

The Witness and the Light

John 1:6-8

Here at the beginning of the Gospel of John the apostle is introducing us to Jesus Christ and summarizing who He is and what our response should be to Him. The prologue in the first 18 verses of chapter one is a masterpiece, a glorious portrait of the Son of God using symbolic language. John presents Jesus Christ to us as the Word, as the Life, and as the Light. Each of those names reveal His deity. "He is the Word because He is the communication of God. He is the Life because He is the very eternal life itself who gives life to everything that lives. And He is the Light because He is the one true illuminator, who illuminates all spiritual reality." (John MacArthur, [Jesus: the Divine Light](#)).

Listen for those three as I read again John 1:1-5.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

What a magnificent portrayal of the eternal Son of God who is the Word, the Life, and the Light. John will continue his description of Jesus in verse 9 writing,

9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

But right in the middle of introducing Jesus Christ as the light, the apostle seems to interrupt His exposition of Jesus to introduce "John the witness." Listen to verses 6-8, our text for today:

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

John Piper raises the question of why John abruptly introduces "John the Witness" at this juncture instead of completing his introduction of the Word of God. Why did John write it this way? Piper reasons that "the effect of the way he did write it is to make crystal clear from the very outset that God's way of letting the light of Christ shine in the world is by human witnesses. God's way of pushing back the darkness is by human witnesses. It didn't have to be this way. God could have caused the light of Christ to spread in some other way. He could have done it with angels. He could have written the gospel in the sky with big puffy white letters made out of clouds. He could have caused the wind to talk. But instead God chose to call and send human beings to bear witness to the light." (John Piper, [A Burning Witness to the Light](#)).

So here is the main point of my message today: **God has chosen to use human witnesses to bear witness of the light so that the world may believe.**

The outline for my message today is simple. We can summarize it in three points:

1. The Messenger – God sent a man named John. (v. 6)
2. The Method – John came for testimony to bear witness to the light. (v. 7a)
3. The Motive – The aim of this testimony was that all might believe. (v. 7b)

The apostle John will narrate the story of John the Baptist later in chapter 1:19-34. But he introduces him here as a witness to the true Light who is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. These same three points that the Apostle John makes in the prologue here in John 1:6-8—these three points also outline the narrative of the rest of the chapter. First, John the Baptist is a man sent from God, but he is not the light (we see this developed in 1:19-28). Second, John was sent to bear witness to the light (we hear his testimony in 1:29-34). Third, John's aim was that all may believe in Jesus Christ through him (we see the result of John's witness as some disciples of John and others believe in Jesus in 1:35-51). (James Boice quoting the observation of C. H. Dodd, *The Gospel of John* [Zondervan], one-volume ed., p. 49).

1. The Messenger – God sent a man named John. (John 1:6)

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

Here we meet John. This is not the apostle John who wrote the gospel, but the one that the synoptic gospels call John the Baptist (Mt 3:1; 11:11f; 14:2, 8; 16:14; 17:13; Mk 1:4; 6:14, 24f; 8:28; Lk 7:20, 33; 9:19). John never calls him “the Baptist” although he does describe his baptizing work (John 1:25-33; 3:23; 4:1). Here in verse 6 John introduces him as simply “**a man sent from God.**”

Immediately we notice the contrast between John and Jesus:

Christ was (ēn) from all eternity (1:1); John came (egenetō) (1:6).

Christ is the Word (*ho logos*, 1:1); John is a mere man (*anthrōpos*, 1:6).

Christ is Himself God (1:1c); John is commissioned by God (1:6).

Christ is the true Light (1:4, 9); John came to testify of the real Light (1:7).

Christ is one we must believe in (1:7, 12); John is the agent through whose testimony men come to believe Christ. (William Hendriksen, [The Gospel According to John](#)).

Jesus is so much greater than John even though John is “**a man sent from God**” and as Jesus said in Matthew 11:11, “**Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.**” He may be a great man, but he is only a man. Jesus is the Word who was with God in the beginning and who was God. He alone is “**the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.**” John emphasizes the great difference between John the Baptist and Jesus, the Son of God. So in verse 8 he says,

8 He (John) was not that Light (Jesus), but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

He says it forcefully and decisively, **“He was not that light.”** All through the Fourth Gospel John is careful to point out that the place of John the Baptist in the scheme of things was high, but that nonetheless it was still subordinate to the place of Jesus Christ. It could be that,

"Somewhere in the church there was a group of men who wished to give John the Baptist too high a place. John the Baptist himself gave no encouragement to that but rather did everything to discourage it. But the Fourth Gospel knew that that tendency was there and took steps to guard against it. It can still happen that men may worship a preacher rather than Christ. It can still happen that men's eyes may be fixed upon the herald rather than upon the King of whom he is the messenger. John the Baptist was not in the least to blame for what had happened; but John the evangelist was determined to see that none should shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche." (William Barclay, [John 1 Commentary](#)).

Look down to verses 19-27. Listen how John confirms that he is NOT the light:

19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," ' as the prophet Isaiah said."

24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. 25 And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. 27 "It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."

Did you notice how John piles on the negative in those verses, **“I am not the Christ,” “I am not,” “No,” “I am not worthy.”** In John 3:26-31 we have John's testimony of his relationship to Jesus:

26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified--behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' 29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. 30 "He must increase, but I *must* decrease. 31 "He who comes from above is above

all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.”

