

Being a Witness to the Light

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Date: 30 June 2019

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[0:00] The Gospel of John, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

Again, I'm going to read verses 6 through 8, and then we'll jump down and read verse 15. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

John bore witness about him and cried out, This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? One of my favorite preachers of all time is Charles Spurgeon.

[1:08] In fact, our dog is named Spurgeon. I think that that's a compliment, but at least I would take it as a compliment. Yeah, if I was a dog, maybe.

So Charles Spurgeon is known as the Prince of Preachers. That was his nickname. He was a Reformed Baptist minister of the 19th century and a powerful gospel witness in his time.

In fact, I'd say he was the most powerful gospel witness during his time of ministry in the world. And his influence continues on into this day. So much so that Carl F.H. Henry, one of the great theologians of the 20th century, said of Charles Spurgeon that he was one of evangelical Christianity's immortals.

Because all of his work is going to last, I believe, from now until the time the Lord returns.

Spurgeon's popularity continues to grow even in these days. I'm amazed by how many people I see on Facebook, on social media.

They'll post quotes of Charles Spurgeon. I wonder if they know much about him. But again, his work endures to this day. And he continues to grow in popularity ever since his death.

[2:27] There are so many great stories to tell about Charles Spurgeon and his impactful and powerful ministry. But my favorite story about Charles Spurgeon is the story of his conversion.

The day he was born again. The day he was saved and became a follower of Jesus Christ. That was on January 6th, 1850.

At 15 years of age, Charles Spurgeon was trudging up Hythe Hill in Colchester, England, on his way to church. But there was a blizzard that day.

So keep that in mind next time it rains on Sunday morning. These people were walking to church in the blizzards. But the snow was falling so much so that he couldn't go any further to the church where he was going to go worship that morning.

So he turned the corner and made his way into a small, primitive, Methodist church on Artillery Street. Spurgeon told the story of his conversion hundreds of times.

[3:38] And I want to share with you his own words of, I believe, his most vivid recollection of that day. He said, But I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning when I was going to a place of worship.

When I could go no further, I turned down a court and came to a little primitive Methodist chapel. In that chapel there might be a dozen or fifteen people. The minister did not come that morning.

Snowed up, I suppose. Snowed up, I suppose. And so a poor man, a shoemaker, a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. He was obliged to stick to his text for the simple reason that he had nothing else to say.

The text was Isaiah 45, 22. Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth. He did not pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter.

There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope in that text for me. He began thus. My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed.

[4:50] It says, Look. Now that does not take a great deal of effort. It ain't lifting your foot or your finger. It's just look. Well, a man need not go to college to learn to look.

You may be the biggest fool and yet you can look. A man may not be worth a thousand a year to look. Anyone can look. A child can look.

But this is what the text says. Then it says, Look unto me. And he, in broad Essex, Spurgeon says, said, Many of ye are looking to yourselves.

No use looking there. You'll never find comfort in yourselves. Then the good man followed up his text in this way. He said, Look unto me. I am sweating great drops of blood.

Look unto me. I am hanging on the cross. Look, I am dead and buried. Look unto me. I rise again.

Look unto me. I ascend. I am sitting at the Father's right hand. Oh, look to me.

[5:50] Look to me. When he had got about that length and managed to spin out ten minutes, he was at the length of his tether. Then he looked at me, Spurgeon says, under the gallery.

And I dare say with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. And then he said, Young man, you look miserable. Well, I did. But I had not been accustomed to have remarks made of my personal appearance from the pulpit before.

However, it was a good blow struck. He continued, And you will always be miserable. Miserable in life. Miserable in death. And if you do not obey my text, you will be miserable.

But if you obey this now, this moment, you will be saved. And then he shouted as only a primitive Methodist can. Young man, look to Jesus Christ.

There and then, Spurgeon says, the cloud was gone. The darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun. And I could have risen that moment and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ.

[7:06] It's awesome. I like to go back to Midwestern, where I went to seminary. It's an opportunity also to be able to go home. And there at Midwestern, they actually have Charles Spurgeon, his library.

Hundreds of thousands of books that they have on display. The man read a lot. And so I like to go there for different pastors' conferences. And before my good friend Nathan Gunter was called to the mission field, we used to like to go together.

And one of the things that entertained us was looking at the current student body and how much they all looked the same. They all looked the same.

They all had rolled up jeans, you know, colorful socks, brown leather shoes with bright colored shoelaces, jackets with leather patches on the elbows, shirts with leather patches on the elbows, haircuts that were all styled in the same way, long beards that were well manicured and oiled.

