

# John 1:19-34

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[ 0 : 00 ] from the book of John, chapter 1, verses 19 through 34. This could be found in the White Bibles on page 982. Again, the scripture reading is John 1, 19 to 34, on page 982 of the White Bibles.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. And this is the testimony of John.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then?

Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? And he answered, No. So they said to him, Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us.

What do you say about yourself? He said, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

[ 1 : 06 ] They asked him, Then why are you baptizing? If you're neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet. John answered them, I baptize with water. But among you stands one you do not know.

Even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The next day, he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.

I myself did not know him. But for this purpose, I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed to Israel. And John bore witness. I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

I myself did not know him. But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the spirit descend and remain is he.

[ 2 : 11 ] This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the son of God. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Well, good morning and welcome to Holy Trinity Church on this beautiful summer day.

If you are new with us or visiting, we are just embarking on the Gospel of John. And we will be in this wonderful work all the way to Advent.

And by then, we will have worked our way through the midway point of the book. So, welcome to one of the great Gospel narratives given to us in the Scriptures.

You know, it is one thing to read in John's Gospel that God can be known, which we saw in week one.

[ 3 : 23 ] It is one thing to read that he has made himself known through Jesus. Although no one had seen him, Jesus made him known as we saw in week two.

But it is quite another thing to simply take John at his word or to be given reasons to think that he might actually be trustworthy.

It is one thing to proclaim, you can know God this morning through Jesus, his son.

It is another thing to be given a presentation that would make that credible. It is one thing to announce something. It is quite different to provide evidence for something.

This is what we are going to be looking at today. It is one thing to just take his word or wait for him to bring forth a witness that might be trustworthy.

[ 4 : 35 ] That is really where the text goes. If I were to call the sermon anything, it would simply be, can I get a witness? You can see it right there at the opening verse, verse 19.

And this is the testimony of John. Or the bookended, verse 34 of our same reading. I have seen and bore witness that this is the Son of God.

The word testimony and the word witness are one and the same. He is both in his person, a noun, a witness.

And through his words, according to what he has seen, a testifier. I guess you could say that we are fortunate.

We are fortunate that we have a gospel writer who understands our needs. If you have never studied the Bible before, you might think that the writers are merely trying to coerce you into belief through what they proclaim to be true.

[ 5 : 48 ] But that is not the case. What we have in the text are writers who are aware of your need for whatever they say about Jesus.

To be rational, reasonable, credible, and that largely on the basis of a witness. You can see the word all the way throughout, can't you?

I hope you have your Bible open. Even back in verse 7, when this man John was named, we saw that he came as a witness. It says there a witness to bear witness.

Verse 8, he came to bear witness. We've seen it in verse 15. John bore witness. And then in our opening verse.

And this is the witness of John. Or by verse 32, John bore witness. And then 34, I have borne witness. So if you're here today wondering whether God can be known, John says yes.

[ 6 : 59 ] If you're here today asking the question, how am I to know he can be known through Jesus? John says, don't merely take my word for it.

Let me provide you an account where witnesses come to the fore, take their stand, give their oath, and you be the judge.

You know, that is the final arbiter on a trustworthy witness. It's the jury. The jury makes a witness trustworthy.

And so here we are. Can this gospel from John, the writer, about Jesus be something that you ought to consider?

And this is the testimony of John, verse 19. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you?

[ 8 : 06 ] Why John the Baptist? Why is John the Baptist the first one on the stand in the gospel narrative?

I could give a lot of reasons. I'll give you five brief reasons that set the table for his witness. First of all, he was the most credible person in the ancient world of the first century.

Josephus himself, the historian, gives three times as much material to John the Baptist as he does to Jesus the Nazarene.

He was well known and well acclaimed. Think about some of the reasons that you and I would find a witness credible. You would have a witness based on their personal knowledge of someone.

And the writing here, even in our text, indicates that John the Baptist met this one named Jesus at least on two occasions.

[ 9 : 16 ] You can even see it there in verse 29. The next day he sees Jesus coming toward him. So he meets him at his baptism. He meets him on another occasion.

He had a personal encounter with Jesus which ought to at least raise him as a credible source for you at whatever minimal level that might be.