Do you see the point? It's NOT about the messenger. It's all about Christ. How easy it would have been for John the Baptist to soak up some of the light shining around Jesus as He came onto the scene. Yet he resisted the glory and made certain that he only reflected Jesus' light to those in spiritual darkness.

God sends human witnesses. It is God's design and purpose for His people that we would testify of Jesus Christ just as it was God's purpose for John that he bear witness of Christ. But it's not about us. It's about Christ. It's fine to give your testimony, but keep the focus on Christ, not on yourself.

We must always point away from ourselves to Christ. We must decrease; he must increase. We are only men sent from God. We are not the Light. We must always make much of Jesus; we must not make much of ourselves. Paul had that same attitude:

“5 Who then is Paul, and who [is] Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” (1 Corinthians 3:5-7).

“5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.” (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Spurgeon said, “There was no light from John except what he reflected from his Lord. All the light comes from Jesus. Every man who comes into the world with any light borrows his light from Christ. There is no other light; there can be no other. He is the “Light of the World.””

Beware of the witness that needs attention for himself. Beware of the preacher who constantly angles to put himself in a good light and returns again and again to his ministry and his achievements. Beware of the preacher's subtle preoccupation with himself even when he speaks of his own flaws. Beware of your own bent to love the praise of men.

So we see the messenger, a man sent from God. And the truth for us is that God is still sending men as witnesses of the Light. 1 Peter 2:9 says as the church **“you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”**

That is the messenger. Secondly we see,

2. The Method – John came to bear witness of the light. (v. 7a)

7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light

Here we see the method of the messenger. He is a witness. In the synoptic gospels we see who John is, but the fourth Gospel we see why he is—his purpose is not primarily to baptize but to serve as a witness of Jesus Christ! In fact 14 times

in the Gospel of John the word *witness* is connected with John (1:7 (3x), 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:26; 5:32–35 (5x), 36).

Notice that He says **"This man came for a witness, to bear witness..."** It is the activity rather than the man that receives the emphasis. We repeatedly see John the Baptist fulfilling his purpose of bearing witness of the Light. John 1:15 nicely summarizes the content of John's testimony - **John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"**

Look down the page further in chapter 1 and we see John's testimony:

John 1:23 he calls Him Lord - **23 He said: "I [am] 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," ' as the prophet Isaiah said."**

John 1:26-27 - **26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. 27 "It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."**

John 1:29-36 - **29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**

30 "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' 31 "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."

32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. 33 "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

35 Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

That is John's testimony. He bore witness of the Light, Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Lamb to takes away the sin of the world. The focus of His witness was the person and work of Christ Jesus. That must always be the focus of our testimony: who Jesus is and what He has done to save sinners. We preach Jesus Christ crucified, raised from the dead, and Lord over all. No other message has the power to save.

So we have seen the messenger and His message. Finally we see:

3. The Motive – The aim of witness is that all might believe. (v. 7b)

Again look at verse 7,

7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

This is John's first use of the verb "believe" (*pisteuo*) which is a major key word in his Gospel as it is used 78 times in the Gospel of John. Remember that to believe in Jesus Christ is the purpose of the Gospel of John as he wrote in John 20:31, **"31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."**

John's whole life pointed to the truth and worth of the One that was to come after him, Jesus. God sent him so that people would believe in Jesus. John witnessed to the truth so we would believe in Jesus. John burned with zeal so that we would believe in Jesus. This gospel was written so that we would believe on Jesus.

Notice it says **"that all through him might believe."** "Through him" refers to John. And you might be thinking, *"Wait a minute, do people believe through a man?"* Yes. People are saved by believing *in* Jesus. But believing *in* Jesus must come *through* a witness. Remember Romans 10:17, **"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."** And three verses before that in Romans 10:14 Paul writes, **"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"**

John Piper says "Believing in the light happens through a witness to the light. There is no other way" ([John Was Not the Light, but a Witness to the Light](#)). Spurgeon said, "Dear friends, if you and I know our real destiny, and are the servants of God, we are sent that men might, through us, believe in Jesus. John was a special witness; but we ought all to be witnesses to complete the chain of testimony. Every Christian man should reckon that he is sent from God to bear witness to the great Light, that, through him, men might believe."

This verse has believe in the subjunctive mood which is the mood of possibility not reality. That ALL *might* believe - This is God's heart! ALL! John is not saying that ALL will believe, but that ALL *might* believe or might be saved! Our great, gracious God **"desires ALL men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."** (1Ti 2:4) Peter says that God is patient **"not willing that any should perish but that ALL should come to repentance"** (2Pe 3:9-note). That is why it is essential that we preach the gospel to everyone—to all. Because anyone might be saved. Anyone might believe. Not all will, but all might. We bear the witness. God does the saving. You don't know who will believe. You don't know whom God will save. So we must bear that witness to everyone.

John's motive, the purpose of his witness is that all might believe.

Keep those three points in mind whenever you have an opportunity to bear witness of Christ. First, God sends human messengers. It is necessary. We must be His witnesses. Second, the message is not about you. Tell people who Jesus is and that He died to save sinners. Our witness is always about Christ and what He has done. Third, seek to bring people to believe in Jesus. Don't just have a nice discussion and leave it at that. Encourage people to put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation before it is too late.