And they all just looked the same. And so we would kind of laugh at this, and we would think, you know, why do they do this? And I think a lot of times in the church people do this because they think that the importance is more laid upon the shoulders of the messenger than it is on giving the message.

[8:37] I think a lot of times people in church put greater emphasis for effective evangelism on who the messenger is and what the messenger looks like rather than they do on the message itself that saves sinners.

Notice that when Spurgeon gave his testimony of the day he was saved, he says very little about the man who shared the gospel with him. The only things he remembers about that messenger was how unimpressive that messenger was because it was the message that saved him.

So understand, you cannot, I cannot save anyone. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. And you don't have to be named Billy Graham or Adrian Rogers or Charles Spurgeon in order to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ and be used by him to bring unbelievers to salvation.

Mark 4, 26-29. Jesus is sharing a parable, I think, that illustrates this very clearly for us. And he said, the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

He sleeps and he rises night and day and seed sprouts and grows. He knows not how. The earth produces by itself first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear.

[10:08] But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come. So in this parable, the sower is the evangelist, the messenger, and the seed is the message.

It's the gospel. It's the good news of Jesus Christ. Notice that Jesus gives little detail about the messenger in that passage. Very little detail about the sower. There are no adjectives that he used to describe him.

His style, his appearance, or his skill. How did he throw the seed? It doesn't say just that he tossed the seed. He's just a regular person. Scattering seed.

That's what Jesus wants us to see. Our job is to share the gospel. We scatter seed. Then we go home. And we go to bed. And then it's the Holy Spirit who we trust to do all the rest.

It's the Spirit of God who raises souls from death to life. Not the methods or techniques of the messenger. You don't have to fit into a certain kind of mold or style in order to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ in this world.

[11:23] John the Baptist certainly did not fit into any mold. I love this description of him in Matthew 3, verse 4 and 6. Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about Jordan were going to him and they were baptized by him in the river in confessing their sins. So this guy, you know, basically he finds a garment made of camel hair.

He cuts a hole out of it, sticks his head through it, gets a belt, and he ties it around. And that's his clothes. Imagine he shows up to a church to interview to be the pastor. He's not going to do very well.

At least based upon appearances, we think, who is this wild guy? Who is this crazy person? And he eats locusts and honey, which I also think is gross. Not a diet that I would want to consume.

But it's not about the appearance. It's about the message. In fact, if it was about the appearance, we would see a lot of people in our church, when we go out and do engaged type events, instead of wearing red shirts, we wear camel hair clothes, and we would eat locusts and honey for lunch, right?

[12:39] If that's what it was about, if that's what effective evangelism required, but it does not. We are commanded to do this. Jesus, like John, also didn't fit the mold.

Martin Lloyd-Jones, another great English pastor, after Spurgeon's time, said, Our Lord attracted sinners because He was different. They drew near to Him because they felt that there was something different about Him.

And the world always expects us to be different. This idea that you are going to win people to Christian faith by showing them that, after all, you are remarkably like them is theologically and psychologically a profound blunder, he says.

So while you don't have to be anyone but yourself to be used by the Holy Spirit of God to bring sinners to salvation by bearing witness to the gospel, you must still be a willing participant in this.

This isn't a task for some Christians to do. This is a calling. This is a command from our Lord for all Christians everywhere to do. Look.

[13:52] Matthew 28, 16-20. After our Lord's resurrection, these are His words to His disciples that are looking on. He says to them, now to the eleven disciples who went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them, and they saw Him and they worshipped Him there, but some doubted and Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.

Go. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

So understand, this is not merely a suggestion from our Lord. He's not asking us to do some kind of a favor for Him. This is a commandment.

We are commanded to go. We are commanded to share the Gospel. We are commanded to make disciples. We are commanded to baptize them and then to teach them to observe all that Christ has taught us.

We can accomplish this great task because we have this great promise from Him that as we do it, He will be with us every step of the way.

[15:14] This is the vision for our church. Why do we post that logo with the four E's whenever we go out and do outreach on our building, on all of our different materials, because this is what we are hoping to accomplish.

This is the vision, engaging, enlightening, encouraging, equipping, bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in hopes that we will make disciples.

And that vision, I should say, only becomes a reality when we are invested in that work together.

Not just one or two of us or a handful of us, but all of us.

So here's the main idea for this morning's message. Christians, bear witness about Christ and hope that all might believe in Him and that Christ will be exalted.

