

The Testimony of John

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[0 : 0 0] But let me start by asking maybe or making, I think it's a little bit cheeky, but some of you in this room will remember the 1960s.

Okay. Is that okay to say that? That's not too cheeky. But the reason I say that, some of you won't, but the reason I say that is one of the things that marked off the 1960s was a thing called the space race.

That is, the NATO and Soviet forces were in a race to see who could get a man or a person into space. The Soviet Union won that race.

On the 12th of April, 1961, they launched cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin into space. Other people at the morning services said, yeah, we remember it was the biggest thing ever when that happened.

And when Gagarin returned to Earth, he said this. He said, I looked and looked and looked, but I didn't see God. Shortly after Gagarin landed, Premier Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier, he said, we sent a man into space and Gagarin was there, but didn't see any God while he was up there.

[1 : 1 3] You see, they thought that if you fly far enough into the heavens, eventually you'll see God. You'll see his face or something like that. They thought that God was inside this universe, inside this creation.

He's just waiting for you to fly up and discover him. It's a really common mistake because God is not inside our universe. He's not inside this creation.

He's the creator. He's outside of it. We cannot find him through a spaceship or we can't find. He's not on an island in the Pacific waiting to be discovered.

He's outside of our space and time. And that means that if you want to know anything about God, he has to reveal himself to us. He has to break in to our creation, our space and time and tell us about himself.

And that's what the first 18 verses of John's gospel do, the prologue. They say that God's son, Jesus, he makes God known to us.

[2 : 2 2] He reveals us, reveals him to us. He tells us what his father is like. He speaks to us about what God wants from us.

That's why John calls Jesus the word. You can see that. Have a look over at John chapter 1 verse 1. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Have a look down at verse 14. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father.

You see, if you had a time machine and not a rocket ship, you could go back in time and see Jesus dwelling among us. I'm not sure Jesus was ginger like on the kids video, but there was a time where you would be able to see the word made flesh, the word dwelling among us.

It was about 2000 years ago. And as Jesus walked around earth, he was wording to us what his father was like.

[3 : 36] And so if the prologue claims, the first 18 verses, if that claims that Jesus makes God known to us, our passage today, verse 19 to 34, it answers the question, says who?

Says who? Upon whose authority? And I put that question at the top of your handout. You see, every religion in the world makes the same claim.

Every religion claims to have a person from God or some news from God that they have got the right insight. And so it's right then that we ask the question, says who?

Upon whose authority do you make that claim? So Muhammad looked inside a cave and then claimed to have knowledge of God. Says who?

A Buddha looked inside himself and then claimed to have knowledge of absolute reality. Oh yeah, upon whose authority? Atheism looks to reason and science for enlightenment.

[4 : 43] Says who? Upon what basis of authority do we make the major decisions of our lives? Is it Western middle class morals? That's the ideal, isn't it?

Says who? And I love the transparency of Christianity here. Because even the Bible must answer the says who interrogation.

So the prologue claims Jesus is the only way to know God. Our passage answers says who? And that's because in our passage today what we have is a courtroom. It's a courtroom scene where John is in the eyewitness box.

He's in the dock. Just to help us, there are two Johns. So there's John, our author, and there's John the Baptist. They're two different Johns. I'll call them the author and the Baptist just for the sake of clarity in the sermon.

But the Baptist is in the witness box. He's giving us his testimony. You can see that. Have a look at the beginning of our reading, verse 19. Now this was John's testimony.

[5 : 50] Have a look at the very end of our reading, verse 34. I have seen and I testify. Our passage is top and tailed with testimony, testimony.

Verse 32 as well. Verse 32. Then John gave this testimony. But what I want to do just for a couple of seconds, I want to show you a whistle-stop tour of our passage.

And I want to show you all the testimonial markers in our reading. So here we go. I'll go quite quickly through them. Verse 19. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him.

Verse 20. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely. Verse 21. They asked him. He said. He answered. Verse 22.

They said. 23. John replied. Verse 24. Now the Pharisees who'd been sent. Verse 25. They questioned him.

[6 : 51] Verse 26. John replied. And finally, verse 28. This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan where John was baptizing. And my point is this.

