the same counterfeit clothing, the New Age today preaches that you can perpetually progress in enlightenment until you reach the “godhood” state that you possess within you.

Another counterfeit light is prosperity. This is the American dream that a wage hike, a third car, a summer cottage, a four day work week, a round-the-world vacation, or an independent financial state will bring contentment.

A number of years ago, right at the height of our most prosperous age, *Time* magazine spoke of ours as, “The age of anxiety without any known cure.”

Well, John informs us of the cure – that the genuine Light of God has come. So, what is the reaction on planet earth to John’s Exhibit A?

Three Reactions to Jesus as the Light

Let me give you three reactions to the knowledge that Jesus is the Light?

The Light is not recognized.

- One reaction is that the Light is not recognized.

Look at verse 10,

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him; and the world did not know Him.

Literally, the world did not recognize Him. Let us find out why.

Turn to II Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 1 through 4. This is a passage with a frightening message.

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

This passage teaches the terrifying truth that those who do not receive Jesus Christ for who He is, are unable to see Him because of the work of an underworld that is pulling the blinders over their eyes. The blinders may be labeled: intelligence, skepticism, works, religion. Whatever it may be, it is blinding them to the genuine truth of the gospel. They just cannot see!

You may be married to a blinded individual, or your child may be blinded, or your parent. All you can do, all you really have to do is pray, “Oh God, open their eyes to the truth!”

Let us go back to John’s gospel for the second reaction.

The Light is rejected

- Another reaction is that the light is rejected.

Now verse 10, of John, chapter 1, told us that Jesus came into the world. Verse 11 tells us that Jesus came to His own people – the Jewish nation.

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

The Greek word “paralambano,” is used in this verse, which means that they did not “accept Him to themselves”. He, their Messiah, was rejected.

It is the same way with this nation. When we approach Christmas, the commercials soon begin to jingle. Ladies and gentlemen, this world will always miss the real Christmas on purpose – because it does not want to be disturbed! “Leave me alone in the dark – the light hurts my eyes . . .”

By the way, on a more practical side, perhaps you have felt the pain of rejection from your friends, your family, your peers. They have, because of your relationship to Jesus Christ, begun to hold you at arm’s length. Jesus Christ knows all about that and you have actually become a partaker of His sufferings.

The Light is received

- A third reaction is that the Light is received.

Continue to verse 12.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

“How do you become a Christian?”

Well, let us start with, “How do you *not* become a Christian?”

Look at verse 13a.

Who were born not of blood . . .

You are not a Christian just because you are a living human being or because you have been born into a Christian home. As the familiar quote says, “God does not have any grandchildren.”

Continue to verse 13b.

. . . nor of the will of the flesh . . .

You are not a Christian because of the things you have accomplished or what your hands have done for God; such as, giving money, helping the poor, signing a church membership card, etc.

Continue to verse 13c.

. . . nor of the will of man . . .

You are not going to heaven just because you have decided you are, or because you have worked hard and believe you deserve it, or even just because you are convinced that God ought to let you in.

Imagine that I showed up at your door and announced that I wanted to be a member of your family. I had even changed my last name to your last name. You would probably say, “You can’t become

a member of my family just because you want to, even if you have changed your name to match my family name.”

“But wait,” I insist, “I’ve changed the name on my driver’s license. I’ll come over and paint your house and cut your grass. What do you like to eat? I’ll cook it. Do you like to fish? I’ll do anything to become a member of your family. Please!”

It does not happen that way. In order to be a member of someone’s family, you must be born or adopted into that family.

Then how do you become a member of God’s family? Look again at verse 12b.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

You become a member of God’s family the same way – you are born, or adopted, into God’s family the moment you believe in Christ as your personal Redeemer and Savior.

What does it mean to “. . . believe in His name”? In the ancient world, a name was more than just a personal designation. It was a reflection of a person’s character and attributes. In fact, people were often renamed for some noticeable character trait. The name of “Jesus” speaks of His person, His attributes, His deity, His messiahship. To believe in the name of Jesus is to trust in His person as God-man and Redeemer, which means that you recognize you are a sinner and that He alone must be your Savior.

Have you ever done that?

Defense Exhibit B

Jesus Christ is the Reliable Lesson About God

2. Defense Exhibit B is that Jesus Christ is the reliable lesson about God.

Look at verse 14.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Imagine that – God choosing a body of flesh and blood! If you were God, what kind of body would you choose? You have got your pick! What color would your eyes be? Would you choose a different nose? What about height, how tall would you like to

be? How strong would you like to be? What about complexion and the shape of your mouth and ears?

I know, if you ladies had the choice, you would look like one of the contestants in the most recent Miss America pageant. My wife watched and I stopped in to watch a little myself – the talent competition, of course, what do you think?! I am always fascinated by their repeated emphasis that one of the most important parts of the competition is talent. That is hard to believe when, of the ten semi-finalists, only one was a violinist who was extremely talented. The other nine semi-finalists either sang or danced – proving once again, to millions of viewers, that they were semi-finalists for reasons other than talent.

And, how about you men? You would look like the current popular movie star!

God could choose a human physique. What kind of man did He look like? Isaiah, chapter 53, verse 2b, tells us that,

. . . [Jesus] has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

We are all concerned with what kind of person we think God can really use. Has it ever occurred to you that the less attractive you are on the outside, the greater the possibility of people seeing the glory of God's Spirit from the inside?

What was Jesus coming to do? For one thing, He was coming to put into flesh the lesson of who God is.

Look at verse 18.

No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

The word "explained" is from the Greek word that has given us the English word "exegesis". The word "exegesis" means, "to explain, to unfold, to lead the way, to interpret."

