



IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES: JOHN

LESSON: WITNESS

JOHN 1:6-8, 15, 19-37

10/11/20

Church News/Announcements:

MAIN POINT

John the Baptist (JTB) was sent to witness that all would believe. As believers, we have that same calling.

JOHN CONTEXT

John the Baptist's life fit perfectly with the purpose of the Gospel of John: "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

INTRODUCTION

Who was the person who told you about Jesus and the gospel? Are there any specific people who come to mind, and how did they teach you about Jesus?

Here in the prologue to John, there is deep focus on Jesus and so much theology about who he is. Then there's a sudden shift to John the Baptist. Based on what you know about John the Baptist, why do you think the author John would do that?

For many people in the very early church, John the Baptist was who introduced them to Jesus. In other gospels, we get the details about JTB such as what he wore, what he ate, where he did his ministry, etc. But here in John, we'll see that the entire focus on JTB is on his ministry and what he did to point to Jesus. Those other details about JTB's life are good to know, but in keeping with John's purpose that we find in John 20:31 (see above), the author John knows that in order to help people believe in Jesus, all we need is JTB's witness about Jesus. So as we dive into our first introduction in John to JTB, think about JTB's role in the gospel of Jesus and how his mission fits perfectly with the gospel mission—that all would believe in Jesus and have life in his name.

EXPLANATION // ...believe Jesus is the Christ...

There are three different scenes that we'll look at today, but first there are some introductory verses to John the Baptist. Verses 1-5 is massive theological ideas about Jesus. We get that he is the Word, the logos. That he existed before creation. That he is God. That he made all things. That he is life. Verses 9-18 continues on with more big theological ideas. There we see that salvation is through Jesus, that Jesus is God incarnate—fully man and fully God, and that he is both grace and truth—salvation and revelation. But right in the middle of that we get the introduction of John.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:6-8, AND 15

What stands out to you in those verses about JTB? Based on those verses, what was his purpose? (A: The word witness shows up 4 times in those 4 verses. We see very quickly that his purpose was to bear witness.)

As we mentioned earlier, our first peek at John the Baptist comes right in the introduction of Jesus in the first few words of the gospel. But the reasons we get there so early is because of why JTB existed in the first place—to witness to others. We see that Jesus is the light and that the light shines in the darkness. But without someone to point us to that light, we would never see it. This shows us a couple of things: (1) how good Jesus is that he is the life and light and all that is good. But (2), how dark and sinful we are in that on our own we could never see the light, but we need God to reveal himself to us in some way.

AW Pink in his commentary on John tells us why we need John the Baptist:

When the sun is shining in all its beauty, who are the ones that are unconscious of the fact? Who need to be told it is shining? The blind! How tragic, then, when we read that God sent John to "bear witness of the light." How pathetic that there should be any need for this! How solemn the statement that men have to be told "the light" is now in their midst. What a revelation of man's fallen condition.

So John the Baptist is here for one reason—to be a witness about Jesus the light.

Now as we move into vs. 19-35, we'll see that purpose play out in specific ways.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:19-28

There are lots of questions about who he is. But just based on this text in vs. 19-28, do we really learn much about John the Baptist? (A: No...JTB keeps the focus on Jesus.)

Here in our first real scene involving JTB, we get the story of when the Jewish leaders (we see in v. 24 it was the Pharisees) sent priests to figure out who he was. We see in other gospels that John had been out in the wilderness, and many people had been going out of Jerusalem to hear him preach. So the Jewish leaders take notice and want to know who he is.

They first ask who he is, and JTB interestingly responds with not who he is, but who he is not. "I am not the Christ." With JTB starting with the fact that he wasn't the Christ, we can assume that there was rampant speculation that he was the Christ and in his humility, JTB wanted no part of that. He was here to point to the Christ, not receive his glory or attention. So the next question they ask is "Are you Elijah?" And then "Are you the prophet?" To both which John says no. But where would they get the ideas of Elijah and the Prophet? What are they asking about?

