

The Witness to Jesus • John 1:6-8

The first five verses of the Gospel of John contain some of the loftiest language in the Bible. They communicate the incomprehensible grandeur of divine incarnation. It is really quite an amazing declaration when it says, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

Then, surprisingly, the lofty language of the incarnation is interrupted to talk about an ordinary man named John. What possible place does this man, this sinner, this mortal with an ordinary name have in the midst of a supernatural revelation about the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, Creator of the universe?

Actually, he has a great deal to do with the Gospel! Somehow in the mysterious mind of God he chose to tie the communication of his message and the introduction of his Son to us ordinary mortals. To people of ordinary birth, human frailties, common names, simple lives and sinful natures has been given the indispensable honor of introducing the Son of God!

Imagine God himself making an appearance on the stage of human history and experience and you are given the job of introducing him. You think through what you are going to say, you practice your words, you carefully select the clothes you will wear, you give special attention to your posture.

But this is no imaginary situation. It’s true! This is our situation because God calls us to be the introducers, the witnesses, to Jesus Christ. The role of John the Baptist in the first century has been passed down through the generations as a sacred trust. His role is

our role; his commission is our commission; his purpose is our purpose; his methodology is our methodology; his relationship is our relationship. Therefore, let’s carefully analyze his role in order to better fulfill ours.

We begin by looking at the commission of John the Baptist in verse 6: *“There came a man . . . his name was John.”* This man named John was a different person from the one who wrote the book, served as Jesus’ disciple and lived longer than any of the apostles. This John became known as “John the Baptizer.” He was a cousin to Jesus.

What is most amazing is that God chose a human agent to prepare the way and give witness to the public ministry of his Son. We would expect angels from heaven, stars in the sky and voices from the clouds—certainly some kind of supernatural phenomena. But instead, God chose the simple witness of a simple man.

Many people are still looking for God’s self-introduction into their lives to come through supernatural lights and sounds. But, God still chooses and still uses human instruments. God has chosen to introduce himself to our coworkers, neighbors and friends, not through the voices of archangels, but through the simple human agency of you and me.

Note well that John was no self-appointed spokesman. He was sent by God. God had prepared John for more than a lifetime—dating back to his conception, birth, growing up, experiences, thinking and everything else about him. It was no accident that John was who he was and where he was. He was sent by God who had an infinite stake in this Gospel business and planned John as part of the presentation of the incarnation.

John knew he was sent by God. That’s why John was able to remain humble even when the crowds

praised him. That’s how he stayed humble when his followers wanted to elevate him above Jesus. That’s how he fearlessly faced imprisonment and death without compromise. If you know you are

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called by God you can do what you have to do in a way that would otherwise be impossible.

You and I are equally called by God to introduce and present Jesus Christ. Do you think that it is merely by chance that you are who you are, that you live where you live, that you work where you work? It's all God's doing. We have been sent by God just like John!

John the Baptist was like an ambassador presenting his credentials. Clearly he was responsible to do an important job and clearly he was acting on the authority of the one he represented.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 we learn that we, too, are ambassadors for Jesus Christ. You and I are commissioned and sent by God to introduce our world to Jesus Christ.

According to John 1:7, the ultimate purpose of John the Baptist was to make it possible that all might believe through Jesus Christ. In a sense, John accomplished that goal. He started the ball rolling. We can all trace our introduction to Jesus Christ back to John the Baptist. He began a chain that has stretched through the centuries to our generation.

John's purpose was not to be rich or famous or powerful. His purpose was to minister to his own generation in the way that God had appointed. That proclaimed purpose is inadequate, though, if it does not become a practiced purpose. John did what he was sent to do. He practiced the purpose of God. What a man! He knew what he was supposed to do and he did it. All the decisions and activities of his life revolved around what God had called him to do.

We need to make a hard evaluation at this point. God has called us to the same purpose to which he called John. That purpose is to enable men and women to believe through Jesus Christ. Does your life revolve around that purpose? Is that central to your thought, key to your strategy, evident in your talk and accomplished by your life? After all, what a tragedy to be an ambassador of God with a clearly proclaimed purpose which we have never practiced!

The scourge of American summers used to be the fear of polio. Mothers dreaded the thought of the telltale symptoms that could later become permanent paralysis. Then, in the early 1950s, a

man named Jonas Salk announced that he had developed a vaccine to prevent polio. I can still remember as a boy my mother taking me for my first polio shot with a sense of relief and joy over the prevention of what might have been.

