



got life?

The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

John 1:19–51

I. The importance of pointing

A. Pilgrim's Progress.

John Bunyan's classic allegory of the Christian life _____ when a man named Evangelist has a conversation with a troubled seeker named Christian about the state of his soul. Evangelist asks why he doesn't do something about it. "Because I don't know where to go," replied Christian.

Then, _____ with his finger over a very wide field, Evangelist said, "Do you see that Narrow Gate over there?" "No," replied Christian. Evangelist then asked, "Do you see that shining light there?" "I think I do," answered Christian. Then Evangelist said, "Keep that light in your eye and go up directly toward it. Then you will see the Gate. When you knock on the Gate, you'll be told what you must do." (Pilgrim's Progress in Modern English, 3)

His job now accomplished, Evangelist basically _____ from the story (though he has occasional moments when he briefly reappears.). Thus, we learn the importance of being _____; the conspicuousness of being invisible; the greatness of being small.

B. The role of the witness.

1. Evangelist served as a _____ to Christian. Because he had seen and experienced something important for himself _____, he was able to help Christian by pointing the way, bearing testimony, sharing evidence.
2. No one comes to Christ without first receiving a witness. Someone must first point the way. The witness exists only to _____ the seeker to Jesus. Once that connection is made, the job of the witness is done.
3. Seen in this light, it is impossible to overstate the _____ of the role of the witness, and at the same time it is impossible to overstate its _____.

C. One witness is not enough.

1. To bear witness is to give _____. It is primarily a legal concept. Jews believed that in a court of law, multiple witnesses were required to prove something true. "A single witness shall not suffice. . . Only on the evidence of _____ witnesses or of _____ witnesses shall a charge be established" (Deut 19:15).
2. John's Gospel places great emphasis on the role of witnesses, using the noun "witness" or "testimony" 14 times and the verb 33 times. This Gospel highlights not only the testimony of John the Baptist (Jn 1:7–8, 29–34; 5:33–36) but also the witness of:
 - a. Jesus' _____ (Jn 5:36; 10:25; 14:11; 15:24).
 - b. The _____ (Jn 5:39,46).
 - c. The Father (Jn 5:31–32,37; 12:28–30).

- d. The _____ (Jn 15:26; see I Jn 5:7–8).
- e. The woman at the well (Jn 4:39).
- f. The writer _____ himself (Jn 19:35; 21:24).
- g. Jesus himself (Jn 8:14, 18; plus all the “I am” statements).

In other words, if anyone doesn’t believe in Jesus, it is not because of the paucity of witnesses or the lack of evidence.

D. John the Baptist.

1. All four Gospels _____ by telling us how John the Baptist bore witness to who Jesus is and pointed to him. “It’s not me—it’s him!” Without John the Baptist, we would never have realized who Jesus was and what he came to do. But once we caught on, we forgot all about John.
2. Although John knew that he was only a “voice in the wilderness,” Jesus regarded John as the _____ “among those born of women” (Matt 11:11).
3. John the Baptist is therefore the prototypical witness. His voice and his finger serve as the supreme _____ for what it means to be a witness of Jesus and bear testimony to the gospel.

II. Come and See! (Jn 1:19–51)

Though our study will focus on the witness of John the Baptist, this entire passage is all about the importance of _____ to Jesus, helping others find the Messiah by speaking a word or indicating the path.

The witness of John the Baptist (to the crowds) He is Lamb of God, Spirit-baptizer, Son of God Jn 1:18–34	The witness of Andrew (to Peter) He is the Messiah Jn 1:35–42	The witness of Philip (to Nathanael) He is the one Moses wrote about Jn 1:43–46	The witness of Nathanael (to Jesus) You are the King of Israel Jn 1:47–51
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Notes on the text:

- A. *Are you Elijah?* (Jn 1:21). This is not an easy question to answer. Malachi 4:5–6, the last verse in the Old Testament, prophesied that Elijah would come “before the great and awesome day of the Lord.” Furthermore, Elijah had not died; he had been taken to heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kgs 2:11). John denied that he was Elijah, but Jesus indicated that it was, in fact, who he was (Matt 11:14).
- B. *The lamb of God* (Jn 1:29, 36). John’s description of Jesus as “the lamb of God” is unprecedented. Where did he get such a novel idea? Scholars debate whether the metaphor is rooted in the Passover lamb, the lamb led to the slaughter (Isa 53:7), the lamb of the daily offering in the Temple (Ex 29:38–42), the lamb (really a ram) that God provided in the place of Isaac (Gen 22), or the triumphant horned lamb of the book of Revelation (Rev 5:6–14; 7:9–10).