Flip over to Malachi 4:5-6. The last two verses in the OT are what they are asking about. Malachi says Elijah the prophet will come “before the great and awesome day of the Lord” and would “turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers”. The prophecy here at the tail end of the OT is that Elijah the prophet would come before the Messiah and introduce the reconciliation of all things. That starts with restoring relationships between fathers and children, but the restoration to come from Christ’s kingdom would impact everything.

Interestingly, JTB denies this. However, elsewhere in Scripture it seems like JTB is an Elijah. Look over in Luke 1:13-17. The angel of the Lord is telling Zechariah about his son—John the Baptist. He tells him, “He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.” This is a clear reference to Malachi 4:5-6. So what do we do with this?

Well, look in Matthew 17, the scene of the transfiguration. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus and Peter, James, and John on the mountain. His disciples later ask, “Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” The disciples in v. 10 ask Jesus specifically about Malachi 4:5-6, and why Elijah must come. Jesus in v. 12 says, “Elijah has already come...” and v. 13 tells us that he was speaking of John the Baptist.

So we’ve got an angel of the Lord telling Zechariah that John the Baptist would be in spirit of Elijah. We’ve got Jesus telling us that Elijah has come in John the Baptist. But then John the Baptist says no, he’s not Elijah. Is Jesus confused? Is John confused?....Are we confused?

The key here is that John was focused simply on his mission and sharing Jesus. He wasn’t concerned with a title and at that point he didn’t know the impact he would have—he just wanted to get people ready for the Messiah. And in that, he was a type of Elijah in that he was preparing the way, making hearts ready, and pointing people to the Messiah who was coming. So yes, he had the role of the prophet Elijah, but in his mind John the Baptist was just John who was preaching and trying to prepare hearts for the Messiah who was coming soon.

The question about John being a prophet is similarly a question based in OT prophecy. Deuteronomy 18:15 says “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers...”. This is a prophecy to the Messiah who would come. The prophet like Moses but would be better than Moses. We saw in Exodus that as intercessor and intermediary between Israel and God, Moses was a picture of Jesus to come. But we saw in Hebrews 3 that Jesus is better than Moses. So JTB was right to answer no to that question, but the priests should have known that when John denied he was the Christ, he also wasn’t the prophet. The Prophet that the priests asked about is the same Messiah, the same Christ, as prophesied throughout the OT...and he was coming.

So, we’ve learned a lot about who he is not, but who did John answer that he was when the priests pressed him? Well, in a clever way, he gave them what they were clearly

looking for—a response based in OT Scripture. John quotes Isaiah 40:3 and sates his purpose as “one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” The context of that passage in Isaiah is in reference to preparing the way for the people to return to God from Babylonian captivity. In that day, in middle eastern royalty, the people would always clear the roads whenever royalty was coming through. Roads were either not complete or would have rocks or other obstacles in the way, so people would go ahead of royalty to clear the way so they could travel straight on the road without having to navigate obstacles. So if you ever saw someone clearing the way, you knew the King was not far behind.

The prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 is a messianic prophecy in that it says that there would be one crying out, “Make straight the way.” There would be a road clearer who would come, and just behind the road clearer was the Messiah. And here John the Baptist says, “I’m that guy. I’m the road clearer, and the Messiah’s coming right behind me.”

Not satisfied with his answer because he didn’t even give his name or an official title, they then ask why he was baptizing. JTB, always humble, answers that his baptism is with water—therefore, it’s anticipatory. His baptism isn’t permanent, but it was preparing people for the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. And in v. 27 he notes that there is one among him who he’s not worthy of. So, the priests question his authority to baptize, and in staying true to form, John doesn’t defend himself but points to the Messiah that was coming. He was sent by God to witness, and that’s exactly what he does. Nothing more, nothing less.

Now lets’ move into the next scene in our story...

