

## Sunday, December 10, 2023 | The Light Has Come

### Week 2 | John 1:6-8 | “The Witness of the Light”

Last week, we started a new series, *The Light Has Come*, in which we'll unpack the prologue of John's gospel. Why? Through those first eighteen verses, we'll learn that the same Light that first illuminated the world was also wrapped in swaddling clothes. And just as He lit up Bethlehem, the Lord shines bright today. John is the only one who starts at the true beginning of Christmas.

And, so far, we've covered the first 5 verses. Jesus, as the Word, was with God and was God before the beginning. And through the Word, God created everything, and through Jesus, all creation holds together. And though the darkness was great, it was not greater than the Light. And if the Word first brought light to our world, he can still enlighten men today. After all, as John showed, is not **the Word of God the light of men**? Then, indeed, just as he was at the dawn of creation, Jesus is the life that humanity needs.

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Last week, we explored the beginning of everything. (Well, to be more precise, we were *before* the start, weren't we?) This week, however, we'll leave the birth of the universe behind and be thrust into a critical point in history. We'll move from talking about the eternal Word to being introduced to a specific person in time: *John the Baptist*. After all, he is one of the main characters in the Christmas story. For instance, before Luke tells us about the baby Jesus, he tells us about the baby John (cf. Lu. 1:5-25). And it turns out the two men were *cousins* (cf. Lu. 1:36)!

In fact, it is hard to ignore how important the Baptizer is to all the gospel writers as each one makes a special mention of him. But, unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John the Apostle strips back the larger-than-life persona of John the Baptist so that we can see who the man was at his *core*.

Before Jesus' cousin was a baptizer or even a preacher, he was a *witness*. He pointed people to the Son of God. And though there will be far more weightier witnesses (e.g., Scripture, Jesus' works, God, etc.), John the Baptist is the *first* to take the stands and testify about Jesus' identity. As such, anyone who bears witness to the Light is another link in the long chain of testimonies that *began* with John.

I want you to notice three things:

- i. The Prophet of the Light (vs. 6)**

**READ:** John 1:6 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

When John the Apostle says "John," is he referring to himself? No. As the rest of the narrative will show, the name "John" in the Gospel of John almost always refers to John the Baptist. And, in a few instances where it doesn't, "John" refers to the Apostle Peter's father (cf. 1:42; 21:15-17).

**SIDENOTE:** The writer of the Gospel of John never once referred to himself as John. So, how can we know that the Apostle John wrote the Gospel of John?

Firstly, though the author of John does not refer to himself as "John," he does refer to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" five times: 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20. In each situation, two things become apparent: "the disciple whom Jesus loved" had to be with Jesus from the beginning and one of the twelve.

Secondly, disregarding modern liberal scholarship (which seems only to regard itself as authoritative), church history is virtually unanimous in ascribing the Gospel of John to John the Apostle.<sup>1</sup> Keener goes so far as to assert that, when compared to the synoptics, "the evidence for Johannine authorship is stronger."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, based on internal and external evidence, this gospel account was written by John the Apostle.

The phrase "sent from God" is an OT phrase that referred to the OT prophets (cf. Ex. 3:13-15; 1 Sam 12:8, 11; 15:1; 2 Sam. 12:1; 2 Ki. 2:2, 4, 6; 2 Chron. 25:15; Psa. 105:17; Isa. 6:8; Jer. 7:25; 26:12, 15; 44:4, etc.). In the synoptics, John was also considered a prophet (cf. Mat. 21:26; Mar. 11:32; Lu. 20:6).<sup>3</sup> Even Jesus himself regarded him as a prophet (cf. Mat. 11:9; Lu. 7:26).<sup>4</sup> Like the prophets in the OT, John was sent *from* God to proclaim a message *for* God. And though prophets were important in their own right, they were the spokespersons of God. As Klink points out, "the emphasis is on the authority of the *sender* [emphasis added]."<sup>5</sup> Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Cambridge, U.K.; Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), p. 68-81.

<sup>2</sup> Keener, Craig S., *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Volume One, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:83.

