



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

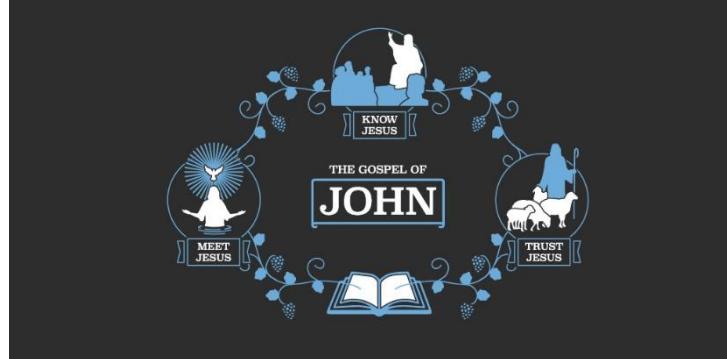
The Testimony of John

The Gospel Of John

John 1: 19–34

Joe Denner | September 5, 2021

Good morning Village Bible Church family. It is good to be with you this morning. For those of you who don't know me, my family and I have been attending here at Village Bible Church for about the last six months. It is my honor and privilege to share God's Word with you this morning. So if you have not already, I would encourage you to open your Bible to the Gospel of John, chapter one.



Have any of you here ever served on jury duty? Raise your hands nice and high. Well, I just got this pleasant little thing in the mail the other day saying that I may have my first opportunity to serve on a jury. Now for those of you who raised your hands, how many of you have actually served during a criminal case? Okay. We have a few hands raised high.

For those of you who are not familiar with that, in a criminal case, we all as citizens of this country have a constitutional right to a trial by a jury of our peers. What does that jury do? A jury listens and a jury takes in. What does it take in? It takes in, first of all, evidence that is being presented by an attorney or a set of attorneys. But most importantly, a jury listens to the testimony of a witness. What does a witness do? A witness gives testimony that is evidence or support for and about what they had seen and heard.

In our passage this morning, John's encounter with the Levites and priests at the river there beyond the Jordan in Bethany very closely resembles a set of lawyers questioning a witness.

Now, before we dive into our text, I do want to make just a quick contextual comment. I want us to understand the historical setting of what's going on in this situation. As we begin the Gospel of John, our new series, we are looking at this opportunity for all of us to meet Jesus, to get to know Jesus better, to trust Jesus more. But in this setting, historically speaking, as John shows up on the scene, according to our traditional understanding, it's been approximately 400 years since God has said anything to the nation of Israel. So imagine that the nation of Israel for 400 years has languished in waiting, wondering and hoping—and probably in even a bit of despairing about whether or not this Messiah, this promised One, is really truly going to come.

Now, you have to understand something. That was odd for the people of Israel. For centuries prior to that, God had faithfully and consistently spoken to them through the prophets—from Abraham to Moses to Samuel, all the way through Malachi. So as John bursts on to the scene in quite an unconventional way, it catches the attention of the religious elites in Jerusalem. So they send this envoy to find out what is going on, who is this Jesus and what is happening. That is exactly what we're going to look at here this morning.

About himself (who are you?)

First of all we want to look at the testimony of John. That's the title of this morning's message and it comes right out of verse 19. But the first thing we want to see is the testimony of John about himself. Now, which John are we talking about? We need to keep the characters in this narrative straight, because in the first 18 verses of this Gospel, it is John the apostle—as Pastor Tim said last week, Jesus' best friend—who has been writing to us and telling us about his best friend.

But in verse 19 he transitions, and he, John, begins talking about another John. This John is the same John he referred to back in verse six when he said, "*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*" Now we commonly refer to this John as John the Baptist. Why? Because a large part of John's ministry is going about baptizing people with a baptism of repentance, because he is

calling them and preparing them for Jesus. This is exactly what John has been doing—he's been baptizing. But then it is that very incident that precipitated the exchange we're going to look at here this morning.

As we pick up the story in verse 19, we want to get a couple facts straight. Let's be clear about who the players are in this drama and understand what's going on. First of all, we have John the Baptist, the one we just talked about. It's not John the apostle, the friend of Jesus, but John the Baptist, the one who comes baptizing with the baptism of repentance, the one being battered with questions. John is being beaten down and pelted with questions by a group.

Who is that group? It's a group of priests and Levites. That's kind of the clergy of that time in Israel. And they have been sent by whom? They have been sent by the Pharisees. Now, the Pharisees are referred to at first, in verse 19, as "the Jews." This was a very general reference to the leaders—the spiritual elite—of the day and of the nation. These Pharisees are later identified in verse 24 as one of the groups, along with the Sadducees, who led in the religious matters of Israel.

