

The Testimony of John

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 February 2018

Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] Let me start by saying that I think it's safe to say that many of you will remember the 1960s. I think that's... Is that cheeky? I don't know if that's cheeky.

I'm sorry if that's cheeky. I don't mean it to be. But my point being is that one of the things that marked out the 1960s was the space race. Do you remember that? Just for those of you who don't know, who were born in the 70s like me, the space race was this.

At the height of the Cold War, that is between NATO and the Soviet Union, there was a race to see who could put a man in space to flex the muscles of those territories.

And the USSR, the Soviet Union, they won that race. On the 12th of April 1961, they launched cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin into space. And when Gagarin returned, he said, I looked and I looked and I looked, but I didn't see God anywhere.

Nikita Khrushchev, who was the Soviet premier, he used that testimony to fuel the communist anti-religion campaign. He said, look, we sent someone into space who looked and looked and Gagarin didn't find God anywhere.

[1 : 15] You see, they thought that if you fly far enough into the heavens, you'll see God's face sort of shining down on you. You'll actually see God.

That is, they think God was inside this creation, inside this universe. And all you have to do is find him wherever he's hiding. And that's a really common mistake, because God is not a being inside our universe.

He's not sitting on an island in a Pacific. He's not just outside Earth's atmosphere waiting for you to sort of find him. He is the creator. He's outside of everything that we can see and touch.

He's outside of space and time. And that means, then, the only way you can know anything about God is if God breaks in to our universe.

And that's what the first 18 verses, the prologue, as it's called, that's what the first 18 verses of John's gospel tell us. Or they claim.

[2 : 19] They claim that God's son, Jesus, makes his father known. 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. Have a look over 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. Verse 14, John chapter 1, verse 14. It goes on. It says, 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, full of grace and truth. You see, if you had a time machine and not a rocket ship, you could go back and actually see Jesus dwelling with us.

You could see the Son wording to us what his Father is like. And so if the prologue claims that Jesus reveals God, that's the first 18 verses, our passage today answers the question, says who?

[3 : 37] Or to put another way, upon whose authority? Jesus claims to reveal God, says who? And I've put that at the top of your handout.

You see, every religion in the world, every worldview makes that same claim. The prologue is not unique. Every religion claims to know something about God.

Every religion's got a man or a woman who has the truth to ultimate reality. And so it's right that we get to ask the question, says who? Upon whose authority?

So, Muhammad looks inside a cave and claims to have the truth about God. Well, upon whose authority? Buddha looked inside himself and claimed to have the truth about ultimate reality.

Oh, yeah. Says who? Atheism looks to science and reasoning for enlightenment. Says who? On what basis of authority do we make the major decisions of our lives?

[4 : 46] Is it Western middle class living? It seems to be the ideal out there. Says who? And I love the transparency of Christianity here.

Because even the Bible must answer the says who interrogation. So the prologue claims that Jesus is the only way to know God.

Our passage today answers the says who? Upon whose authority? And in our passage today, what we have is a courtroom scene.

Where John is in the witness box. He's in the dock. Just for the sake of clarity, there are two Johns we're talking about today. So there's John, the author of the book.

I'll call him Author John. And there's John, the Baptist. I'll call him the Baptist. So you've got the author and the Baptist. And the Baptist is in the witness box giving his testimony.

[5 : 42] You can see that. Have a look down at the beginning of our passage, verse 19. Now, this is John's testimony. At the end of our passage, verse 34, I have seen and I testify.

Our passage is bookended with testimony, testify. Verse 32. Have a look. Then John gave this testimony. We've got real eyewitness testimony.

But if I can just show you in a little bit more detail. I'm going to do a whistle stop tour of the passage. Listen out for all the markers of eyewitness testimony you get here. So 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.

21. They asked him. He said. He answered. They said. John replied. Verse 24. The Pharisees who'd been sent questioned him. Verse 26. John replied.

[6 : 45] Verse 28. This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan where John was baptizing. And all these little little nitty gritty bits of text.

They seem insignificant. But what they show is that we're getting an eyewitness account. Lawyer friends of mine tell me that this is the sort of stuff they deal with every day.

And that's because as Christians, we are realists. We are realists. Unlike other truth claims about God, ours are based on real eyewitness testimony.

Real historical events. Real checkable interactions. Realistic testimony. And what we're going to see today in this passage, and as we see right throughout this series, is eyewitness courtroom testimony.

That Jesus is the word made flesh. That he has come to make his father known. And that by believing in him, we will have eternal life.