In these verses, God provides us with three truths about our witness that He, and He does throw through the example of John the Baptist.

[16 : 17] And John the Baptist is often overlooked in the Bible, but he shouldn't be because, as a matter of fact, He's the pivot of biblical history. Biblical history pivots on Him.

In Luke 16, verse 16, Jesus said that the law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Meaning that John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and therefore the last of the representatives of the old order.

John was the herald of Christ. He was the forerunner of Christ. He prepared the way for His coming and He earned the praise of our Lord for doing just that.

Jesus says of Him in Matthew 11, among those born of women there are not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist. And so in these verses we have an outline of what made the witness of John the Baptist so effective.

And this is important because through it we too can learn how to be effective as we bear witness in this world for our Lord.

[17 : 26] And so the first thing we see is that there is a necessity for our witness. There is a necessity of our witness. Again in verse 6 it says there was a man sent from God whose name was John.

In verses 1 through 5 which we've covered over the past few weeks we've been introduced to Jesus as the eternal everlasting Word of God the Creator the Sustainer and Source of Life and Light.

He is fully God. He is fully man. And now here all of a sudden we're introduced to a mortal man with a common name. All it says is there was a man and his name was John.

The most important thing about this man wasn't anything to do with himself but the fact that he was sent from God.

God has chosen to spread the Word of the life and the light in Christ and he has chosen to spread that Word through the witness of human beings.

[18 : 38] again John the author of this gospel the apostles said the Holy Spirit is the author but you understand what I mean. These things are written that you might believe he says in John 20 verse 31 again who wrote these things inspired by the Holy Spirit a man John wrote these things because he was a chosen witness of Christ to write about these things.

when Jesus prays in John 17 notice how he foresees that people will come to faith and salvation in him. He says there beginning in verse 18 as you sent me into the world so I have sent them into the world and for their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth.

I do not ask for these only but also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may all be one just as you Father are in me and I in you and they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

God has decided that human beings who bear witness to Christ will be the means by which every person who comes to faith will come to faith in Christ.

Let me ask you a couple questions. Those of you who know Christ as your Lord and Savior who is the person that shared the gospel with you? Do you remember that person? Who was the person who shared the gospel with you?

[20 : 10] How do you remember that person? I remember who it was for me and I was thankful to grow up in the church where I had a lot of people wanting and willing to share the gospel with me but I remember the first time that I came to faith in Christ it was through my Sunday school class and my Sunday school teacher this woman's name was Elmo Ross.

Elmo was single she'd never been married she grew up on the farm she was missing half a finger because of a farm accident so all of us boys automatically like she had points with us right because she's cool and she's tough but she was sweet and she loved the Lord and she knew her Bible and she taught it well nothing super special about her but just the fact that she was a willing messenger sent from God to take on a class with a bunch of rambunctious boys and she loved us and she told

us about Jesus John Piper says the word and the life and the light are coming into the world but they are not going to conquer this darkness the way a bolt of lightning brightens the night they are going to conquer by lighting millions of cold dead human torches with the oxygen of the gospel and the mysteriously spontaneous combustion of the new birth and that gospel will come through human witness just as God sent Jesus his son to bear witness to him so he also sends us to bear witness to his son

Romans 10 14-15 tells us how necessary our witness is how then will they call on him whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching 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 so understand this and my hope one of my hopes that will result from this sermon is that you do not see your witness as a chore but as something that we get to do this is a privilege this isn't the only way that God could have chosen to spread the gospel but he chose this way I believe so that we can take part in the joy of being used by him to share the gospel and to see the Holy Spirit bring that person from death to life and so we need two things to keep in mind as we witness as we do this first of all that we serve a God who saves he has provided the foundation for our salvation in Jesus

Christ and so again we trust not in our methods or our charisma or our cleverness or our abilities to argue but in the finished work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection on the third day from the grave the gospel is such a deep and profound message yet it's so simple that children can share it with one another and believe we've got to trust that we serve a God who saves and also we've got to understand that we serve a God who sends God is at work today sending his witnesses throughout the world and using them as his means to communicate the gospel John the Baptist's main identity in this text is that of a witness it says that he came as a witness to bear witness that's who he was he was sent by God as a witness to the light and God continues to do the same thing today he uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things and let me tell you this