But there's more than just his personal, firsthand knowledge of the one he is bearing witness about. John was impeccable in regard to his character.

If you go to a court of law today, the character of a witness is critical to establishing their credibility. Which is why someone who's trying to defend a witness will build up their character.

Somebody who's trying to destroy a case will tear down their character. Because your word is associated with your character. So let me just say a few things about the character of John the Baptist.

[ 10 : 23 ] This was a man who called a spade a spade. And he was well respected across the platform of his day. In other words, he was a person of integrity.

If you were to take up Matthew's account, chapter 3, verse 5, you would see that all the people held him in high esteem. That they were coming to him from everywhere.

All the people were willing to listen to John. If you were to think of Matthew 3, which is a parallel account, you will see that he wasn't afraid to establish his own credibility in the places of power. He took on the religious power brokers. He looked them in the eye and told them to repent and called them a den of thieves. Much the way good journalists will do today who look on at the religious constituencies that lead and need to be told that their activity is not in accord with righteousness and justice.

He also took on the politicians. He was the one who was famous for taking on a marriage at a high level in the government and calling it inappropriate in every respect.

[ 11 : 42 ] In fact, it got him imprisoned. So he could take on religious power. He could take on political power. And yet he was well respected.

Jesus calls him the greatest man that ever walked the earth. John the Baptist was a man of the people, was never a puppet for the powers that be.

In fact, the tax collectors, those who extorted people, we have a city that's infested with aldermen throughout the decades and throughout the wards that are extorting individuals and businesses and taking more than they're supposed to take.

And John the Baptist is one who took on tax collectors. He's also one who looked the military personnel, those who were to serve and protect, and instructed them on how they ought to care for those around them.

So here's a man of impeccable character. His witness, therefore, may be deemed somewhat credible.

[ 12 : 58 ] Let me say more than his personal knowledge of Jesus, the character that he had concerning his own life. This guy has very few liabilities.

Very few liabilities. There's not any dirt to drag up on John the Baptist. You read in the annals of history, there are no ghosts in his closet.

There's one moment when he's in jail that he actually doubts whether Jesus is the one. But that actually adds to his credibility.

He's thinking his way clear. And let me give you one more. He doesn't have a vested interest in Jesus.

Many people would say that John the writer does. In other words, the disciples who walk all the way through life with Jesus have a vested interest after his death to find him to be king or resurrected.

[ 14 : 13 ] But John the Baptist is giving you his testimony today before the death of Jesus, before the announced resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, in the record, he will die before the death of Jesus.

So here's a man without any personally vested interest that would make you think somebody's handling him. Here's a man whose character is impeccable.

Here's a man who had first-hand knowledge. Here's a man where there's no dirt to be drug up. And so it is worth looking then at his testimony.

No wonder the writer brings him forth first. And notice his testimony. 19 to 28 It's a testimony about himself.

First, regarding his identity. Second, regarding his authority. Just look at it with me. Who are you?

[ 15 : 25 ] They asked. And he confessed and did not deny but confessed I am not the Christ.

I mean, even the way the language is put is striking. He's confessing. He's not denying. He's confessing who he is not.

Emphatically. I am not the Christ. I, the one who history will record as perhaps the greatest individual in the first century.

Only afterward to be supplanted by Jesus. History who will look back on him as credible in every respect. He says, I am not the Christ.

Now that means he's not the Messiah. He's not the one the Jewish scriptures looked for to redeem Israel and through Israel bless all the families of the earth.

[ 16 : 24 ] In other words, he's saying, as great as you think I am when you ask me about myself this is what I say. I am not the Christ. And then they ask him, well then are you Elijah?

The reason they bring forth Elijah is of course there was a prophetic word that before the great day of the Lord came Elijah would return. And John the Baptist has no self-awareness that he is fulfilling the function of that call.

Jesus will later call him Elijah, the one promised to come. But in regard to his own self-understanding, he's neither the one who will redeem Israel and rescue the world, nor does he

consider himself to be the one who is marching in front before that day.