Why were these guys sent? They are there to figure out, "Why is this guy baptizing? And by what authority is he doing this?" Something we're going to learn, if you haven't learned it already, is that the Pharisees have quite an authority complex. They have a real problem when they see anybody doing anything outside the scope of what they believe ought to be done. Certainly we see that here in John 1 and we're going to encounter this again and again as they begin to tussle with Jesus throughout this Gospel.

What has really struck me, and it's really at the heart of what I want to share with you this morning, is that here is John, right there in the center of everything that's going on. John has the opportunity, if he wants, to grab the limelight and take center stage. But he doesn't. What's that about? Well, before I answer that question, let's take a look at John's interrogation and what that looked like. So along come these priests and Levites. John is baptizing. They come up in the crowd and begin to assault him with questions—the first one of which is in verse 19, when they say, "Who are you?"

Not the Christ

I think John's response is very interesting. He says—or as the Apostle John records—"He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, *I am not the Christ.*" He's telling them, "I am not the Christ. I am not the Messiah. I am not the long-awaited, long-expected Savior, Rescuer and Deliverer of the people of Israel."

What I find interesting about this is that there's nothing recorded in the text that says the Levites and priests said anything about him being the Messiah. What strikes me about this is John wants to make sure, right here at the very outset, that the people understand that he is not the One they are looking for. He is not the One Who is coming to save them. He is not the One they have been longing for through all these centuries. He wants to get that out of the way immediately; he wants no mistakes about that.

Not Elijah

The second question they ask him then is, "Well, okay, so are you Elijah?" Now, Elijah was the prophet back in 1 Kings who did not die but was carried away in a chariot of fire. The Jewish people believed Elijah would be coming to usher in the end of all time. John says, "I am not Elijah."

Not the prophet

So then they ask, "Okay. Well, are you the prophet?" Who's the prophet? The prophet. Notice, it's not a prophet, but, "Are you the prophet?" Well, the prophet was mentioned by Moses back in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses foretold of a day and time when a prophet just like himself would once again come to the nation of Israel. Over all of these hundreds and hundreds of years, the Jews have been waiting. They've been waiting for the Messiah. They've been waiting for Elijah. They've been waiting for the prophet. They've been waiting for somebody to come along and rescue them out of all their troubles. In each case, John says, "Nope. Not me."

So, you can imagine at this point the priests and Levites have got to be a little frustrated. They had a job to do. They had answers to take back home in Jerusalem. And by the way, this was not a small journey. This group of priests and Levites had traveled 33 kilometers, which is 53 miles.

Now, some of us do that in a day without even thinking about it. Back then it wasn't so easy. They had to walk. It probably was a two-day journey or longer, depending on how aggressive they wanted to be, how good of shape they were in, what the weather was like and all this terrain. They have come a long way and are very likely tired. They are the lackeys of the Pharisees, trying to

just get an answer. But this guy keeps saying, "Nope. Nope. Nope." So they finally say, "Okay. Well then, who are you? What do you say about yourself?" You can almost hear the exasperation in their voices. They say, "Hey, we need answers."

Now before we answer that question, I want to go back to the question I asked a little bit ago. John had every opportunity to grab the limelight. He had every opportunity to take it all for himself. But he didn't—why not? Because for John, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the miracle child, it was not and never would be about himself. It was never about him. He didn't want the limelight. Remember, he had been sent by God for a specific purpose. Back in John 1: 7 it says, "*He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light.*" He didn't want to take the light; he wanted to bear witness to the light. "*He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light*" (1: 8).

The voice of one crying out in the wilderness

So in answer to the question of these exasperated, frustrated priests and Levites, when they ask "Who are you? I mean, come on, what do you say about yourself? Say something!" John's response is, "I'm just a voice. I'm just the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. In this barren, dark, lost place, I'm just a voice."

Just a voice. No big title. No big resume. No lights. No name tag. No nothing. He says, "I'm just a voice and I'm here to make straight the way of the Lord. I am here to prepare the way of the Lord. I am the construction crew for the coming Messiah. I am here to fill in the potholes. I am here to straighten the curves. I am here to take down the mountains and make a clear path for Him to come."