God is sending you he's sending you you may you may not know where he's sending you but he is sending you to share the gospel with someone and his sending you doesn't mean that he's calling you to pack up your stuff and move to Africa or Europe or someplace like that he is sending you into your place of work in your neighborhood in the schools wherever he has you to go he is sending you as his missionary as his ambassador and so it's my hope for all of us like Isaiah when we see this our response to our Lord is here I am here I am Lord send me don't let it be somebody else let it be me I want to be the one that you use to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ God has saved you and he's called you to bear witness for him and what he's done for you that's not a chore that's a privilege the first truth about our witness is that it is necessary the second truth about our witness is that it serves a great purpose the purpose of our witness found in verse 7 he came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him and that him is speaking of John the Baptist might believe through his testimony of the great him

[25 : 47] Jesus Christ believing in the light happens through a witness to the light there is no other way two things then we must know about the purpose of our witness first of all we give testimony of Christ who are we witnessing to what are we witnessing about Jesus Christ Romans 10 17 so faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ again this is the goal of John's gospel that he says that believing you may have life in his name our witness is necessary because without our witness no one hears this isn't a testimony about someone who simply helped you get through a difficult time in your life this is a testimony about someone who has completely transformed your life who transferred you from darkness to light who purchased your salvation with his death and who sealed it with his resurrection our testimony our witness to

Jesus isn't given in the same way that we would testify or tell someone about a good restaurant that we've eaten at or a good movie that we've seen or a good book that we've read this is urgent people need to hear it we give testimony to Christ we give testimony to all God sends us to all people all kinds of people because he saves all kinds of people I love in Revelation 7 we get a peek into heaven and what it will be like when all of those who have come to faith in Christ will be worship him look at the description in Revelation 7 9 and after this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages and they were standing together before the throne before the lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands this past week I went to get my hair cut and I usually go to my barber who's right over here but he's not open on

Monday and last week was a busy week because the only opportunity I had to get a haircut was on Monday so I went to a different place to have my hair cut and I'll confess to you to look around a second that the lady cutting my hair I didn't think would be the type of person who would want to hear anything about Christ or want to have anything to do with his church and it always comes for me that when you're getting your hair cut there's that you know that banter I'm not great at banter but I know that you know I'm always going to be asked so what do you do and that's always my opportunity I'm ready for it I'm a pastor here it comes right and so she asked so what do you do and I was ready and so I told her and I started talking to her about our church and she started talking to me about how she used to go to church and she hasn't been to church in a long time and so I invited her to come to our church that's why

I had to make sure that I was going to call an audible if I invited her to come to our church and you know what she was receptive to that she said okay and she said where is it so I told her and then at the end she said okay so where your church is the one behind Soho right and I said yeah she's like okay well sometimes I have to work on Sunday but do you have church on Sunday night and I said yeah we do and so she told me that she was going to come here and it was a lesson for me that God is in the business of saving all people and all types of people even the ones that we are so shamefully quick to think to be excluded from his kingdom because here's the thing everybody we are all unworthy of what God has done for us and if God were truly to be fair then in fairness he would allow us all what we want born sinners he would give us the sin that we seek and the consequences of that which would be eternity separated from him we're all unworthy of what God has done for us on June 2nd minutes before minutes I should say after he finished his sermon David Platt was notified that Donald Trump the president of the United States was on his way at that moment to his church and he would be there in minutes and he would like for him David Platt to pray for him so David Platt not only did he do that but he also along with another staff member took the president aside and gave him a clear presentation of the gospel and you know that he received a lot of flack for that from his congregation a lot of people were really mad that he would allow the president into their church and that he would allow him on stage and that he would pray for him so much so that

[31:28] David Platt sent out a letter to his church an explanation of why he did what he did I want to read to you his explanation part of it he said as I said in the sermon today Christ alone unites us I love that we have over 100 nations represented in our church family including all kinds of people with varied personal histories and political opinions from varied socioeconomic situations it's clear in our church that the only reason we're together is because we have the same king we adore worship fear and follow with supreme love and absolute loyalty and his name is Jesus that's why he said as soon as I heard this request backstage the passage from God's word that came to my mind was 1st Timothy 2:1 through 6 which says first of all then I urge that supplications prayers intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people for kings and for all who are in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way this is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our

Savior who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth for there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men the man Jesus Christ who gave himself as a ransom for all which is the testimony given at the proper time then he continues in his response he says based on this text I know that it is good and pleasing in the sight of God to pray for the president so in that moment I decided to take the unique opportunity for us as a church to pray over him together my aim was in no way to president and other leaders who govern in the way this passage portrays and so let me tell you the only reason anyone would have to be upset with David Platt praying over the president and sharing the gospel with him is because they've elevated their feelings and their opinions over the commands of scripture and there's too much of that going on in the church today and let me tell you this too if it had been