At least at this moment he does not. And then they say, well then are you the prophet? Probably a reference all the way back to Moses in Deuteronomy 18 where he, the first prophetic word voice of God for the people, was told by the Lord that God would raise up another prophet after him that all the people would listen to.

So, John's testimony concerning himself as great as he is, as credible as he is, is simply this. I'm not the promised one who rescues the world. I'm not the one who has this Elijah-like manifestation before that day of the Lord.

[18:02] I'm not even the great prophet, the one who would follow one like Moses. And so they say, well then, verse 22, who are you?

And so he moves. Not from who he is not or what he does not understand about who he is to what he does understand.

Look at verse 23. He said, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.

He viewed himself as the voice in Isaiah 40 that prepares Israel for the time when their sins would be removed and their relationship with God would be restored.

He launches his ministry on the back of Isaiah 40 which proclaims that the time for Israel to be paying for her sin is now complete.

[19:14] when you think about the making straight the way of the Lord, if you were to look back into the book of Isaiah, you would be arriving at a moment where the prophet was indicating that after God's people had lost access to God and been carried away through the north, there would be a day when those roads, literally those roads, the highways would be made straight where the people could return to the land and live again in the presence of God.

In other words, in the book of Isaiah with its prophetic and poetic discourse, there is a metaphor that the highways are going to be made straight when the sins of the people will be removed and you and I can know God.

I'm that voice. I'm that voice that in a sense is already metaphorically leveling mountains for the entrance of the Lord.

His identity, a word of readiness for the work of God.

What about His authority? 24 to 28, they'd been sent and they asked Him, why are you baptizing? If you're just a word, if you're just a reed shaking in the wind, if you're neither the Christ nor Elijah, nor the prophet, as verse 25 says, then why or on what grounds are you baptizing people in readiness?

[21:11] and notice what He does. Rather than find Himself on the witness stand and defensively defending His authority before them, He simply takes their question on His authority and turns it into a statement on Jesus' supremacy.

In other words, He says, look, enough about me. No more queries about who I am or on what authority I arrive in your midst.

And rather than defend my authority, I will make a statement on His supremacy. Verse 26, I baptize you with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.

These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. Here is the humility of the witness. Enough about me, he says.

I am not worthy to do the most menial servant like act of kindness when the man of honor comes into the house.

[22:44] I don't consider myself worthy to untie his sandals, wash his feet, put him at his seat.

I would feel that that were a place too elevated for me. Stunning given what you and I have already been told this morning about his greatness.

John, the greatest man who ever lived, unworthy in his own mind to do the simplest task on welcoming the guest of honor.

honor. And then the text moves. From his witness about himself to what he has to say about Jesus. 29 through 34. I'll give it to you in three simple movements. This is what he has to say about Jesus. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[23:52] He does it by way of title. Behold, the Lamb of God. And then on the back side, Behold, the Son of God. What does he mean by Lamb of God?

And this idea of taking away the sins of the world. What does John conceive that title and that task to be?

The common Christian reading of the text is to implant some prophetic awareness of Hebrew scriptures such as Isaiah 53 where there is a suffering servant who in a sense is sacrificially offered up for the sins of many.

In other words, he makes atonement for sins. But it seems difficult to conceive at this moment in John's life that he would have that strong of an awareness that this Jesus is the fulfillment of all that Isianic promise even even though he saw his own ministry bursting forth from Isaiah 40.

It's certainly possible. It's certainly possible that what you have here is really a prophecy, a prophetic word beyond his own understanding implanted by the Spirit wherein he was able to interpret all of the Old Testament scriptures concerning a Passover lamb.

[ 25 : 43 ] And now he attaches it to Jesus. Concerning a lamb that was led out of the city for the atonement of sins and he attaches it to Jesus. Concerning a triumphant lamb and he attaches it to Jesus.

Concerning the suffering servant and he attaches it to Jesus. Or perhaps he has something else in mind. There are other Jewish writings that predate the death of Jesus and the Christian interpretation of his sacrifice for our sins.

There are other writings such as 1 Enoch where there is this Jewish literature that speaks of God's people like sheep being run down by ravens sins with a defenselessness to them until one in their midst grows a horn a sheep strong enough to defend and in a sense take away the sin of the unbelieving world that's persecuting God's people who are in need of God's reclamation.

or the literature of something like the testament of Joseph the twelve patriarchs upon which there are Jewish writings engaged with their life.