Perhaps the best understanding is that the term is used with a general meaning. That is to say, it does not refer to any one specific lamb, but to the lamb as the sacrificial animal par excellence. . . . John is saying that in Jesus we find that divine victim who would perfectly fulfill all that the entire _____ foreshadowed. (Leon Morris, Expository Reflections, 42)

- C. *An Israelite in whom is no deceit* (Jn 1:47). The word “deceit” is surely a reference to Genesis 27:35 where Isaac tells Esau that his brother Jacob “came deceitfully” and stole his blessing. Jacob is the classic example of a deceiver. After his conversion, his name was later changed to Israel. Jesus seems to be saying to Nathanael, “You are a true Israel in whom there is no _____!” This man has a pure heart, ready to respond to the truth; what every true Israelite ought to be!
- D. *Heaven opened* (Jn 1:51). The Bible teaches that heaven is beyond the reach of any mortal (see Gen 11 and the story of the tower of Babel, etc.). But while no man can reach heaven, God may decide to _____. Jesus’ promise to Nathanael that he would “see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” is a reference to Jacob’s _____ (Gen 28:12). Jesus is saying that he is the ladder, the link, the _____ between heaven and earth. He makes it possible for God to come to man and man to come to God through himself.

III. A theology of witness.

Looking especially at the prototypical ministry of John the Baptist, we learn what it means to be a witness.

- A. The _____ of the witness.
- John had a remarkable ministry, preaching repentance and preparing the way for the Lord. Many had exalted ideas of who he might be.
 - Are you the _____? “I am not the Christ” (Jn 1:20).
 - Are you _____? (Mal 4:5–6). “I am not” (Jn 1:21).
 - Are you _____? (Deut 18:15–22). “No” (Jn 1:21).¹
 - Though Jesus considered John the Baptist to be Elijah (Matt 11:4), John never had such exalted notions of himself. “Let me explain to you who I am,” he said. “I’m only a _____ in the wilderness (Jn 1:23; see Isa 40:3). “I’m not the Word . . . just a voice . . . nothing more, nothing less.
 - In John 3:26–30, John explains even more about his identity.

They came to John and said, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John answered, “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The _____, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must _____.”
 - Jesus added a final metaphor to explain John’s identity. Jesus is the light of the world (Jn 1:4–8; 8:12). John is only a “burning and shining _____” (Jn 5:35). Bearing witness to the light of the world is a little like pointing a flashlight at the sun. But human _____ is such that even such a foolish action is helpful.
 - Thus we can summarize the identity of a witness this way. He/she is:
 - Not the Word, but a _____.

¹ Notice how John’s responses to these questions become progressively more terse: “I am not the Christ.” “I am not.” “No!” Leon Morris comments: “Since his interest is in Jesus, not in himself, he has no intention of being sidetracked into a discussion about himself. He does not matter. Jesus does.” (*Expository Reflections*, 30).

- Not the Light, but a _____.
- Not the Groom, but the _____.

Jesus must _____. I must _____. Once I've helped people meet him, I need to get out of the way.

Illustration: C. S. Lewis' essay "Meditation in a Toolshed." Lewis described entering his dark toolshed one afternoon. A bright sunbeam shone through a crack at the top of the door with specks of dust floating in it. Everything else in the shed was pitch black. He saw the beam of light but nothing else. Then, he moved so that the beam fell on his eyes. He began to _____ the beam rather than _____ the beam. He explains that when he stopped looking at the beam but looked along it:

I saw no toolshed, and [above all] no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam and looking at the beam are very different experiences.

This is a helpful way to think of the role of a witness. Don't look _____ the witness, look _____ the witness. To look at the witness is to miss the point.

B. The _____ of witness.

John the Baptist knew that his place of witness was not in _____, not in the _____, not in the normal routines of everyday life. He was a voice "in the wilderness." To receive his witness, people had to interrupt their schedules and go out to a remote location. To be an effective witness often means connecting with seekers in ways that are _____ and perhaps even odd.

