

THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST  
John 1:19-37

Intro: Verse 19 of John 1 begins with the words, "And this is the record of John."

The Greek word which is here translated "record" also means a witness, or a testimony.

In verses 6 through 8 the Apostle John had introduced John the Baptist. In addition to saying in verse 6 that he had been "sent from God" and named John, he went on to say in verse 7, "The same came for a witness." This is the same word which the Apostle John would use in verse 19. John came to be a witness, a testimony. His ministry was not that people would make a great deal of him and his ministry, but he appeared on the scene to give testimony to, to identify, the One Who is the Light. He clearly was not "that Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe."

He was not "sent from God" in the same way that the Lord Jesus was sent, i.e., from the presence of God. But he was "sent from God" as one who was born in dark days in Israel's history to bear witness to the Light. We learn more about John the Baptist from Luke's record of the events which attended his birth. Zacharias was his father and Elisabeth was his mother. Although he was born into a priestly family, we have no record that he served as a priest. God gave him the name John, but he was called "the Baptist" because he baptized thousands of people in Israel when they repented of their sin.

John the Baptist was unique for several reasons:

- 1) His ministry was predicted by Isaiah the prophet.
- 2) His ministry broke a silence by God of about 400 years.
- 3) His ministry was fruitful beyond what anyone could have imagined that it would be. People went out to him to be baptized. Matthew has given us the following report of John's ministry:

Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea,  
and all the region round about Jordan,  
And were baptized of him in Jordan,  
confessing their sins (Matt. 3:5, 6).

- 4) His ministry preceded and introduced the coming of the long-awaited Messiah.
- 5) His ministry was all the more amazing because he was not a member of the ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. We could also add a sixth point:
- 6) He was one who was faithful to the Lord in his ministry although he finally died as a martyr for the truth of

God. We know that he was troubled by his imprisonment later on and sent his own disciples to Jesus to confirm that our Lord was the Messiah, but that problem was then settled in his own mind. It just shows that John was well acquainted with human frailty which he demonstrated at that time. Cf. Matt. 11:1-6. After John's disciples left, our Lord gave a remarkable testimony concerning John. He said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11).

And so we are dealing with a very unique person, one raised up by God, blessed by God, and greatly used by God to turn many to God and to the Messiah in those needy days in Israel's history.

His ministry was so great, in fact, that the Sanhedrin began to worry about him and where his ministry would go. And so they sent a delegation of priest and Levites to Jerusalem to ask him, "Who art thou?" It is at this point that the Apostle John picked up the story of John the Baptist's ministry. The attention which John the Baptist had gotten was enough to, as we sometimes say, turn anyone's head. And yet we see a faithfulness in John's ministry that all who serve the Lord would do well to follow.

John the Baptist knew what they were thinking, and so he said,

I. "I AM NOT THE CHRIST" (John 1:20).

Thus, his ministry began with a strong denial. Notice how it is stated in verse 20.

We can see from Scripture that there often, not always, but often, seems to be a tendency on the part of men to exalt a servant of the Lord beyond the position that he actually holds. John would at the very beginning dispel such an idea from the minds of his visitors.

We ought to be able to understand how "the Jews" felt, and why they were so concerned about where John's ministry was going. It was a threat to their own position. At the same time there must have been some among the scribes and Pharisees who sensed a need for more than they had because some of them went to be baptized by John.

The Jewish visitors were not satisfied with his answer, and so they pressed him with some more questions, very complimentary to say the least.

They wanted to know if he were Elijah. He said, "I am not." Then they wanted to know if he were the prophet which Moses had mentioned in Deut. 18:15. John said, "No." John said, "No." Perhaps they made other suggestions but these are all that the Apostle John has recorded for us.

Finally, getting frustrated and knowing that they still did not have the answer they had come to get, they said the words recorded for us in John 1:22.

A very thought provoking question for all of us to ask ourselves is the question the Jews asked John: "What sayest thou of thyself?" It means, Who do you say that you are?

Here is the second part of John's testimony that we need to notice:

## II. HIS TESTIMONY ABOUT HIMSELF AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST (John 1:23, 27, 30).

This comes in three parts.

### A. "A voice" (v. 23).

He did not actually say "the voice" (although it is not necessarily wrong to translate the Greek text this way). But he said, a voice.

How many of us are willing to be just a voice? While the messenger is always important, and it is imperative that his life be above reproach, yet the important thing is not who the messenger is, but what he has to say! Don't we get that from what John said. John was not out to make a name for himself; he wanted the people to know who the Lord was. He came to prepare them for the coming of the Lord.

The second thing that John said was this:

### B. "He who coming after me is preferred before me."

He said this in verse 27, and the next day he repeated it in verse 30. He meant that the Lord had a greater position and would assume that position even though He was younger than John. We have the suggestion here of the pre-existence of our Lord, a claim that John never made for Himself.

John's ministry was to prepare the way for One Who was greater than he was, and Who would have a ministry far more extensive and far more effective than he had had.

The third thing that I want you to see is also in verse 27.

C. "Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

This was the work of a household servant--to take off the sandals from the feet of those coming into the house, and then to wash their feet. Far from making someone great out of himself, John's testimony was that the Lord was so great that he was not worthy to be His servant, to take His shoes off, and to wash His feet.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more of us had that attitude toward our Lord? I am afraid that John the Baptist would be shocked speechless if he could hear the way some people talk in such familiar terms about God and about our Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of John's testimony thus far, and see if your feelings about the Lord are anything like his were. I don't think that there is any question but that the power of John's ministry was traceable to his attitude toward himself in his relationship with the Lord.

But now I want to direct your attention to two positive things that John said about the Lord in this passage.

III. JOHN THE BAPTIST'S TESTIMONY CONCERNING OUR LORD.

The first we find in John 1:29:

A. "The Lamb of God."

How rich in meaning was this expression, especially to Jews who had been raised and made familiar with the idea of animal sacrifices!

Did John believe that baptism saved? No. Did he believe that the animal sacrifices of the Jews could save them, or ever had served that purpose? No. He believed that all of those sacrifices pointed to the coming Messiah, and he believed that the Lord Jesus Christ had come to provide a sacrifice whereby men everywhere and anywhere could have their sins taken away, forgiven, and remembered against them no more. And further he believed that those who trusted in Christ would have perfect acceptance with God because it is sin which has separated us from Him.

The other expression is in John 1:34:

B. "The Son of God."

John the Baptist was like the rest of us in one regard: He learned the truth about the Lord a little at a time. It was

at our Lord's baptism that he realized that the Messiah was the Son of God. This was why He could be the Savior; He had not sins of His own which needed to be taken away.

Concl: Much more could be said about John the Baptist. You see more in John 3 which is so very important. But there is enough here for us to take in and to profit from. What a testimony John had! May the Lord raise up men in our day who will follow in the footsteps of John the Baptist who lived for one purpose: to exalt the Lord as the only Savior of sinners.