All these little details, they seem really irrelevant and they don't really seem like they've got much significance. But what they show us is that we are getting an eyewitness testimony about what is happening then.

Lawyer friends of mine, they say that this is the sort of stuff they deal with every day. And that's because Christians are realists.

If you're a Christian, we are realists. Unlike other claims about God, our claim about God is based on real eyewitness testimony.

Real historical events. Real checkable interactions. Realistic testimony. And what we'll see today and in this series in John's Gospel is actually eyewitness testimony.

[7 : 53] That Jesus is the Word made flesh. That he makes his Father known. That by believing in him, we will have life in his name.

And so my aim today is this. My aim is that we would believe the Baptist's testimony. That Jesus is in another category altogether. That he has God's authority.

That's a bit of a mouthful. So let me say it again. My aim is that we would believe the Baptist's testimony. That Jesus is in another category altogether.

That he has God's authority. And so there's a handout there, which you should all have in your inserts. That will tell you where I'm going. And that will help you as we go through today.

So we're going to start by looking at the Baptist. And then we're going to move on to look at the Messiah. So the Baptist first. And one thing we miss about John the Baptist, which, I mean, we all know who he is.

[8 : 51] But one thing we miss about him, he was the most famous person alive. We always miss that fact. And let me show you what I mean. So in Matthew and Mark's Gospels, they both tell us that people from all over the city of Jerusalem, all through the whole country of Judea, and all the surrounding countrysides, came out to see and be baptized by John.

Our passage in verse 28 says that he started baptizing in Bethany. But by the time you get to chapter 3, there's a really interesting detail in chapter 3, verse 32.

And it says, John is baptizing up north near the Sea of Galilee because there was more water there. That means that there was not enough water in the River Jordan to baptize the people that were coming out.

He had to move north into the Sea of Galilee where there was enough water. Tens of thousands of people came out to receive his baptism. There's a secular historian called Josephus.

He wrote in the first century. He says this, Many people came in great crowds to see John the Baptist. Clearly, he's an international celebrity.

[10 : 06] But actually, he's bigger than that. Because listen to the words of Jesus himself. This is Jesus speaking about the Baptist in Luke. He says that among those born of women, by the way, that's everyone, just in case you don't know the birds and the bees.

Among those born of women, everyone, no one is greater than John the Baptist. Isn't that remarkable? They're the words of Jesus. That means not King David, not King Solomon, not Moses, not Elijah, not Elisha, not Noah, not even Abraham is greater than John the Baptist.

And if the Baptist were alive today, he would be all over the news, all over social media, of course. Everywhere he went, there'd be hysteria.

He's the Pope. He's the Dalai Lama. He's Billy Graham. He's Tim Keller. He's all the prophets all rolled into one man. And so it's no wonder in verse 19, the stir he causes.

Have a look with me. Now, this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. I think this is remarkable what happens next.

[11 : 22] All the esteem that we've just sort of heaped on him, he directs the attention to someone even greater. Verse 20. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely. I am not the Messiah.

That is, I am not God's long-awaited king. The ruler of all the nations. No, no, that's not me, says John. Verse 21.

Then who are you? Are you Elijah? You see, one like Elijah was coming to call God's people back to him. No, no, that's not me either. Or are you the prophet?

Verse 21. One like a Moses figure was supposed to come to perform another exodus to rescue God's people. No, no, that's not me either, says the Baptist.

And it must have been really frustrating for the Pharisees. Imagine if you asked me, who are you? Who are you? Who are you? And all I say is, look, I'm not Andrew Price, and I'm not Mark Chu, and I'm not, you know, Tim Smith.

[12 : 26] Really frustrating. And finally they said, verse 22. Who are you? Give us a break, John. Just give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?

And so he replies, verse 23. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness. Make straight the way for the Lord.

John is quoting Isaiah 40, which was our Old Testament reading, which Mark gave us. I preached on this about a month ago, but here is a two-second recap. See, God's people were all under judgment.

They had been for a really long time, and they were about to go off into exile because of their sin. But into that chaos and disaster, God, or Isaiah, prophesies a word of comfort, comfort.

God himself is coming to rescue you. Rescue from sin and rescue from this world. And Isaiah says that this new age of rescue will start when you see a voice of one crying in the wilderness.