C. The _____ of witness.

1. A witness has only one thing to say: "It's not about me. It's about _____." He points to Jesus. He gives names and titles to Jesus that will immediately connect with his hearers, helping them to understand who he is and what he has come to do:
 - Prepare the way of the _____ (Yahweh).
 - _____ of God (sacrifice for sin).
 - Son of God (divine).
 - _____ (the One we've been waiting for).
 - The One Moses wrote about.
 - The _____ of Israel (our leader, Lord, future).
2. John's message, however, also contained two other important elements:
 - a. _____. Confess your sins and turn from those attitudes and behaviors that blind you to the truth of Jesus. Do this quickly because _____ is coming soon! "The axe is already laid to the root of the tree." Don't trust in the fact that you are a descendent of Abraham (heritage, orthodox traditions, etc.). God can produce children for Abraham from rocks (Matt 3:7-12). Therefore, turn from evil, do the right thing and be content with your wages (Lk 3:10-14).

A witness knows that preparing the way of the Lord involves clearing out the rubble and debris (repentance).

- b. Baptism _____. John's baptism was with water (for purification). But this symbol pointed to the real need: baptism with the Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11).

A witness knows that his work is not done until the Spirit of the living God has lit a fire in the heart of the seeker through the indwelling Spirit of holiness.

- D. The _____ of witness.

John the Baptist _____ because of his witness to Jesus. He lost his disciples (Jn 1:35–37). He lost his crowds (Jn 3:26). Ultimately, he lost his life (Mk 6:14–29). We must never forget that the early Christians had such a clear understanding of the cost involved in bearing witness to the Name that the term for witness (*martus*) soon came to mean being a _____. To be a witness and to be a martyr were two ways of saying the same thing. A witness finds himself in losing himself!

- E. There is no such thing as _____ faith.

For faith in Christ to be genuine it must be first-hand and personal. Believing in Christ through the testimony of someone else is inadequate and will not last. Though many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the testimony of the woman at the well (Jn 4:39), it was only after they had personally met Jesus and developed a relationship with him over the two days that he stayed with them that they came to authentic faith.

They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this indeed the Savior of the world." (John 4:42)

- F. The _____ for witnessing.

Because witnessing involves both character (who we are, not just what we say) and because when done rightly it always leads to some form of martyrdom, we need divine power do it rightly. Perhaps the most succinct statement of the theology of witnessing is found in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Note:

1. We are called to _____ witnesses not to do witnessing.
2. We are to bear witness to _____ ("witnesses of me") not just to share our testimony of how we made a decision.
3. We are called to be _____. It is in when we lay down our lives that we are the most effective witnesses. "Death is at work in us, but life in you" (II Cor 4:12).
4. Witnessing begins at _____ (Jerusalem) then works out in ever-expanding concentric circles (Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth).
5. To be a witness requires the _____ that comes only through the infilling of Holy Spirit.

G. The _____ in witnessing.

As long as we remain silent about Jesus, we leave our options open. No one is quite sure what we believe. Our silence is a form of _____. But once we speak out and bear witness, then we are committed. It is naming the Name (Jesus) that both seals our martyrdom and ensures our victory!

The triumphed over him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their _____, they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11 NIV)

Facing a Task Unfinished

Original Words by Frank Houghton, Music by Samuel Wesley

New Words and Music by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, Ed Cash, and Fionan de Barra; © 2015 OMF

*Facing a task unfinished that drives us to our knees
A need that, undiminished rebukes our slothful ease
We, who rejoice to know Thee, renew before Thy throne
The solemn pledge we owe Thee to go and make Thee known*

*Where other lords beside Thee hold their unhindered sway
Where forces that defied Thee defy Thee still today
With none to heed their crying for life, and love, and light
Unnumbered souls are dying and pass into the night*

*We go to all the world with kingdom hope unfurled
No other name has power to save but Jesus Christ The Lord*

*We bear the torch that flaming fell from the hands of those
Who gave their lives proclaiming that Jesus died and rose
Ours is the same commission the same glad message ours
Fired by the same ambition to Thee we yield our powers*

*O Father who sustained them O Spirit who inspired
Savior, whose love constrained them to toil with zeal untired
From cowardice defend us from lethargy awake!
Forth on Thine errands send us to labor for Thy sake*