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The Testimony of John

John 1:19-28

Intro: We've now come to the first major division of John's Gospel. The prologue consists of the first 18 verses but here in **vs19**, we are launched into the events of the first momentous week of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Seven days are described from **vs19** to the end of **ch2**, beginning with the day John the Baptist met with the delegation that came to him from Jerusalem and ending with the day Jesus attends the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Since the tone of the Book changes at this point, our handling of it must change as well. Previously, we have been making our way verse by verse but now, we will move a bit faster, at least where the text allows us to.

The main focus of the rest of **ch1** is the specific witness of John the Baptist concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we study through this, we should ask ourselves, "How does a believer in Jesus Christ witness for him?" We may look at this passage that deals with John the Baptist's witness of Jesus and assume that the job of witnessing was somehow unique to John. I mean, he was called and tasked to do just that, right? Yes, he was; but the reality is, every Christian is called and tasked by God to do the exact same thing. The great downfall of modern Christianity is the false concept that evangelism is the sole responsibility of ministers or "evangelists." That's not how the Gospel was spread across the world in the 1st Century. Sure, we read about John and Peter or Paul and Silas but they weren't the only one sharing the good news of salvation. One historian states "it became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relations the inestimable blessing which he had received" (**Gibbon**). In that day, all Christians - small & great, rich & poor, slaves & free men - made it their consuming passion to tell others about Jesus. The early Christians were informal missionaries; that's what all Christians should be today.

We've already seen the outline the Apostle used to finish out **ch1**. It was given in **vs7-8**. These verses contain three statements about John the Baptist's testimony: (1) **he was not the Light** but (2) **was sent to bear witness to that Light** in order that (3) **all men through him might believe**. Thus, in **vs19-28**, John denies he is the Light; in **vs29-34**, John bears witness to the

Light and in vs35-51, the results of John's testimony is the 1st disciples believe in Jesus. Today, we're going to deal with the 1st point in the outline: John's testimony that he's not the Messiah. John's testimony was mentioned briefly in the prologue, twice; but now we have the extended version. The first example of it is given here in John's reply to a delegation sent out by the religious establishment in Jerusalem. In this section, John's testimony can be broken down into 3 parts: 1) what he wasn't; 2) what he was and 3) what it meant for the Jewish delegates.

19-21- Messiah – Why the “3rd degree?” When John began his public ministry as a preacher of repentance in the Jordan valley, there was a widespread air of expectancy around the countryside, especially among the more pious Israelites who looked for the redemption of Jerusalem. The sudden appearance of this strange preacher & baptizer, showing authentic signs of an OT prophet, made a deep impression of his fellow Israelites. The last, truly Jewish dynasty had collapsed under Roman domination some 60yrs before. This loss of independence dashed all the hopes Israel had pinned to that dynasty and brought about a resurgence of the ancient hope of a Messiah thru David's line.

Now, John was born into a priestly family and so belonged to the tribe of Levi, not Judah. But, as often is the case, charisma counted more than accuracy and John was such a dominating figure that people began to wonder exactly who he was and what he claimed to be. In fact, Luke tells us that, “**the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not**” (Lk 3:15). This is the background for the “Who are you?” question from the Jerusalem delegation. “Inquiring minds want to know; what do you have to say for yourself?”

Since John's reply was negative, it seems strange that it's introduced by the words, “**he confessed and did not deny.**”

If you look at vs20-21, it seems all John is doing is denying so what is the Apostle actually saying here about John. He wants us to understand that even John's denials were part of his positive witness (confession). John was divinely called to announce the arrival of the True Messiah; that was his purpose & his ministry. Had John claimed himself to be the Messiah, many people would have readily accepted it. But then, he would have denied his holy calling and, more importantly, he would have denied his true Messiah and Savior – Jesus. So, when presented with the temptation to accept the

title for himself, John confessed that he wasn't the Messiah and he did not deny his calling or his Lord. **Matthew Henry** believes this correlates with Christianity today: "Those that humble and abase themselves thereby confess Christ, and give honor to him; but those that will not deny themselves do in effect deny Christ." John the Baptist staunchly refused to apply any messianic claims to himself; reserving them all for the One they were due. Well, if John wasn't the Messiah, maybe he was actually some other figure of end-time expectation...

Elijah – Did they just pull that name out of a hat? No. The only "filter" they had with which to analyze current events was the Old Testament. When John showed up on the scene, it caused some to refer back to the last 2 verses of the Scriptures (**Mal 4:5-6**). The expectation of a returning Elijah was alive in that day and John certainly bore some of the marks of Elijah – he was dressed in **camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist** (**Mark 1:6**). This must have reminded folks of the description of Elijah in **II Kings 1:8** "**a hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist**." Now, anyone could imitate Elijah's uniform but no simple imitation could reproduce the note of judgment and the call to repentance that was in both their messages. So, was John Elijah? Or, did he at least claim to be? No!