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:29-34

Here we enter the second scene of this series of stories with John the Baptist. Where as the first scene was with priest sent by the Pharisees who were his opposition, now we see him the next day likely out in the wilderness preaching to whoever was there to listen. And what we see here is that he sees Jesus and exclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin for the world.” There was power in those words then, and there is power in those words today. Listen to this testimony about this verse as told by Charles Spurgeon:

In 1857, a day or two before preaching at the Crystal Palace, I went to decide where the platform should be fixed; and, in order to test the acoustic properties of the building, cried in a loud voice, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” In one of the galleries, a workman, who knew nothing of what was being done, heard the words, and they came like a message from heaven to his soul. He was smitten with conviction on account of sin, put down his tools, went home, and there, after a season of spiritual struggling, found peace and life by beholding the Lamb of God.

Those words of John the Baptist, almost two thousand words later echoed by Charles Spurgeon, impacted lives for eternity. When people heard about Jesus, they can't help but respond. But what all is wrapped up in those words that John said?

The testimony of John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and made two distinct points. First, John establishes that Jesus is the Lamb of God. The context for this preaching is that it's just short before Passover. John 2:13 tells us that the Passover was at hand, and this scene takes place just days before that. So the sacrifice of a lamb would have been especially on the peoples mind as they look back to the Exodus and celebrate the spilled blood of the lamb that saved their firstborn. The "Lamb of God" in reference to Jesus who had showed up on the scene would have instantly raised peoples eyebrows and recognized that this one that John is pointing to, if he is the Lamb of God, is the one who would ultimately atone for sin by being the "lamb led to slaughter" as written in Isaiah 53.

The second thing he says here is that this Jesus is the one "who takes away the sin for the world." To this point, the Messiah was a promised King who would establish the throne of David and reestablish the kingdom of Israel, but to expand his influence to be the savior of the entire world is new. Isaiah 53 tells us he would "bear the sin of many," but here we get a taste of John 3:16 before John 3:16 was written... "that whosoever would believe in him would have everlasting life." John didn't know what it would look like, but upon seeing Jesus he declares him to be the sacrificial lamb of God who would bear the sins of the world.

Do you think God knew exactly how His plan for Jesus would play out at this point? Why or why not?

How can we trust in God that he will fulfill his plan, even if we don't see the full picture?

Moving ahead, the next scene which happens on the next day. The audience is not one of opposition, or just neutral listeners, but some of John's closest followers.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 1:35-37

**What happened when Jesus again proclaimed Jesus as Lamb of God?
(A: His followers left him to follow Jesus.)**

Here we get John the Baptist standing with two of his disciples, Andrew and one other. They are probably talking about something when Jesus again walks up and John immediately does what he has been sent by God to do: proclaim that this is the Lamb of God. The response to that is simple... “the two disciples hear him say this, and they followed Jesus.” The response here is exactly what John wanted, but it’s only a response that can happen when a leader is humble enough to point everyone to Jesus and not care for or take any credit or pride in himself. John lost two followers from his disciples, but he did that because he had pointed them to Jesus.

In closing, let’s go back to vs. 6 and 7 and look at the three things we first learn about John the Baptist:

1. He was sent from God. V. 6
2. He came as a witness. V. 7
3. He was to witness that all might believe. V. 7

When we first see John we see his purpose and calling, and then just a few verses later we see all of these happen:

1. Verse 33 tells us that he was sent, and John knew he was sent
2. We see either the author telling us that John witnessed, or we get the dialogue of his witness in vs. 7, 8, 15, 29, 32, 34, and 36. Seven times in just a few scenes.
3. In v. 37, when he proclaims Jesus to his followers, we are told that they followed Jesus. And reading ahead, Andrew in his first act after following Jesus goes and bring his brother Peter to Jesus.

Because John the Baptist was faithful to go when sent, and was faithful to witness when given the opportunity, many people came to belief. Andrew believed, Peter believed, and the early church would never be the same because of the testimony of John the Baptist.