[7 : 50] And so my aim today is that we would believe the Baptist testimony. That Jesus is in another category. Because only he has God's authority.

That's a mouthful. So let me say it again. My aim is that we would believe the Baptist testimony. That Jesus is in another category altogether. Because only he has God's authority.

And so there's a handout. You should all have one of those. That tells you where I'm going. And we're going to start by looking at the Baptist. And then we're going to move on to the Messiah.

So first, the Baptist. And one thing we, I think we fail to realize about John the Baptist. Because we know him so well. Is John the Baptist was the most famous person alive in the world.

At his time. So in Matthew and Mark's Gospels. They tell us that people from the city of Jerusalem. From the country of Judea. From all the surrounding countryside.

[8 : 50] They all came out to see and be baptized by the Baptist. In verse 28 of our passage. It tells us that John started baptizing in Bethany.

But by the time you get to chapter 3. John has had to move north to the Sea of Galilee. And the reason is given that there is more water there. You see, so many thousands of people had come out to be baptized by John.

There was not enough. They ran out of water in the Jordan River. It's a remarkable detail. He has to go north to the Sea of Galilee. Where there's more dunking room. As it were. Clearly, John has an international profile.

There's a historian. An historian called Josephus. And he quotes this. He says, Many people came in great crowds to see John the Baptist. Josephus wrote that in the first century.

And that's all very well and good. But listen to what Jesus himself says about the Baptist. This is from Luke's Gospel. Jesus says that among those born of women.

[9 : 58] Which, that's everyone by the way. If you don't know the birds and the bees. Those born of women is everyone. Among those born of women, no one is greater than John the Baptist.

Isn't that remarkable? So that means not King David. That not King Solomon. Not Moses. Not Elijah. Not Noah. Not even Abraham. Is greater than John the Baptist. Says Jesus. If John the Baptist were alive today. He would be front page news. Wherever he went. There'd be hysteria. All over social media.

No doubt. He's the Pope. He's the Dalai Lama. He's Billy Graham. He's Tim Keller. He's all the prophets rolled into one. That is the Baptist. And it's no wonder then in verse 19.

The stir he causes when he's in town. Verse 19. Now this was John's testimony. When the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. They sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.

[11:02] Who are you? And it's remarkable then. With all that esteem that we just heaped on him. It's remarkable that he directs his attention or their attention to someone even greater.

Verse 20. He did not fail to confess but confessed for the I am not the Messiah. That is I am not God's long awaited anointed king.

The Messiah was to rule with absolute authority. Oh that's not me. Says John. Verse 21. Then who are you?

Are you Elijah? You see one like Elijah was coming to turn God's people back to him. Oh that's not me. Are you the prophet? See one like Moses was coming to perform another Exodus like rescue for God's people.

Oh that's not me either. Says the Baptist. And it must have been so frustrating for the Pharisees and that delegation. Who are you? Who are you? Who are you?

[12:06] And John says well I'm not Mark Chew. And I'm not Andrew Price. And I'm not Annette. I mean clearly I'm not Annette. But if I said that that doesn't really help you does it?

If you come to find out who I am. And finally he said verse 22. Who are you? Give us a break John. Just tell it. Just give us an answer to take back to those who sent us.

What do you say about yourself? Verse 23. John the Baptist replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet. I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness.

Make straight the way for the Lord. That is a quote from Isaiah chapter 40 which was our first reading today. I preached this about a month ago.

But just to recap really really quickly. God's people had been under judgment for a really long time. They were about to go into exile because of their sin.

[13:02] And then Isaiah 40 comes in and says comfort, comfort my people. God himself is coming to rescue you from sin.

And rescue from this world. Comfort, comfort. And this rescue says Isaiah 40 will start when you see a voice crying in the wilderness.

Make straight the way of the Lord. And that makes sense of this religious delegation who've come to find out about John. You're famously spiritual.

Everyone in town is coming out to see you. Are you the Messiah? Are you this rescuer? John says don't be excited by me. I'm just the voice.

I'm the voice that prepares the way for the Messiah. And so verse 24. Now the Pharisees who'd been sent questioned him.

[13:59] Why then do you baptize if you're not the Messiah? Nor Elijah. Nor the prophet. He says in verse 26. John says I baptize with water.

Don't get excited by me. All I can do is wet you. I'm great at dunking you in the water. But that's all I can do for you. And he goes on.

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. You see back in their culture.

Feet were off limits. So imagine if you can. No sealed pavements. Only dirt roads. Middle Eastern heat. Donkeys.