Listen to this quote from the testament of Joseph concerning a lamb of God. He writes and I saw in the midst of the horns a virgin wearing a many woven garment and from her came forth a lamb and on his right was as it were a lion and all the beasts and all the reptiles rushed against him and the lamb overcame them and destroyed them.

[ 28 : 01 ] In other words there's a complete body of literature that viewed the lamb of God in the Jewish context as the one who would remove sin the kind of sin that was oppressing people.

Now which one it is here I don't know but either way you look at it this is what he is bearing witness of that in Jesus you have one that is likely associated with the Jewish deliverer who would remove sin evil wickedness he would take it away now later through John's apostolic witness understood to be the Passover lamb lamb the one who not only removes sin from the world but takes your sin upon himself this is his testimony about Jesus that he is one it says in verse 30 after me comes a man who ranks before me because he was before me the lamb of

God the victorious warrior lamb that's what he wants you to consider he's bearing witness that you and I should pay attention to Jesus because in Jesus we have one who is so strong so extraordinary that two effects come from his life evil is put down and atonement is made how does he know that well he moves from the lamb of God to the spirit of God he was baptizing with water but verse 32 he bears witness I saw the spirit descend from heaven like a dove and it remained on him I myself did not know him but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me he on whom you see the!

descend and remain this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit John is on the witness stand and you were to ask John how do you know that Jesus is the one he would say to you God made known to me the means by which in my own personal experience it would be validated and when Jesus was baptized the spirit descended as a dove rested on him and it was confirmation to me that's how I know it was confirmed through my experience in accord with a word that was given now this might seem strange this idea of a dove resting on someone but I'll just let you know that there was a day when I was performing a wedding in Bond Chapel for members of our church years ago and the doors were open much like a day like this and

I you might think I'm I'm just telling you this is my experience as the couple had made their vows and knelt for the prayer blessing in through the open back doors is the flapping of wings!

[ 31 : 36 ] the hovering above them the resting on the organ loft behind me of a dove no not a pigeon a dove it was witnessed by many I completed the prayer eyes open and the bird flew down and out and away now I don't know what to say about all that other than to tell you something as remarkable as that John had in his own experience regarding something much more elevated or

happenstance of my own he had been given a word beforehand that the spirit is going to come in your ministry of baptism as people are being made ready you're going to see the one who will fulfill all their readiness and it will come as the spirit and the spirit as a dove and

John says I know that about Jesus I'm willing to speak against tax collectors in the city streets who do wrong and I know this about Jesus I'm willing to speak against those in city hall can speak to this about Jesus this is his witness the lamb of God the spirit of God which which then you ought to think maybe there is something different about Jesus because the spirit only descends in the old testament at any rate through this anointing on particular individuals with great import whether they be priests who mediate relationship with God or kings who rule for God and you bundle up the idea of a kingly priest resting on Jesus at the outset of his ministry and you must confront the testimony of

John is he credible can he be trusted if not why not lamb of God spirit of God I have seen verse 34 and have borne witness this is the son of God I love that phrase I have seen and I have borne witness it is as though he's on the stand right hand in the air saying to you with that verse I'm telling you the truth the whole truth nothing but the truth I am testifying in accord with what I have seen and so now it comes back to you and to me what are you going to do with

Jesus don't take the gospel of John just because you have an apostle announcing it you're fortunate enough to have an apostle that knows you're going to need evidence for it don't simply take his word weigh!

His witness there are so many here this morning who have weighed it held it to be reasonable and through their life experience found it to be true and there are many more here this morning that need to weigh the witness of John and determine whether Jesus is worth following when we return next week we will see that some begin to do that very thing our heavenly father we look to be enlightened we want to believe what these witnesses proclaim thank you that even in the [ 36 : 23 ] Bible we're not just led about by religious fanatics but by good writers who provide reasons for the credibility of the Christian faith for those of us who have received this word we ask now that you would hear our voices as we give you thanks for taking away our sin in Jesus name amen Ž Ž Ž