Barack Obama if it had been Nancy Pelosi or if it had been AOC the expectation should still be the same when it comes to the eternal destiny of immortal souls nothing nothing should get in the way of our sharing the gospel with them to all people my hope and my prayer is that this church better reflects the church of Jesus Christ that we see pictured in Revelation chapter 7 the gathered assembly of people from all tribes all peoples all languages and it should be yours too our witness is necessary it has a purpose and our attitude in it is important the attitude of our witness verses 8 and 15 he was not the light verse 8 but came to bear witness about the light verse 15

John bore witness about him and cried out this was he of whom I said he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me so we have to have the right attitude when we do this and so here's a couple things to remember as we witness first of all we are not the hero of our testimony when you're witnessing are you talking more about yourself or Jesus are you through your witness giving more glory to yourself this is who I was I was looking I am doing so good or are you giving Jesus the credit and the glory for that we aren't the hero when we witness in fact we should think little of ourselves it's about Christ and so secondly we are to humbly acknowledge the supremacy of Christ in all things especially to ourselves John 3:26 through 27 some of John the Baptist's disciples have come to him and by this time his ministry is winding down and Jesus is picking up and they notice that more people are going to Jesus' disciples for baptism than they are coming to him right and we see that church competition was even a thing back in these days so his disciples came to John the Baptist and they said to him!

[36:26] he who is going to him our church is getting smaller what do we do John answered a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven and then in verse 30 he says he must increase speaking of Christ and speaking of himself he says but I must decrease and man maybe that be the prayer of every follower of Jesus Christ he must increase and I must decrease yesterday was the international I guess you call it day of the martyr the voice of the martyr does June 29th because that's the day we believe the apostle Paul was martyred and so a neat thing that they're doing and we're blessed to have Jeremy Burton and others in our church who are involved with

VOM and the work that they do is great work and I was touched yesterday as they did a ceremony they have a wall there where they induct different martyrs Yesterday they inducted a family the Grunewald family who none of you I'm sure if you hadn't seen those videos I didn't you wouldn't have any idea who these people were 12 years ago this family left South Africa and they went to Afghanistan after 9-11 as missionaries and Hanali the wife was away from the house when members of the Taliban rushed in and they shot and killed her husband and her two teenage children her son and her daughter and they set the building on fire and I hear testimonies about that and I hear her talking about how she knows that God has a plan and God has a will and how she's faithful despite going through a pain that I couldn't imagine being worse living the rest of your life without your husband and your children murdered in such a brutal way and I hear those testimonies and then I look at myself and I look at our church and I look at the church in the United States of America and I think what are we doing and I get so tired of playing church don't you we come into this place and we think about ourselves we think about how comfortable our pews are how long is the message going to be will I get to the restaurant before the Methodists do we think about the different people that we are at odds with maybe we have disagreements about different things that don't matter in the long run there are people who are going out called into the mission field and they are willing to make the ultimate price for Christ who gave his life who paid the ultimate price for us and so I'm tired of bickering and thinking about personal preferences and things that in the long run they just don't matter at all so my goal here

I hope along with your goal as your pastor my goal is not to return this church to where it used to be ten years from now or before or whatever the case may be I want you to know that my goal isn't numerical my goal is to be a witness for Christ here not to play church but to get serious about what he's called his church to be serious about doing and I hope that you have the same goal and I promise you that if we share that goal there will be results and there will be the kinds of results that we will give great glory and honor to our Lord and Savior for I will tell you if you're here this morning and you've heard witness to the light Jesus came to us he lived a perfect sinless life for us because all of us fall short of God's glory all of us have sinned and fall way short and left to ourselves we would choose our sin over

God and we would spend our eternity in hell forever as a result but God in his grace sent his son who lived for us who died on the cross for our sins and yes the pain of the cross was excruciating but what was most excruciating for him our sins the shame and the guilt that we should have to bear for all of eternity he bore it on the cross in our place and he died for us on the third day he arose from the grave as proof that this was not some mere mortal man that this was the God man this was the son of God and as his resurrection sealed our salvation it proved that his sacrifice was sufficient and he's ascended he intercedes on our behalf today he sits at the right hand of the father but he's coming back are you ready for that do you know him do you believe in him as

[42:23] Lord and Savior Thank you.