

Text: John 1:19-28

Title: "Believe that Jesus is the Christ because John the Baptist was His forerunner"

Time: 10/15/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One commentator called the Apostle John a "subtle" writer while referring to the literary genius of this Gospel (Carson, 147).

The world viewed Jesus's disciples as unlearned men, a bunch of rag-tag fishermen, and so they may have been at one time. But John had spent a lifetime of study in the service of the Lord, and that lifetime of study is reflected in the craftsmanship of his Gospel. Reading what John wrote, we marvel as the Sanhedrin once did: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

You remember how John has woven together his major themes, all of which are introduced by his Gospel's profound prologue. Other literary subtleties grace the pages of John's Gospel. Students have appreciated John's use of Jesus's claim to be the *I am*. In addition, John uses the word *sign* to refer to the miracles Jesus did, emphasizing that they were designed to reveal truth.

John artfully speaks of the passion week of our Lord as His *hour*, and John's organization of his Gospel goes through a major transition in chapter 12 when Jesus's hour finally has come (John 12:23, "And Jesus answered them, saying, 'The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified'"). Prior to this, Jesus's hour of glorification had not come (John 2:4).

So, this morning, having covered the Prologue introduction to John's Gospel last time, we now come to that section in which

John gives us reasons, in anticipation of Jesus's hour, why we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, Son of God, and so have life in His name.

And the first of these reasons to believe this about Jesus is what our text calls "the record of John" (v. 19). That word *record* is the word *witness* we saw used so often in this Gospel. It is the word from which we get our English word *martyr*. John the Apostle challenges us this morning to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and to have life in His name, by referring to the witness of John the Baptist. We must believe on Jesus as Christ, the promised Messiah, because John the Baptist was His forerunner.

This specific witnessing opportunity happens sometime after the baptism of Jesus, which goes unmentioned by this Gospel. We learn from the other Gospels that John baptized Jesus, after which the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for forty days and forty nights.

While his Lord endures that testing for John's sake and for ours, John is tested as a witness for his Lord, as we can expect to be tested. Notice with me three things about John's witness this morning, as we think about our own need to be bold witnesses for our Lord.

I. John's witness was a gospel promised long ago (vv. 19-23).

Illustration: This past week we received in horror the news reports about the Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel and the declaration of war by Israel in response. The Lord Jesus predicted the trouble that Israel has experience over many centuries. He said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). He cared about Israel's suffering, and so should we.

Their being trodden down of the Gentiles has made the Jewish people long throughout their history for a political solution brought by their promised Messiah's arrival. Edersheim described the longing of first-century Jews this way: "[The Jewish expectation of the Messiah] outlived not only the delay of long centuries, but the persecutions and scattering of the people; it continued under the disappointment of the Maccabees, the rule of a Herod, the administration of a corrupt and contemptible Priesthood, and, finally, the government of Rome as represented by a Pilate; nay, it grew in intensity almost in proportion as it seemed unlikely of realisation [sic]" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 308).

Application: It is this longing that created the interest in the ministry of John the Baptist we read about in our passage. Two parties are sent from trodden down Jerusalem to investigate his ministry. The first is a company of priests and Levites (v. 19). John the Baptist was the son of Zacharias the priest and Levite, and so John too would have been considered in the priestly Levitical line.

They ask their question, "Who art thou?" as John's fellow priests and Levites. This first group seems willing to throw their support behind the ministry of John the Baptist if he gave them the answer they were looking for. They asked, "Who are you?" hoping John was their Messiah deliverer.

Along with their longing for the coming of their Messiah, the Jews of this day believed that when the days of Messiah approached, the prophets of the Old Testament would be resurrected to help bring about Messianic deliverance for their nation. The Old Testament prophesied not only of the coming of Messiah or Christ throughout its pages, but also of the coming of Elijah in Mal. 4:5 and the coming of a prophet resembling Moses in Deut. 18:15-18. So the questions put to John inquire as to whether he is the Messiah, or if not the

Messiah, then whether he is one of the resurrected prophets of the Old Testament who would come in the last days.

John's answers are clear as God's witness – "Are you Christ?" "I am not the Christ"; Elijah? "I am not"; Moses's prophet? "No." Now we know from other passages that although John the Baptist is never called the Christ or the prophet that Moses said would come (also a reference to Christ), John is called Elijah by Jesus Himself (Matt. 11:14, 17:12, Mark 9:13, Luke 1:17 – "the spirit and power of Elijah").

He was not the Elijah the priests and Levites were asking about – the Elijah of the Old Testament literally resurrected from the dead (remember that Elijah never died), but he was the Elijah intended by the prophecy of Mal. 4:5-6, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

After all those no's, these disappointed would-be supporters ask one more time, "What sayest thou of thyself?" (v. 22). John goes to Scripture to explain that he was God's special witness. He quotes Isa. 40:3, which speaks of the forerunner who would prepare the way of the Lord of Isaiah 40 (Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament).