<sup>3</sup> Kruse, Colin G., *John*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Revised Edition, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2017), p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Köstenberger, Andreas J., *John*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Klink, Edward W., *John*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Academic, 2016), p. 97.

before you go any further, you must understand that our author casts John the Baptist as one of the prophets of the OT. And this man does not speak for himself; he speaks for God.

But, by the end of John's book, we'll realize that the Baptizer is the *last* of the OT prophets. And this was prophesied to happen. In fact, the last two verses of the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament end like this,

**READ: Malachi 4:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. <sup>6</sup> And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

For centuries, the Lord spoke through the prophets. Then, after the prophet Malachi, the voice of the prophets ceased for four hundred years. Thus, you must understand that the Jewish world perked up when John the Baptist came on the scene. The Jews hadn't received a fresh word from the Lord in four generations.

## **ii. The Prophet's mission for the Light (vs. 7)**

**READ: John 1:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.

John's mission—i.e., why God sent him—was to be a "witness" for the Light (e.g., sworn testimony). Ironically, the Baptizer's purpose in life wasn't to baptize; at least from the author's perspective, it was to point people to "the Light." In fact, though there are brief *mentions* of John's preaching/baptizing, there are no *descriptions* of them in this gospel account, such as those that we see in the synoptics.<sup>6</sup> For our author, "John the Witness" would be a much better title for the man than "John the Baptist" since there are repeated references to John's witness and not to how he, incidentally, also baptized people (cf. 1:7-8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:26, 28; 5:33).<sup>7</sup>

Though he is not the only witness in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist is "the paradigmatic"<sup>8</sup> voice that all the other witnesses are contrasted with. And while he is not the most important

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<sup>6</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 33.

witness called to the stands (cf. 5:36), he is the *first*.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, John the Apostle begins to base his account on the testimony from significant individuals. The things this authors will tell us are not hearsay. The most credible witnesses verified the facts.<sup>10</sup> Coincidentally, since John proclaims the truth, for John the Apostle, the Baptizer is the "prototype of Jesus' disciples."<sup>11</sup> In the Baptizer, we ought to find an example to emulate.

Interestingly, the theme of "witness" (also known as the "lawsuit motif") is a big part of John's account (cf. 1:7, 8, 15; 3:11, 26, 28; 8:18; 10:25; 15:27; 18:23, 37; esp. 5:30-47).<sup>12</sup> And when we hear the term "witness," we must understand it in its *official legal sense* in which someone is "testifying or bearing witness to the true state of affairs by one who has fuller knowledge or superior position."<sup>13</sup> In fact, one could argue that the whole book of John is one big trial narrative.<sup>14</sup> But, to be clear, our author is endeavoring to show us that Jesus is not on trial; the *world* is. In pages that follow, John parades one witness after another who all testify to the validity of the Word. Yet, despite some pretty fantastic witnesses (e.g., John the Baptist, the Scriptures, Jesus' works, and even God himself, among others) the world still ends up rejecting Jesus. And, in doing so, they condemn themselves.

The goal of pointing people to Jesus was so that "[all might believe through him](#)," with "[him](#)" referring to John the Baptist. "People are said to believe "in" Christ, not "through" him."<sup>15</sup> The Greek word translated as "believe" is πιστεύω (*pisteuō*). Just as through the Word, "[all things](#)" were created, through the testimony of John the Baptist, God intended that "[all might believe](#)" in the light.<sup>16</sup> And, considering that all four gospels highlight John's ministry, everyone who's ever come to Jesus has John the Baptist to thank.<sup>17</sup> By baptizing Jesus that day, he tipped the first dominion of the gospel movement.

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<sup>9</sup> Carson (1991), p. 120, "The Word in whom inheres the life that is the light of men was first displayed in the public arena of history when a man sent from God bore witness to him."

<sup>10</sup> Morris (1995), p. 80, "Witness establishes the truth."

<sup>11</sup> Keener (2003), 1:391.

<sup>12</sup> Morris (1995), p. 79, points out that "John uses the word [witness] more often than anyone else in the New Testament."

<sup>13</sup> Klink (2016), p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Keener (2003), 1:392-393, quoting Painter, "The World had Jesus on trial, but was unable to produce a valid witness. Jesus' witnesses not only cleared him of all charges; their evidence brought the world under judgement."