So back to our original question: why does John the Baptist show up so early in the gospel? Why is he that important? Well, it’s because he personifies the believers task in accomplishing John’s purpose in writing his gospel in the first place: “...so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

The takeaway for us is that John the Baptist is each of us. Like him, we have each been sent. Like him, we have each been tasked with being a witness and pointing others to Jesus. And like John the Baptist, if we are faithful to go and witness, people will believe in him.

APPLICATION // ...have life in His name.

As we close out, let's use some discussion to see how we can apply the lesson that we learn from John in our own lives...

Where is a place, or maybe a person in your life that you can envision yourself being a witness? What groups or circles are you in regularly?

John witnessed about Jesus when he was with opposition, with neutral listeners, and with those closest to him. What are some ways you have or have seen someone else witness either to someone opposed to them, with normal everyday people, or with someone very close to them?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God to give us boldness to be witnesses like John for the cause of Christ.

COMMENTARY / RESOURCES

VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY

Note that in the other gospels we get details on John the Baptist like what he wore and ate. Here in John the focus is on what he said and did as a **witness** of Jesus.

V. 6: "Sent from God." Like the OT prophets he was equipped and commissioned by God for special ministry.¹

V. 7: John came as witness. "Witness" is important in John's writing, and especially here in the Gospel of John. Used 14 times as noun and 33 times as verb here in John.

V. 8: First of several times we'll see who John is NOT. He is NOT the light... but his purpose is to bear witness to that light.

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT Edition. Editors: Walvoord and Zuck

V. 19: John obviously had great influence in his preaching b/c the priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem to investigate. They wouldn't have done this for a "nobody."

V. 20: Interestingly, John starts with who he is not. And it's noted very clearly as a "confession" and not a denial. So he isn't denying their speculation of him as Messiah, this is part of his confession—his testimony. "I am not the Messiah... but the Messiah is indeed coming." He was setting up his witness.

V. 21: "Are you Elijah?" Reference to Malachi 4:5-6. "Are you the prophet?" Reference to Deuteronomy 18:15. Albert Mohler has great explanation of this in his sermon on this passage: <https://albertmohler.com/2018/05/20/john-119-42>

V. 23: John quotes Isaiah 40:3. "John's message was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 with reflections of Malachi 3:1. All four gospels relate John the Baptist to Isaiah's words. Isaiah 40:3, however, refers to "highway construction workers" who were called on to clear the way in the desert for the return of the Lord as his people, the exiles, returned to Judah from the Babylonian captivity in 537 B.C. In similar fashion, John the Baptist was in the desert preparing the way for the Lord and His kingdom by calling on people to return to him."²

Vs. 24-25: The Pharisees were the ones who actually sent the priests to investigate John. The Pharisees were concerned with position and title, and thus they ask why John was baptizing if he didn't have an official title such as Elijah or Prophet like they had asked about.

Vs. 29-34: "First, God himself had given John a message: "The one you see the Spirit descending and resting on—he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (v. 33). Second, John witnesses this event (v. 32). He had known Jesus but had not realized Jesus was the one sent from God (v. 31). However, when he saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus, it became clear. Third, the Spirit rested on Jesus. The word *rest* is used in both verses 32 and 33. In the Old Testament, when the Holy Spirit came on a person to empower him for a specific task, it was temporary. Yet the Spirit remained permanently on Jesus. When John saw the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus, he recognized the fulfillment of the promise of God to send the Messiah. John testifies to the deity of Jesus Christ in verse 34: "I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." He does not hesitate, waver, or doubt. John is clear: Jesus Christ is God."³

Vs. 35-36: "John provides a genuine model of what it means to be a minister or servant of God. The human tendency is to make a name for ourselves and to attach our names to other people, institutions, and things so that people will remember us. To minimize oneself in order for Jesus to become the focus of attention is the designated function of an ideal witness."⁴

² The Bible Knowledge Commentary, NT Edition. Editors: Walvoord and Zuck

³ Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in John. Carter and Wredberg

⁴ John 1-11: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, Borchers