Jesus is the exegesis of God the Father. He has not only explained who God the Father is, but He is going to lead the way to live with the Father in heaven.

Author Philip Yancey relates a modern day story that illustrates so wonderfully this truth.

One raw winter night, a farmer heard an irregular thumping sound against the kitchen storm door. He went to a window and watched as tiny, shivering sparrows, attracted

to the evident warmth inside, beat in vain against the glass.

Touched, the farmer bundled up and trudged through fresh snow to open the barn for the struggling birds. He turned on the light, tossed some hay in a corner, and sprinkled a trail of saltine crackers to direct them to the barn. But the sparrows, which had scattered in all directions when he emerged from the house, still hid in the darkness, afraid of Him. He tried various tactics: circling behind the birds to drive them toward the barn, tossing cracker crumbs in the air toward them, retreating to his house to see if they'd flutter into the barn on their own. Nothing worked. He, a huge alien creature, had terrified them; the birds could not understand that he actually desired to help.

He withdrew to his house and sadly watched the doomed sparrows through a window. As he stared, a thought hit him like lightning from a clear blue sky; if only I could become a bird - one of them - just for a moment. Then I would not frighten them so. I could show them the way to warmth and safety. At the same moment, this man had grasped the principle of the incarnation – why God had become man.

Defense Exhibit C

Jesus Christ is the Redeeming Lamb of God

3. Defense Exhibit C is that Jesus Christ is the redeeming Lamb of God.

Christ is:

- the Lamb who saves from sin, and also,
- the Lamb who saturates with the Holy Spirit.

I am going to deal with the subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in our next discussion. But notice, for now, verse 19.

And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

I love this! The religious world was in a "tizzy," wondering, "Who is this man?"

So, here comes the official designation, with starched collars and flowing robes, "the delegation" from Jerusalem. Continue to verses 20 and 21.

And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

They asked him, "Are you the Messiah?"

He could have answered, "Messiah? You think I could be?! Hey, that's quite a compliment! Well, no, I'm not, but I am one of His choicest servants."

"Are you Elijah?"

"Hey, that's close. You know, at my conception an angel from God said I would come in the spirit of Elijah. I've tried to pattern my ministry after him. We are a lot alike, you know."

The moon would never say, "Isn't my brilliance magnificent?" Nor would the moon ever say, "I don't think I'm getting the recognition I deserve, I think I'll not shine tonight."

One of the best qualifications for a witness is humility. I am convinced that a lot more Christians would serve God if God would share the credit; if God would guarantee recognition for them!

The truth is, in the text, did you notice that John's answers, far from getting longer, more exaggerated, or more descriptive of himself, actually got shorter and more cryptic.

- The first question, in verse 19b,
... **"Who are you?"**
- John's first answer, in verse 20b,
... **"I am not the Christ."**
- The second question, in verse 21a,
... **"Are you Elijah?"** ...
- John's second answer, in verse 21a,
... **"I am not."** ...
- The third question, in verse 21b,
... **"Are you the Prophet?"** ...
- John's third answer, in verse 21b,
... **"No."**

That last question is referring to the end time prophet who would speak as Moses did.

One of the greatest contributions you can make to the body of Christ is in not only discovering what you are, but in discovering what you are not!

Continue to verses 22 and 23.

They said then to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us?"

What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

John was referring to a custom that was prevalent in his day. When the emperor was to pass through a region, the people went out before He arrived and literally, prepared the road – leveling ground, putting down stone, filling in pot holes. John was saying, "Get ready! The King is coming. Is there a road being built for Him to enter the nation and enter your own life?"

And who was this King? Twice John refers to Jesus in the same way. First, look at verse 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!"

Then, skip to verse 36.

and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

"He's here! He's here!" John was crying!

But, notice also, He is a Lamb. This is a prophetic reference to the fact that Jesus had come to die as the ultimate, final, eternal sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

This is the witness of John, "Don't look at me – just listen to my witness, that –

- Jesus is the light from God;
- Jesus is the lesson explaining God;
- Jesus is the Lamb of God, come to take away the sin.

Application

Let us apply this in a couple of ways.

Being a witness does not require ability, but availability

1. Being a witness does not require ability, but availability.

Do you know why you did not live a hundred years ago? God did not need your witness then. God put you in this generation, at this time, with your distinct personality. He redeemed you, and indwells you so that you can get on the witness stand and tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.

Go back to verse 6 of John, chapter 1, and read it again, placing your name in it.

There came a man [or woman], sent from God, whose name was [fill in your name].

Being a witness does not require eloquence, but obedience

2. Being a witness does not require eloquence, but obedience.

Sometimes I am convicted by the testimony of children – sometimes my own. I have to admit, though, that one of the most embarrassing moments was when our child decided to be a witness to a neighbor.

I believe Candace was about four years of age and she could not quite say her “R’s” at that time. She was visiting a neighbor, and I am so glad they are in our church, but she asked her, because they had just started going to our church, “Where do you go to church?”

The neighbor answered, “We go to your church.”

And Candace said, “Oh. Well, do you know the ‘Loward’?”

She replied, “I sure do know the Lord.”

“Well, how do you know the ‘Loward’?”

And she gave an answer that my daughter was not completely satisfied with, so she began to chant, “You don’t know the ‘Loward,’ you don’t know the ‘Loward,’ you don’t know the . . .”

That puts a whole new meaning on friendship evangelism! “Ha, I knew you weren’t going to heaven! I just knew it!”

Fortunately, they decided to come to church anyway and stick around!

Oh that we would live with that question on our lips, “Do you know the Lord? And, if you do not, let me get up on the witness stand and tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God!”

This is your mission in life!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/3/1993 by Stephen Davey.

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