Isaiah 35 actually makes reference to a highway for our God. John is here to build a highway for the Messiah to come into the hearts of people who are lost in their sin, a clear path for the Savior of the world Who, at this point now, John has finally come to realize is Jesus of Nazareth. He does this "voice of one crying out in the wilderness" by calling men and women to repentance, by calling them to turn their hearts to God, to prepare themselves to receive the salvation of God that his father Zechariah had prophesied about at his birth. So then the men ask, "Well, why are you baptizing? You're a nobody. You're just a voice." They didn't have a TV show back then. John is saying, "I'm just a voice." "So then, why are you baptizing? You have no authority."

See, not only did he not have any authority, but he did this in an extremely unusual manner. When the Jews did baptisms, they self-administered baptism—they baptized themselves. So for John to insert himself and be plunging these people into the river, they are thinking, "Who is this guy and by what authority is he doing this?"

To skip ahead slightly, John tells us why in John 1: 31. He says, "*I myself did not know him,*" talking about Jesus, "*but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.*" John says, "That's my job. That's my thing. That is what I get to do. I get to reveal Jesus."

See folks, that's what it ought to be about for us too. Just like John, our ministry is not about us. I'm imagining that many of you in this room are involved in ministry of one kind or another. The word "ministry" simply means serving other people. I'm imagining many of you are involved in all kinds of capacities of ministry, serving, caring for people. Here's the bottom line. Just like John, we must remember that it is not about us; it is about Jesus. It is not about what we can accomplish; it's about what He can accomplish in other people through our surrendered vessel.

This was John's mission and purpose; it ought to be ours. We should prepare the way for, bear witness to, reveal to the world the One Who has come to rescue us from our sins. That's exactly what John did. Verse 29 says, "*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him,*" then he begins to testify. We're going to see three things John testifies about Jesus. This is his testimony.

About Jesus (Behold...this is...the Son of God)

First and foremost, when he sees Jesus coming, he says, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" First of all, "Don't look at me. Look at Him." That's what all of us should be doing. "Don't look at me—look at Him. Behold Him. He's the One."

Behold the Lamb of God

Well, Who is He? He's the Lamb of God. This is a reference that all of them—especially those priests and Levites—should understand. They are used to this burdensome system of sacrifices and offerings, of tremendous and unbelievable amounts of blood, all through the years, as they sacrificed animal after animal after animal. John is saying, "This is not a lamb—this is the Lamb. This is the Lamb of God, the One Who comes to be the perfect, spotless, blameless sacrifice." He's the One Whose blood

will not only cover over our sins, but as it says in Hebrews 9: 14, it will also cleanse our conscience from dead works, so that we can serve the true and living God.

John said, "*This is the Lamb of God...*" Who does what? ..."*Who takes away the sin of the world!*" The Greek language here is very beautiful, because it brings together two ideas. First, it's the idea of bearing. Just like the imagery in the Old Testament when the priest would lay his hands on the animal, it was transferring the sins of the priest and the sins of the nation onto that animal. That animal bore those sins.

It also combines with this the idea of lifting up and the act of carrying away. Praise the Lord. The Lamb of God has come, Who is not only going to bear our sin, but He's going to lift it up and take it away. He's going to take it off us. Isn't that a wonderful thing to be thankful for this morning? The Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world.

Now, John is proclaiming that this is what is going to happen. His first testimony is that Jesus is the One! He is the One Who has come to take away the sin of the world.

Part of the reason this is confusing for the Jewish people is that this isn't what they are expecting. They are expecting a knight in shining armor to come in and deliver them from Roman oppression. But John knows through the power of the Holy Spirit that what these people need more than anything is to be saved from their sins, and that this Man—the Lamb of God—would indeed take away those sins.

This is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Second, John says in verse 33, "...*this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.*" Now, John had been given a sign. He says, "The One Who sent me gave me a sign. He told me, 'He on Whom you see the Spirit descend and remain—He's the guy. He's the Messiah. He is the Lamb of God."

John had seen that in an earlier instance when John had baptized Jesus in the Jordan. John had seen the Spirit of God descend from heaven, having come down upon Jesus, resting on Him and remaining on Him. I believe when John saw Jesus coming, he saw the Spirit of God remaining on this Lamb Who had come.

Then he says, "Not only is this the guy, but He's going to baptize you with the power of the Spirit. Me? I've just been baptizing with water. I've just been dunking you in the river. But this One? This One is going to baptize you with the power of the Holy Spirit and that is going to change everything."