[13 : 37] Make straight the way of the Lord. God himself will come, like a king, with a great processional highway, rescuing his people from the spiritual wilderness.

John says, don't be excited by me. I'm only that voice. All I do is prepare the way for the Messiah. And so verse 24.

Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, why then do you baptize if you're not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? He says, I baptize with water.

See, all I can do is wet you. I'm really great at dunking you in the water. If that's what you want, then I'm happy to do that for you. I'm great at wetting you. He says, but among you stands one you do not know.

He's the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie. Back in their culture, feet were off limits. You could imagine no sealed roads, dusty, just dust everywhere and dirt, camels and horses and donkeys all over the place, Middle Eastern sun, feet were off limits.

[14 : 53] Not even, Jews would not even allow Hebrew slaves to sort out their sandals. They would get Gentile immigrants to do it for them. The Baptist says, you think I'm a big deal?

There is one standing among you now, and I am beneath the person who's able to touch his feet. Here is the great man, the Baptist.

Uncomfortable to speak about himself, because he'd rather point to the one who's standing among them now, the Lord Jesus. And so we're going to look at Jesus now.

This is point number two. We're going to move from the Baptist to the Messiah. Verse 29. The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, or behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

And that's a really interesting turn of phrase, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Again, the Baptist has in mind Isaiah. Chapter 53 of Isaiah, famous chapter.

[15 : 59] It says that God has a unique servant who will be pierced for our transgressions. Famous verses. Who will be crushed for our iniquity.

This servant will somehow be led like a lamb to the slaughter. Because the Lord will lay on him the iniquity or sin of us all.

John says, Behold, the Lamb of God. Here he is. The time is now. I think also, John has in mind the idea of the Passover. Remember the Passover from Exodus.

Just quickly, in Exodus, Israelite families would have to sacrifice a spotless lamb. They'd put the blood on the lintels and the doorposts.

When God's judgment came near the house, it would see the blood of the lamb and pass over, move on to the next house. And with the lamb, you couldn't use the runt of the litter.

[16 : 59] You weren't allowed to use a lamb that got caught on the barbed wire in the back paddock. It had to be a perfect lamb. Also, each household had to have their own lamb.

One lamb had only enough blood for one household. And so let me ask you then, how spotless and how large must a lamb be to take away the sin of the world?

Where do you find a lamb like that? Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is the Baptist's testimony.

And in these verses, have a listen to how many times the Baptist, as great as he was, pushes the attention towards the Messiah. So verse 29, look, the Lamb of God, don't look at me, I'm just a voice.

He is God's Isaiah 53 rescuer. Verse 30, this is the one I meant when I said, a man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

[18 : 05] This bit's just a little bit tricky, but what he's saying is Jesus surpasses or outranks the Baptist even though he's younger than him, even though he arrives on the stage of history after him.

And the reason why is because he was before John. That is, he was preexistent because in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

That is who Jesus is. Verse 31, John says, I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

You see, John baptizes with water to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival. people. Some of you, again, here I am being cheeky, so please forgive me.

Some of you might even be able to remember the Queen's first visit to Australia. That was in 1954. Bit cheeky, sorry about that. In 1954, the Queen arrived in Australia for the very first time and you could imagine everywhere the Queen went, every city, imagine the cleanup and the preparation that has to go on for her to, you know, clear out the dirt and the grubbiness and put everything in a pristine condition as you'd expect for a royal visit.

[19 : 25] When I was, when we were living in London, you would see politicians all the time in their big Range Rover driving down the street. You would see the princes, William and Harry quite often as well, but every now and then, just once in a, for me it was once in 10 years, you saw the Queen driving and you know it's the Queen because Her Majesty has the biggest Rolls Royce you have ever seen.

It's got a really huge roof, a surface to air missile wouldn't dent the thing. But the other thing about, the reason you know it's the Queen, apart from the Rolls Royce, is she has 12 white motorcycles, excuse me, and those motorcycles are unmarked and what they do is they travel in a relay ahead of her and they clear the traffic and so the Queen never has to stop at a red light.

It'd be very embarrassing if she's stopping at a red light and one of those guys comes with a squeegee to squeegee her glass and she's like, I don't know, do you take pay pass? Like what? Very embarrassing.

