

The apostle John moves on from his introduction in verses 1 – 18 by calling his first witness. He wants to prove to the reader that Jesus is the Christ. John the Baptist is a key witness because of his role in the coming of the Messiah. He was the first prophet in 400 years, and the last Old Testament Prophet. His task was simple. Point people to Jesus – “behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” 21 They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” 22 Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” 26 John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27 It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” 28 These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ 31 I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” 32 John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ 34 I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.

John was an important figure. He had appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The people were anxiously waiting for the coming of the messiah, and John attracted a large following. (Mark 1:2-8)

John’s popularity and teaching alarmed the religious leaders, and they sent a delegation to find out who he was, and why he was saying what he did. The delegation would have been sent by the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, and was made up of priests, Levites, and probably Pharisees (v19, 24).

Their major concern was to find out if he was the Messiah because many people wondered if he was. “Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ” (Luke 3:15). When they approached John in the wilderness they asked him, “who are you?” From John’s reply (v20) we see that he understood them to be asking if he was the Messiah.

Verse 20 is an attempt to translate the Greek into English. John’s answer was adamant. He was upset that they were asking him this same question again. He had already declared that he was not the Christ, and that they needed to repent because the actual Messiah was coming. The testimony of John the Baptist could not be clearer – he was not the Messiah.

In Malachi 4:5 it says, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.” John’s dress of camel’s hair with leather belt, and diet of locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:6) was strikingly similar to the description of Elijah in the Old Testament. When John the Baptist denied he was the Christ, the group sent to question him quickly inquired if he was Elijah then. His response was quick and succinct – no. He was not Elijah from the Old Testament returning to earth.

The inquiring committee had yet another question regarding an individual from prophecy – the Prophet.

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The prophet is found in Deuteronomy 18:15-18 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you...” Again, John’s reply is a terse no. Both Peter and Stephen in the book of Acts apply this passage to Jesus.

The inquiring committee was out of options and finally resorted to “who are you?” They were sent to get an answer and they needed something to report back to the Sanhedrin. In answer, John the Baptist quotes Isaiah 40:3 in reference to himself (v 23). He was simply a voice. His job was to prepare the way of the LORD. This was why he was preaching repentance. In this short reply, he tried to turn the conversation away from himself and toward the Messiah.

Still not satisfied, they wanted to know why he was baptizing if he was not any of the aforementioned individuals. Again, John tries to turn their attention to what was important. He, himself, was not that important. His baptism was only an outward sign of repentance. The one he was witnessing to was greater. Instead of questioning him, they should have been listening to him and seeking the One that he was heralding.

The next day as John was teaching and baptizing, he sees Jesus and makes a very profound declaration. “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In verses 29 – 34 he tells us four things about Jesus.

Jesus is the Sacrifice for Sin (v 29) The Old Testament has many references to sacrificial lambs. Maybe most notable is the lamb sacrificed at the Passover (Exodus 12:1-36). The sacrifices of the Old Testament did not pay for sin, they only represented the need for atonement and pointed to the Lamb to come. Jesus is that lamb, He was crucified on Passover, and His blood is the payment for our sins. 1 Corinthians 15:3 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, **that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**”

Jesus is More Than a Prophet (v 30) John left no doubt that Jesus was superior to him. In fact, he said he was not even worthy of removing the sandals of Jesus – the lowest of tasks. Those who want to limit Jesus to a good teacher or prophet do so in opposition to the clear testimony of Scripture. Why is Jesus greater? Because He is eternal. Although John was physically born first in this world, Jesus “existed before” him.

Jesus was Declared by God to be His Son (v 31-33) John relates the incredible way he knew Jesus is God. God had told him in advance that the One he saw the Spirit descend on at His baptism would be the One. This took place when he baptized Jesus. At that time a voice from heaven declared “this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:13-16). John had seen and heard the testimony of God that Jesus was His Son.

Jesus is God John finishes off his testimony concerning Jesus with the bold statement “I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” John is a true and credible witness to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. He was faithful to the task God had given to him. As the “voice” he boldly declared the coming of the King.

What was the response of those who heard John’s testimony? Verses 35-36 tell us,

³⁵ Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”³⁷ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

What is our response to John’s testimony? Do we believe it as those disciples did? Jesus truly is the Lamb of God. He has paid the penalty for our sin. We only need to ask for forgiveness and believe. John 20:31 says, “but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”



Bible Study Information:

Legislators Only

Next Study: Tuesday, February 20th

Time: 8:00 pm

Location: Perkins in Fort Pierre