Horses. Camels. Cows. Everywhere. Feet were really stinky. And you wouldn't even get your Hebrew slave to touch your feet and deal with your sandals.

[14:56] The Jewish people used to get Gentile unbelievers to deal with the feet. And here is the Baptist saying you think I'm a big deal? There is one standing among you now.

And I am beneath the person who is able to touch his feet. I'm less than a Gentile unclean immigrant.

Here is the great man. Here is the great man. The Baptist. Uncomfortable to speak about himself. Because he's very keen to speak about the one who is standing among them now.

The Lord Jesus. And so let's move now from the Baptist to Jesus the Messiah. This is point two. 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.

[15:53] And here again the Baptist has in mind Isaiah. I think we're in chapter 53. It tells us that God has a unique servant who will be pierced for our transgressions.

These are famous verses. Who will be crushed for our iniquities. Who will somehow be led like a lamb to be sacrificed.

Because God will lay on him the iniquity of us all. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And I think the Baptist also has in mind Exodus and the Passover. You'll remember that at the Passover each Jewish household would have to take a perfect spotless lamb.

They would have to sacrifice it. Put its blood on the lintels and the doorposts. And then God's judgment would pass over that house. That's how it goes.

[16:53] And you couldn't use the runt of the litter when it comes to lambs. You couldn't use a lamb that was caught on the barbed wire in the back paddock. You had to find a perfect spotless lamb.

Also you could only have one lamb per household. One lamb has only enough blood for one family.

And so then I ask you how spotless, how large must a lamb be to take away the sin of the world?

As John says. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Where do you find a lamb like that? The Baptist says behold.

Look. Here he is. He has God's authority to do God's work of rescue. He is God's lamb. Verse 30. Have a look in verse 30 and beyond. Have a look how many times the Baptist pushes attention towards this lamb. This is the one I meant when I said a man comes after me who has surpassed me because he was before me.

[18:03] And this bit is a little bit tricky. But what he's saying is that Jesus surpasses or outranks me even though he's younger than me. He arrives in history after me.

And that's because he is before me or pre-existent says the Baptist. Because the Baptist knows that in the beginning was the word. And the word was with God.

And the word Jesus was God. Verse 31. I myself did not know him. But the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

John says he came baptizing with water. That is he is preparing the way for Jesus arrival. If I could be cheeky again.

Some of you might remember 1954. Which is even more cheeky because it's before the 60s. But in 1954 Queen Elizabeth made her first visit to Australia. I don't know if people.

[19:03] A couple of nods here and there. And I remember. Oh sorry. I wonder if wherever you were. Whatever town. If it was Melbourne you were in. What the sort of preparation was like before Her Majesty made her first visit.

The clean up that would have been involved. Get rid of the riffraff. Clean streets. All that sort of business. And I think that's fitting isn't it. For a royal visit. I used to live in London.

And in London. Because it's such a small city. You often see politicians like David Cameron and Theresa May. You often see them driving past in their big. The big Range Rovers.

And quite often you actually see the princes. William and Harry driving around. They've got special cars. But every now and then. Just only saw it twice in 10 years. You get to see Her Majesty the Queen.

You know it's Her Majesty. Because she has the biggest Rolls Royce you've ever seen. A surface to air missile wouldn't put a dent in this thing. But also Her Majesty has 12 white motorcycles.

[20:02] And what these motorcycles do. Is they travel in a relay. Way ahead of her. And they clear the intersections for her. So Her Majesty doesn't have to stop at the red light. It would be very embarrassing.

If she stops at the red light. And you get one of those homeless people. With the squeegees. Trying to squeegee. I don't know what. Does she have any cash to flick him? I don't know. It would be very embarrassing.

Her Majesty never has to stop at a red light. I think it's for security as well. But you would expect that for a royal visit. Wouldn't you? Those motorcycles prepare. The London traffic for her arrival.

Well here is John. Preparing the world for God's Messiah. His King. Water baptism. A symbol of washing away of the old.

As they too prepare for a royal visit. Have a look at verse 32. Then John gave this testimony. I saw the spirit come down from heaven.

[21 : 04] 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 whom you see the spirit.

Come down and remain. Is the one. Who will baptize. With the Holy Spirit. There is an astonishing detail there. I tried to highlight it. With the way I read. You see throughout the Old Testament.

God's Holy Spirit comes down on certain people. Certain anointed people. So King David. King Saul. Gideon. To name a few. But in all of those cases.