But wait! Didn't Jesus Himself say that John was Elijah in **Matt 17:10-12**? In fact, when the angel Gabriel appeared before John's father Zacharias, he told him that John would minister in the **spirit and power of Elijah** (**Luke 1:17**). But all this simply means that John the Baptist and his ministry was merely a type of Elijah and his ministry. But when you get right down to brass tacks, John the Baptist wasn't Elijah, and more importantly, he **never** claimed to be!

The prophet – Finally, they asked if he was the prophet. Note: John didn't have to ask "which one?" because he knew exactly what they were referring to. Moses, in his final address to Israel, told them that one day, God would raise up in their midst a prophet like Moses to speak to them thru. The voice of this prophet should be treated like the voice of God (**Deut 18:15-19**). This statement of Moses was understood to point to one particular prophet, a 2nd Moses, who would exercise the full function and authority of Moses. It came to be held that this prophet like Moses would not be raised up until the end of the age. John rejects the idea that he's the prophet like Moses because he realizes that this divine promise can only be and will only be fulfilled by

the true Messiah – Jesus Christ.

22-23- a voice – after playing 20 questions, the delegates were no closer to getting an answer than when they had started. They were frustrated. John was clearly an end-times figure but he refused to be identified with any of the popular figures of end-time expectations. What happens when God’s work doesn’t fit in your little box? Frustration! Of course, they have to go back with an answer so they just ask him straight up, “**Well then, just who are you now?**”

John responds by saying in effect, “If you want to find my ministry foretold in the Scriptures, checkout **Isa 40:3-5**. John’s humility is thus revealed. He declares himself to be a voice and a workman. You can’t see a voice; you can only hear it and respond to it. No one notices the workman who’s just preparing the road for the coming king. Soon, they’ll be having another award show (Oscars) & invariably, there will be a ton of interviews conducted on the red carpet but have you ever noticed: no one ever interviews the folks that roll out the red carpet. You never see them. The last thing John wanted was for people to look at him. He wanted them to forget about him and see only the King.

24-28 One – Now they’re confused! “**If you’re just a voice, why do you baptize?**” Apparently, John’s baptism was distinct from the baptism of Jewish proselytes in that John administered it personally. Basically, baptism was for Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. Proselyte baptism was usually self-administered, the proselyte performing their own ritual cleansing. But, since John preached a baptism of repentance for everyone, he literally demanded the Jews to identify themselves as being no better than the pagan Gentiles. Where did he get that kind of authority?

In his response, John reasserts his own humility and he also reveals that these delegates are severely missing the point! John clearly admits that he only ministers the outward sign of repentance (that’s what water baptism is) but the implications is that there is a greater baptism available. John doesn’t speak about this different baptism here but he does speak about the One who will administer this greater baptism. In fact, he specifically directs them to Him: **there stands One among you whom you do not know**. What a statement! Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe, the 2nd person of the Godhead, the Captain of the Lord’s host, the Angel of the Lord – their long

awaited Messiah – was already in their midst, walking breathing – living. He was right there! The kingdom of God was at hand which means they could literally reach out and touch it and yet, they never noticed Him. In fact, they didn't even ask John to point Him out! Now, John the Baptist is an important religious figure. If he says he's really a nobody but he's been sent by God to announce the arrival of a real somebody; a somebody much greater than himself, don't you think they should at least be curious as to who that somebody really is? Especially if He's already standing among them (the vicinity)?

It's true that God is often nearer to us than we are aware of but these guys were just asking John if he were the Messiah. He denied being the Messiah but now he's telling them that the Messiah was already here, already revealed, already beginning to work out His plan of salvation for not just Israel, but for the entire world. How could they not see it? Why did they not respond? **1:10-11** depravity of man. The glory of God could be staring you in the face and you still refuse to see it, acknowledge its existence or benefit from its presence. Sure, they got the information they were looking for, they did the job they were tasked with but what'd they miss out on? **1:12** receiving ***the right to become the children of God***. I don't care what you do for a living, nothing is more important than that! These delegates just came to give John a hard time, not receive instruction from him. Their ignorance was willful! They had the opportunity to meet and know their very own Messiah but they wouldn't do it, in fact, they chose not to.

Contrast the self-serving attitude of the Jewish delegates with self-denying attitude of John the Baptist. He was truly a somebody in the world but he knew spiritually, he was a nobody. He had nothing to offer the world but the message of repentance. This should be true of every good minister, Christian worker, and witness. If we're going to witness for Jesus, we must first of all ***forget ourselves***—our likes, our dislikes, our needs, our personal interests, our free time, even at times our work or our ambitions. We must think ***first*** of the other person and of his ***need*** for ***the Savior***. What makes a person forget himself in order to selflessly point others to Jesus? Only an ***awareness*** of Jesus' ***worth*** and His ***glory (goodness)***!

Here was a man, sent by God to point people to Jesus, who was effective because he had forgotten himself in the service of his King. 😊