

The Privilege Of Proclamation

John 1:19-34

When we began this series a week ago it was noted how John had a very specific purpose for writing his gospel.

In chapter 20, verse 31, John tells us: **“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.”**

Or, you might say that at every point in his Gospel, John is providing answers to the question:

Who is Jesus?

John’s first answer is that *Jesus is the eternal Word*.

John declares, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”** (1:1).

So, right from the start, John’s assertion is that *Jesus is God*.

Having made that assertion, John now needs to corroborate his assertion with some evidence.

He begins with an eyewitness named **John the Baptist**.

If you are familiar with the other Gospel accounts you are aware that John the Baptist is a different sort of person.

To say that John the Baptist is eccentric is an understatement.

He did not wear conventional clothing, but rather Mark's Gospel tells us that John the Baptist "**was clothed with camel's hair**" (Mk. 1:6).

Not only was John crudely dressed, but he also had an unusual diet, consisting exclusively of "**locusts and wild honey**" (Mk. 1:7).

And yet, in spite of his unconventional appearance and his unusual diet the multitudes flocked to him.

Some even wondered, and asked, if he was 'the Christ'.

What led people to ask this question?

If it wasn't his appearance, or his lifestyle, what was it then?

Was it his ability to endear himself to people?

Certainly not!

Do you remember John the Baptist's sermon introduction, recorded by Luke?

The multitudes gather to hear John the Baptist speak, and he begins by saying, **"You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"** (Lk. 3:7).

I don't imagine that would be a very helpful way to build a congregation.

"Good morning everyone. Welcome to St. Andrew's Kirk. Now, you know you are a brood of snakes, don't you..."

Not a good strategy, right?

And yet, though his clothing was *crude*, his diet *strange*, and his message *harsh*, there was something about this man that caused others to wonder if he might be the promised king of the Jews.

But when asked to identify himself, he responds plainly, “**I am not the Christ**” (1:20).

John the Baptist is then asked, “**What do you say about yourself?**” (Jn. 1:22)

John’s answer is a simple one: “**I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘make straight the way of the Lord’**” (1:23).

In a similar situation, we might be tempted to talk about ourselves—we might be tempted to talk about the positions we’ve held within the church, or our theological training, or the books we’ve read.

But that’s not what John the Baptist does.

John’s message is consistent: “Don’t pay attention to me. Pay attention to the One who comes after me—He is your Messiah . . . It is **He who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie**” (1:27).

Some might know that, in the ancient world, the act of untying the sandal of another was the work of a slave.

And yet, John the Baptist insists that the One He is heralding for is of such high standing that he is not worthy of even being His slave.

Again, it is not as if John the Baptist is a meek, or gentle, soul.

This is someone who boldly challenges religious hypocrisy; this is someone who unequivocally warns of coming judgment.

And yet, John the Baptist exhibits genuine humility when talking about his own relative importance in comparison to Jesus.

John's message is constantly, "**I am not**", "**I am not**", "**I am not**" (Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:20, 21).

And then we come to verse 29 and John the Baptist confidently identifies Jesus for us:

“The next day (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”

What we find in the Gospel of John is that the question, “Who is Jesus?” is consistently answered in terms of, both, His *identity* and His *function*.

That is to say, John doesn't simply want us to know *who Jesus is*, but he also wants us to know *what Jesus has come to do*.

‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’

The basis for John the Baptist's profession is detailed for us in verse 32 and following:

“And John bore witness: ‘I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (1:32-34).

We're not even through the first chapter and we've learned a great deal about Jesus.

In eternity, Jesus is **the Word** through whom all creation came to be.

We are told that Jesus *is* God (1:1), but with some distinction—Jesus is “**the Son of God**” (1:34).

We are also introduced to *what Jesus has come to do*.

We are told that Jesus has come to shine light into darkness, which is to say that *He has come to confront and conquer evil* (1:5).

We are told that *He has come to take away the sin of the world* (1:29), and that *He will baptize with the Holy Spirit* (1:34).

The role of John the Baptist is merely that of a herald, and a **witness** to these things (1:7).

In chapter 1, verse 7, we read: “**He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.**”

And then in verse 34, John the Baptist says of himself, “**I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.**”

It cannot be denied that John the Baptist holds a unique position in history as the forerunner to Jesus.

John the Baptist was the first to boldly identify Jesus as the Son of God, and the first to frame the mission of Jesus in terms of obtaining forgiveness for sin.

But while John the Baptist holds a unique position in history, we should not say that his proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God is unique beyond being the first to make such a claim.

If we fast-forward to the first chapter of the Book of Acts, we see the Resurrected Jesus giving instructions to the early church, and here is what He says:

“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” (Acts 1:8).

Dear friends, it is important that we see that *being a Christian necessarily makes you a witness*.

Jesus does not ask His followers to consider being a witness for Him.

Nor does Jesus even command His followers to be His witnesses.

No, Jesus states it as an inevitable outcome of receiving the Holy Spirit—“**you will be My witnesses**” (Acts 1:8).

So, for the genuine Christian, we should not be asking, “Am I a witness?” but rather, “What kind of witness am I?”

Am I a faithful witness?

Does my life reflect the glory of Christ and the magnitude of His mission?

We can look to John the Baptist as an example of what a faithful witness looks like.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that you waltz into your workplace tomorrow and announce to everyone that they are “a brood of vipers”.

We may not want to emulate John the Baptist's *manner*, but we ought to be heralding his *message*.

John the Baptist declared, **“I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God”** (1:34).

Dear friends, have you come to recognize Jesus as the eternal Word; the Son of God?

Do you regard Jesus as **“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”**?

Then you must call upon others to recognize the same.

Charles Spurgeon summarizes our duty when he says, “The true messenger calls upon men, to see Jesus.”

Many of you know that I was born and raised in Niagara Falls, Canada.

I was blessed to live in such close proximity to this majestic natural beauty.

I recall as a young child when the city spent a large sum of money on *lighting* so that tourists could see the Falls at night.

This investment provided a massive boost for tourism in that tourists could come at just about any time of the day and have a wonderful view of the Falls.

It is now estimated that nearly 12 million tourists visit Niagara Falls each year.

The installation of effective lighting directly led to a massive increase in the number of tourists.

But do you think there was a single tourist who came to Niagara Falls to see the lights?

No!

The millions came to see what the lights pointed to.

Dear friend, our task as witnesses is a simple one:

We point to Christ.

We live in such a manner that others can see Christ.

This is the Christian's primary task, and it is the church's primary task.

St. Andrew's Kirk might do a hundred good things for this community, but if we neglect to effectively point others to Christ we are missing the main thing.

Have a look again at John's declaration.

It is massively encouraging, and it is definitive.

John the Baptist did not say, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who *might* take away the sin of the world'.

He did not say, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who *can potentially* take away the sin of the world'.

No, John says, "**Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (Jn. 1:29).

Jesus succeeded in His mission.

Atonement for sin has been achieved and the gift of eternal salvation is available to those who believe in Christ.

But how shall they believe without hearing this message?

And how will they hear this message without a messenger?

If you are a Christian, you have been assigned the role of being Christ's messenger.

You are a witness of what Christ has done.

What Jesus has accomplished is not the church's secret.

It is our sacred duty...

It is our privilege to point to Christ and say,

"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Amen.