<sup>15</sup> Morris (1995), p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 33-34.

<sup>17</sup> Carson (1991), p. 121, " Derivatively, because the Baptist's witness has been bound up in all four canonical Gospels with the beginning of Jesus' ministry, like Abel 'he still speaks, even though he is dead' (Heb. 11:4). All who have ever come to faith are indirectly dependent on his opening proclamation of the identity and saving purpose of Jesus Messiah."

Two observations can be made with John's use of **πιστεύω** (*pisteuō*).

First, though John uses this word close to one hundred times (3xs more than the Synoptics combined), he uses either the *verb* form or the *participle* form. John never uses the *noun* form—i.e., **πίστις** (*pistis*)—in his gospel account.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, *pistis* is often translated as “faith” in your bibles and indicates a *singular* moment (Matt. 8:10; Lu 8:48), whereas *pisteuō* indicates a “relational trust in Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup> To be clear, both words essentially talk about the same subject matter—i.e., the gospel.<sup>20</sup> The faith that saves you is the same that keeps you believing. However, John is concerned with describing a *living* and *active* faith rather than a *static* one. He wants to show that being a believer is a life-long obsession, not just a one-time decision. John wants to illustrate a state of being rather than a class of person.

Second, **πιστεύω** (*pisteuō*) was not only John the Baptist's life goal, but it was also John's. At the end of his book, John says,

**READ: John 20:30-31 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> 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.

Like John the Baptist, John the Evangelist wants his readers to *believe* in Jesus. Why? Because to put your faith in the Son of God means having “**life in his name.**” Eternal salvation is acquired by believing in Jesus Christ and not by doing good works for Jesus Christ. Köstenberger says it this way, “Being a child of God is neither a quality possessed by all nor an exclusive prerogative for Israelites; it is an entitlement for those who believe in the Word.”<sup>21</sup>

### iii. **The Prophet's distinction from the Light (vs. 8)**

**READ: John 1:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but came to bear **witness** about the light.

Why would John need to distinguish John the Baptist from Jesus the Christ? Because many in the first century were impacted by the Baptizer's ministry but didn't yet know that Jesus had

<sup>18</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 34, notes that he does use **πίστις** (*pistis*) in 1 Jn. 5:4; Rev. 2:13, 29; 13:10; and 14:12.

<sup>19</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Morris (1995), p. 81, ““Believe” is not in the continuous tense, and this is perhaps significant. John came to bring people to decide, to make the definitive act of faith.”

<sup>21</sup> Köstenberger, p. 39.

come. For instance, while in Ephesus, Paul encountered disciples of John the Baptist who had yet to be saved (cf. Ac. 19:1-10). But we ought not to disparage John for this. His fame was a part of God's plan. And though he was not the light, he was the lamp (cf. 5:35). And, for the readers of this account, John the Apostle does not want his audience confused. "Just as he brings out the true greatness of John, so he makes clear his limitations."<sup>22</sup>

As the light of Jesus' fame grew, John's diminished. And surprisingly, this made him happy.

**READ: John 3:26-30 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and **all are going to him.**" <sup>27</sup> John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' <sup>29</sup> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The **friend** of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, **rejoices** greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this **joy** of mine is now complete. <sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease."

John is the perfect illustration of humility. He knew his place in this world. The Baptizer knew the part he was meant to play. And, once he was finished, he was content to be forgotten. Though, clearly, no one forgot about John's ministry.

**So, what's the takeaway?**

There is no greater purpose for one's **life** than bearing witness to the **Light**.

**READ: Romans 10:9-15 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without

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<sup>22</sup> Morris (1995), p. 81.

someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Discipleship does not mean the disciple gets the most out of *life*; it means God gets the most out of the *disciple*. It means we are God's witnesses near and far, at home and at work. We are the ambassadors of faith. Just like John, God has but one purpose for our life: to point people to the Light that is Jesus Christ.

## Video Description

### **The Light Has Come | Week 2 | “The Witness of the Light” (John 1:6-8)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:** <https://docdro.id/mtXWLMz>

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