When we think about the idea of baptism, what is it? We've seen it up here at the back of the stage, in the baptismal. We have seen it on the screen with John there in the river, immersing people. What it means is to immerse. It means to plunge into or to identify with. What John is saying is that when the Messiah comes, He's not going to baptize you with water. He is going to immerse you into and plunge you into the power of the Holy Spirit. As we know from Acts 2 forward, that changes the whole game.

These men, the disciples about whom we're going to read, who were cowering in the upper room after Jesus' death, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, went out and turned the world upside down. Dear friends, that is supposed to be happening today in and through us as well.

The Son of God

Lastly, John's last testimony in verse 34 says, "*And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.*" This is the Son of God. This is God Himself. Remember back in verse one? Jesus' best friend John, said, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" John was saying, "This is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, the One Who has come to rescue us from all our sins. John is saying, "This is Him. This is indeed God in the flesh," as the apostle said in verse 14.

So to summarize, the testimony of John is that Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. Secondly, Jesus is the One Who will baptize us with the Holy Spirit. And third, Jesus is the Son of God.

What about us?

Finally, where does that leave us this morning? What about us? Here John has been getting pelted with questions. But now I ask you a question. What about you? What about me? Well, to put it simply, like John, this life is not about us. It's not about the titles. It's not about possessions. It's not about the experiences. It's not about the relationships.

This life is about Jesus. There are a lot of trappings and distractions; there are a lot of things that are involved in this whole Kingdom of God thing. But let's be clear about one thing. At the end of the day, it is all about Jesus. Like John, we are to testify and bear witness to Jesus, that He is the Son of God, that He is the Savior of the world, that He is the Lamb, that He is the One Who will baptize with the Spirit.

So our lives, thoughts, words and deeds—just like John's—should be pointing people to Jesus. "Look at Him. Behold Him. If you haven't already, meet Him. By the way, if you've met Him, get to know Him. And if you know Him, definitely trust Him."

Let's look at one passage outside of the book of John for a moment—Acts 1. This is after the resurrection. Jesus has been appearing, talking with and teaching His disciples about the Kingdom of God that is coming. They're like, "Okay, is it now? Can we do it now, Jesus? We'd love to do it right now!"

Jesus says in verses 7-8, "*It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*"

I want you to notice something about this statement Jesus made to His disciples. He said, "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses.*" This is not an optional thing. He says, "You will be My witnesses."

Where? Notice the "and...and...and" of Jesus' statement: "*In Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.*" The church must be involved in all four of these circles at all times. It's not a this, then a that; maybe some of this, then some of "that." No, it's an "and...and...and." You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem—in our Jerusalem, in our Judea, in our Samaria and in our world. That's God's call upon our lives. As a matter of fact, in Matthew 28: 19, Jesus said, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*" So whatever your ministry is—whether you're serving the children, doing men's ministry, women's ministry, going to the prisons—it doesn't matter what it is. Our ministry is making disciples. Our ministry is seeing other people come to faith in and then learn to trust in and follow Jesus Christ, becoming like Him. That's what this whole gig is all about. When Matthew records Jesus saying, "*Go therefore...*" the actual Greek structure is, "As you're going..." So it's not just a command to go. His point is, "Hey, by the way, you're going to be going somewhere, so as you go, make disciples. Whether you're ministering in your home, at school, in the workplace or wherever you're going, whoever you are, whatever you do, make disciples of Jesus."

Let's see people baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Let's see people learn and begin to follow the teachings of Jesus, the Son of the living God, the Lamb of God Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17: 18, "*As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*" In John 20: 21, when Jesus encounters the disciples in the upper room, He says, "*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*"

This mission will not be complete until the day Jesus Christ comes again. Dear friend, whomever you are, wherever you are, let's make disciples of Jesus. Let's share the testimony. Let's share the story of what God has done.

If you did the small group study this week, Pastor Steve asked you, "Have you ever written out your testimony? Have you ever shared your testimony?" If you haven't, it's a wonderful thing to do. It's a great opportunity. Testify. Be like Peter and John in the book of Acts when they said, "We cannot do anything but speak the things we have seen and heard. We can't stop ourselves." May the Spirit of God release that river and that torrent in us, here in this area and across the world, for His glory.

So this morning I have two questions. Have you met Jesus? Because if you haven't, we would like to introduce you to Him. He is the Savior of the world; He is God's own Son and He came for you. If you've met Jesus, I ask are you witnessing? Are you testifying? Is it your sole purpose that your words, thoughts and deeds would ultimately lead others to see Jesus, to meet Him and know Him and trust Him.