I think it's there probably for security reasons, but those motorcycles, they clear the traffic, they prepare for the Queen's sort of arrival, as you'd expect with a royal visit.

Well, here is John, the Baptist, and he is preparing people for God's Messiah. He's doing it with water baptism. It's a sign of a washing away of the old as they too prepare for a royal visit.

[20 : 57] And then John, in verse 32, he gives this testimony. I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, the man on who you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

And there's an astonishing little detail in those passages there. You see, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would descend on certain people, certain anointed people, such as King David, King Saul, and Gideon, but the Spirit would never remain on them.

It would depart. But for Jesus, you see, not only is he God's Lamb, but God's Spirit remains on him. Hence the Baptist says, verse 34, I have seen and I testify that this is God's chosen one or God's Son.

That is his testimony. The Baptist is the greatest man who can wash us. He points to the greatest man who can baptize us with God's Holy Spirit because it remains on him.

And that is significant because all the water in the Jordan, all the water in the Sea of Galilee, all the water in the oceans, all it can do is get us wet and wash us outside.

[22 : 25] The Bible story up until John tells us we need a washing on the inside. Our hearts are full of sin. No matter what we do on the outside, no matter what Israel tried, eventually they'd sin again.

They need a washing on the inside. Ezekiel, in the Old Testament, it says, Ezekiel says that God's Spirit will come one day and wash your insides.

He will baptize your hearts. And so then John comes to give this testimony. I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And so Jesus never just arrives in the New Testament.

We never should think that Jesus is just there for the very first time. First and foremost, he is the answer to all of the Old Testament promises and expectations. Our author, John, is showing Jesus' connection to the past, to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, to Passover.

And at the start today, we said that all religions claim to have the truth about God. Here is a passage that asks, says who?

[23 : 39] The claims of the Bible must be tested too. Christians are realists. And so the prologue claims that Jesus reveals God to us.

Says who? The Baptist does. This is his testimony. He was the most famous international celebrity. Historically checkable.

Here is his eyewitness account of Jesus' arrival. Oh yeah? Upon whose authority then? Well, God's, of course. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

God's man doing God's work. God himself says halfway through verse 33, the man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

John testifies this is God's chosen one in verse 34. And that means that in the marketplace of claims about God, Jesus is the only one with all of God's authority.

[24 : 49] He is God's man. This testimony shows it to be the case. He's in another category altogether. And so, if you are a Christian, I wonder how the Jesus of your mind compares to the Jesus of history.

How big is your Jesus? You see, a small plastic Jesus that fits nicely in your pocket, that fits nicely in your Sundays, he will only produce a small plastic faith.

A small plastic faith will not keep you standing in a world of suffering and sin. Small plastic Jesus will get lost amidst the other claims for truth about God.

And plastic Jesus certainly won't make true all the blessings of the prologue. Light where there was darkness, adoption as God's children, and most importantly, eternal life.

Only believing in the Jesus of history, the Jesus of this eyewitness testimony, will produce eternal life. And so, for all of us, whether you're a Christian or not a Christian here today, the application for now is to come back next week.

[26 : 13] Come back next week because in this series, our author, John, is going to be giving us an eyewitness testimony about the life of Jesus.

We're going to be seeing courtroom level evidence showing Jesus in action. We'll see water change to wine. Jesus has God's authority.

We'll see a man who's healed after 38 years of paralysis. Jesus has God's authority. We'll see Jesus feed 5,000 people with a small packed lunch.

Jesus has God's authority. We'll see Lazarus raised from the dead. Bin your plastic Jesus. Come every week and meet the real Jesus of history.

You see, other religions will give you arguments and ideas about God, but Christianity is on another level because you don't just get a watertight argument, you get a watertight person.

[27 : 15] Jesus Christ, the Jesus of history, against whom in the end there can be no good argument. So let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are a realist.

we thank you that you provide us eyewitness courtroom level testimony. And so would we come back each week? Help us especially because some of these passages are so familiar to us, we know it all already.

Help us see it for the very first time. Please help us to be amazed by this testimony of you. Please would you move our belief in you down further flaws in our heart.

so we too can have eternal life. We ask it for your namesake. Amen.