The spirit soon departs from those people. But for Jesus. You see not only is he the Lamb of God. But God's Holy Spirit remains on him.

It's no wonder the Baptist says in verse 34. I have seen and I testify. That this is God's chosen one. Or God's son.

[22 : 05] The Baptist is God's great man. He can wash us. But he points. To God's greatest man. Who can baptize us. With the Holy Spirit.

Because it remains with him. And this is significant. Because all the water in the Jordan. All the water in the Sea of Galilee. It can only make us wet.

It can only wash us. On the outside. But the Old Testament. Right up in. The whole Old Testament in fact. Right up until John's Gospel. Says. That we need.

An internal heart washing. Instead. We've all got a problem of sin. Our hearts are sort of sin factories. As some people say. We need.

We need. A heart washing. On the inside. We need to be. Baptized internally. And so here is John. Saying. I saw the Spirit. Come down. And remain on him.

[23 : 03] He is the one who will baptize. With the Holy Spirit. And so Jesus. Never arrives. On the scene. In the New Testament.

We never just see Jesus. Just there. We always must first think. Jesus is the answer. And the fulfillment. To all of the Old Testament. Beforehand. I think our author John.

Is showing his connection. To all the Old Testament. So to Passover. To Isaiah. To Ezekiel. The baptism of the Holy Spirit. And here's the thing.

You see. At the start today. We said. That all religions claim. To have the truth about God. Here is a passage. That asks. Says who? The claims of the Bible.

Must be tested. As well. Christians are. Realists. The prologue claims. Jesus reveals God. Says who?

[24 : 03] The Baptist does. Here is his testimony. He was the most famous. International celebrity. Historically checkable.

Here is his eyewitness testimony. Of Jesus arrival. Oh yeah? Upon whose authority? 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. Of rescue. God himself says.

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. Or God's son.

And that means. That in the marketplace. Of claims. Of claims. About God. Jesus stands alone. He is the only one. With all of God's authority.

[25 : 04] He's in another category. As everything else. And if you are. A Christian here today. Which I think is. Almost all of you. If you are a Christian here today. Let me ask you.

How big. Is your Jesus? Does the Jesus of your mind. Compare. With this Jesus of history. How big is your Jesus?

You see. A small. Plastic Jesus. Will give you a small. Plastic faith. A small. Plastic Jesus. Will produce. Small.

Plastic faith. He will. Fit nicely. Into your pocket. Small. Plastic Jesus. Will fit nicely. Into your lives. On Sundays. But.

He will produce. A small. Plastic faith. That will not stand up. In a world of. Suffering and sin. Small. Plastic Jesus. Will get lost. Amidst all the other.

[26 : 01] Claims. Who are jostling. For airtime. Plastic Jesus. Certainly. Won't. Make true. All the amazing. Claims. Of the prologue.

Lights. Where there was. Darkness. Adoption. As one of God's children. And most importantly. Eternal life. Says who?

Our author does. John. And if you're. Not a Christian. Here today. Or maybe. If you are. The application. For now. Is to come back.

Next week. Come back. Next week. Come back. Every single week. Through this series. Because. Our author. John. Is going to present. To us. Eyewitness. Courtroom level.

Testimony. We're going to be able. To see Jesus. Face to face. John's. Aim. Is that we would. Believe. That Jesus. Is this Christ.

[26 : 58] Is the Messiah. That we would have life. In his name. We'll see. Water. Changed into wine. In a couple of weeks. Water. Changed into wine. Jesus. Has God's authority.

We'll see. A man. Who's been. Paralysed. For 38 years. Suddenly healed. Jesus. Has God's. Authority. We'll see. Jesus. Feed 5,000 people.

With just a small. Lunch. Jesus. Has God's. Authority. And he'll raise. Lazarus. From the dead. Jesus. Has God's.

Authority. You see. Every other. Religion. In the world. Gives 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. Man. Jesus Christ. The Jesus. Of history. Against whom.

[27 : 53] In the end. There can be. No good argument. So let's pray. Lord Jesus. Thank you. That you. Are a realist.

That you want us. To be realists. Thank you. That you provide. Eyewitness testimony. About your life. Please help us. To believe it.

And especially. Lord Jesus. We all know. So many of these stories. In John's gospel. Please help us. To hear them. As if for the very first time. Please. Amaze us.

Once again. As we see you. Face to face. Please. Please. Deepen our belief. In you. Please move our convictions. Several floors.

Lower. In our hearts. We ask this. That you would be glorified. Amen.