John fulfilled the prediction of that prophesy when he came preaching and baptizing to prepare the hearts of men for the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord of Isaiah 40. For that reason, we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Because of who Jesus is, as witnessed by John the Baptist, we must find life in His name. Do you believe? Have you been given this life? Many have rejected John's witness. What will you do now that you have it? As believers in Jesus Christ, we must ask ourselves a question like the one put to John – "What do we say of ourselves?"

Who are we? What is our mission? Why have we come? We must find our answer in Scripture just like John did.

Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Matthew 28:19-20, "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the earth."

Just like John found his mission in Isaiah 40, we can find ours in these verses and many others. We are voices in the wilderness, witnesses for Jesus, the Christ. Not only His disciples, but his disciple-makers, because He must be followed as the One to whom all authority in heaven and in earth has been given.

Do we say this about ourselves like John did? Do we agree with Scripture that our purpose is to prepare hearts for an introduction to Jesus Christ as His witnesses and disciple-makers? Illustration: I had to battle the temptation to skip offering a gospel tract at the football game last Friday night. John's witness was God's gospel blessing promised long ago for a sin-cursed world of woe, and our witness is that too.

II. John's witness was a baptism pointing to an unknown Savior (vv. 24-27a).

Application: With verse 24 the questioning of John the Baptist is taken up by a second more hostile contingent from Jerusalem. The Pharisees were not connected to the priests and Levites, nor to John therefore, and their questioning of John

reflects their lack of trust in his ministry. They came to challenge the authority of his baptism ordinance (v. 25, "Why baptizest thou then?"). For the evil false religion represented by these Pharisees, believers' baptism was a rebuke. Believers baptism has been the same ever since.

Baptism was not foreign to the Judaism of these Pharisees. It was a rite of proselytization for the Jews. When someone wanted to convert to Judaism, he would go through a baptism. But John had introduced a baptism practice that was foreign to these Jews in two ways.

First, in Jewish baptism, converts baptized themselves. No one baptized the Jewish convert. He went under the water on his own. John baptized, exercising a God-given authority not previously known to the Jews. More disconcerting for the Pharisees, John was baptizing members of Judaism, not new converts to Judaism. The gospel he preached taught that it was not enough to be a Jew. Instead, men and women needed to repent of sin and be saved out of the Judaism they knew.

Matt. 3:5-9, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, "We have Abraham to our father": for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.'" The Pharisees never thought of themselves as needing repentance, let alone as a generation of vipers. John's baptism said different.

Jews thought they were ok with God based on their connection to Abraham and their Jewish religion. John's answer in our context about why he baptized confronted these Pharisees with the truth that we must be connected to someone far

greater than Abraham (vv. 26-27a). The message of John's baptism was, "Jesus Christ stands among you, but you do not know Him."

John's baptism ministry pointed men and women to Jesus Christ so that they would know Him. Ours must do the same. This morning as we meet, Jesus has promised to stand here among us. Do you know Him? Has your baptism of repentance pointed Him out to others who do not yet know Him?

III. John's witness was Christ-exalting in a self-exalting world (vv. 27b-28).

Illustration: Lenski explains the picture John draws upon here: "When an honored guest or the master of the house himself entered, it was the task of the humblest slave in the house to unfasten the straps, remove the shoes, bathe the feet, and cleanse the shoes" (122).

Application: The passage before us is a conversation between four authorities whom the people of Israel would have thought of as religious leaders – priests, Levites, Pharisees, and John the Baptist. John is different from the other three, even from his fellow priests and Levites. What made the difference? It is what he says here – "I am not worthy to undo the shoe latchet of Jesus, because He is the Christ, the Son of God, in whose name alone we can have eternal life." None of the other religious leaders in this passage felt that way.

I was explaining to a fellow religious leader who is advocating acceptance of homosexuality in our town that Jesus believed in the authority of the Book of Leviticus, which tells us not only to love one another as ourselves, but also that homosexual acts are sinful, not loving. He responded that Jesus was a Jew of His day, so He could not expect to know to reject this teaching of Leviticus the way we morally superior people know now to reject it today. My friend has it wrong – we are

not worthy to undo Jesus's shoelace. We are unworthy to be the humblest slave of His household.

John's witness was the exaltation of Jesus in a self-exalting world. Can we say with John that we know our unworthiness? Without knowing this about ourselves, we can be like the priests and Levites and Pharisees of this passage, but we cannot be God's witnesses who exalt Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, in this self-exalting world.

Conclusion: We cannot read John's humble words without remembering the humbler actions of the One we must exalt with our witness (John 13:1-17). Jesus became the humble slave who washed His disciples' feet. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross for us. Because of who He is, and because of how unworthy we are, we must believe, and we must be bold witnesses like John – with the gospel for a sin-cursed world, a baptism that points to an unknown Savior, and an exaltation of Christ alone in this self-exalting world.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*