But, what if the physicians of America had failed to practice the use of the vaccine that Jonas Salk announced in 1953? "Unforgivable!" we'd shout. Those physicians were called to healing, committed to helping and saving lives. Besides, why would they want not to practice what they knew would save millions of lives?

We have been called to practice the proclamation that salvation full and free is available through Jesus Christ the Son of God. Not practice what God has proclaimed? Never! We have been called and we are committed to the soul-saving purposes of God!

John's methodology was to let the light of Jesus Christ shine for what it was. The brilliance of God's light is more than adequate. There was nothing he could do to enhance it, to change it, to upgrade it or to brighten it.

We, too, need to remember to let the light shine. As Christians we are not responsible for saving anyone, converting anyone or even convicting anyone of sin. God's light shines all by itself! But, like John the Baptist, we must be witnesses, we must bear a testimony, we must tell about the light and show the way! This method is fantastically effective.

Suppose all the people of Wooddale Church made it a daily practice of mentioning Jesus Christ, telling about his impact on our lives and sharing his blessings through the church body. Then God allows a non-Christian to touch 200 of our lives in the period of three years, being continually pointed to the saving light of the Savior. Think of the impact! Do you know who gets the credit and glory? Not you or me or any other modern John the Baptist. God gets it all! Jesus Christ is the light of the world. We are the pointers!

Have you ever gathered a few people in a public place and stood pointing up at the sky? Eventually, almost everyone who comes by will look up. That's what we're to do . . . keep pointing to Jesus, all of us, until everyone looks up to him!

At the conclusion of this sermon I'm going to ask you to commit yourself to this kind of witness for Jesus Christ, so begin thinking about your commitment. Will you go on record with God to be a John the Baptist to the people and places where God has sent you? Remember, God is not asking you to be the light, only to point to the light!

One more thing has to be understood as we analyze John the Baptist. The record has to be made very clear that John was not the light. He was nothing; Jesus was everything.

There were people then who thought otherwise. His disciples wanted to give praise to John and warned him about the increasing popularity of Jesus. They became a little concerned when Jesus started going up in the polls and John the Baptist was going down in the polls. They were concerned that his reputation was becoming less while Jesus' reputation increased.

Here are some key lessons to learn:

Do not confuse the ambassador with the king.

When God builds a church, give the glory to God and not the preacher.

When people come to Christ, give the glory to God and not the counselor.

There has to be a clear distinction of relationship. John the Baptist was clearly not the light. Jesus Christ is the light and we are nothing. Never get that mixed up as far as you are personally concerned and never get it mixed up as far as anyone else is concerned.

At the same time, do not fail to recognize that we must be clearly connected to the light. John was clearly connected to Jesus Christ. He knew who Jesus was and what he was doing. And John knew why he was here.

Out of a deep personal relationship with God, John the Baptist was able to announce to the world about Jesus Christ when he said in John 1:29, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" That kind of witness always grows out of relationship.

You can't tell someone what a great wife you have if you don't have a close relationship with her. You can't tell someone that the best place to live is in such and such a community if you have never lived there. There has to be a relationship. Obviously, the best way to be an effective witness for Christ, the light, is to be closely connected to him.

We have candles that we place in our windows each Christmas. They have a single bulb that goes into the base and then tubes that go up to plastic flames. The purpose of the whole thing is to give off a Christmas effect. But the flames have no light of their own. All they do is radiate the light of the bulb to which they are all connected.

As witnesses we have no light of our own. All we can do is radiate the light of Jesus Christ when we are connected to him through faith.

Imagine if everyone at Wooddale Church became witnesses for Jesus Christ. What if we were all daily pointing to the light? Imagine what would happen. God would be pleased and glorified. He could use us as never before - - - a whole church of "John the Baptists!"

Would you commit to be a "John the Baptist?" Would you commit to pray regularly for witnessing opportunities? Would you trust God to give you witness opportunities that you can handle and

that you feel comfortable with? Trust God that he will answer that prayer and decide that you will daily take advantage of the witness opportunities God provides. Encourage and pray for others in the body as we all witness.

Pray . . . and carefully consider this kind of commitment to be a modern "John the Baptist."

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