

## **The Testimony Of John Concerning Christ..**

Text: John 1:19-28

Suggested Hymns:

8, 402, 13, 4, 18

- 1) John Testified Of Christ Without Being Influenced By Flattery, Fear, Or The Desire Of Favour.
- 2) John Testified At The Proper Place And Time.
- 3) John Testified In The Proper Manner.
- 4) John In His Testimony Emphasised What Was Essential.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 1:19-28, <sup>19</sup> *Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"* <sup>20</sup> *He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."* <sup>21</sup> *And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."* *"Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."*

<sup>22</sup> *Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"* <sup>23</sup> *He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD,"" as the prophet Isaiah said."*

<sup>24</sup> *Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.* <sup>25</sup> *And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"* <sup>26</sup> *John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.* <sup>27</sup> *"It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."* <sup>28</sup> *These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

While we are standing almost in the shadow of the Christmas-tree, there steps before us in our text the great teacher who terminates the long list of Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist.

Let no one say that the section before us does not constitute a fitting text for the Sunday before Christmas. John the Baptist here points to the very Person whose birth we shall celebrate in the immediate future.

And John tells us who this Person is, namely, the Christ, and that he himself is not worthy to render this Person the most humble service, not even to unloose the strap of His sandals. He indicates thereby that the Jesus whose birth we shall soon sing about is the great God and our Redeemer.

Whoever will take this message to heart will be preparing for Christmas in the right way and will perceive, too, that this text has an important message for us at this particular season. Is there anybody among us who feels keenly that much of the Christmas joy which we see about us is a hollow show, one of the many vanities that the children of men like to engage in, a pageant that lasts for a day and consists largely in an excess of spending and overindulgence, frequently leaving distress and heartache in its wake?

Let him see that, while it is true that many people observe Christmas in a wrong way and from motives that are not commendable, it is also true that the foundation for the Christmas joy of God's children stands firm and will stand firm throughout eternity.

It is simply this, that the Child born in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago, the Child that we are speaking of during these days, is the Christ, the Son of God. If we ponder this fact, Christmas will not appear ridiculous to us, an empty bubble, created by the folly and vanity of men, but will be to us a festival of holy joy, spreading that peace in our heart which passes all understanding.

Aside from the feature of the text just dwelt on, there is an aspect of it that lends itself well to a meditation before Christmas. St. John the Baptist here confesses Christ and by his example teaches how we are to render testimony of Jesus whose birth we are about to celebrate.

We know that the Scriptures repeatedly stress our duty of confessing Jesus before men. For example Matthew 10:32, <sup>32</sup> *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”* And 1 Peter 3:15, <sup>15</sup> *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”*

Confessing Christ — how glad we should be to do this if we are actually filled with joy over the birth of the Saviour!

Let us, then, learn how we should testify of Christ to our fellow-men by studying the example of John the Baptist. Our theme is *The Testimony of John Concerning Christ*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. John Testified Of Christ Without Being Influenced By Flattery, Fear, Or The Desire Of Favour.**

While John was baptising on the east side of the river Jordan, one day he saw a distinguished company of people coming towards him. It consisted of people who were giving their time and attention to the Temple service in Jerusalem, priests and Levites.

They asked him, “*Who are you?*” No one can deny that it was a curious fact for John that a delegation of dignitaries came down from Jerusalem to see him. How important a person the rulers in Jerusalem must have considered him, since they thought it worth while to send to him not merely one messenger, but a delegation!

*Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees*, says our text. We see that they not only held a high official position, but in addition belonged to that influential and respected group that was thought to be holier than any other group among the Jews.

There was a great temptation for John in that question “*Who are you?*” John must have known that the people were speculating as to whether he was the Messiah, the Christ, or not, and now it appeared that not only the common people, but the chief men of Jerusalem likewise were seriously considering the possibility of him being the Messiah.

The question was, as it were, an invitation addressed to him to declare himself the King of the Jews, the promised Helper. And it was implied that, if he should make such a declaration, he would be received with loud acclaim.

But what does John answer? The evangelist has some unusual words on this point. We read, <sup>20</sup>*He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”* Note the emphasis on the fact that John confessed and that he did not

deny. The evangelist is telling them that it was something remarkable that had occurred.

Some other person in a similar situation may not have confessed, but would have denied. With John, however, it was different — he confessed, he spoke the truth. From his answer we see that the question, “*Who are you?*” really amounted to this question, *Are you the Christ?* Accordingly John says, I am not the One whom many of you think me to be. I am not the Christ.

The delegation continued its questioning. “*What then? Are you Elijah?*” *He said, “I am not.”* John was Elijah in a way, according to the testimony of the Bible itself.<sup>1</sup> He had come in the power and spirit of Elijah and was the forerunner of the Messiah.

But in another way he was not Elijah, namely, not the old Elijah who had lived on earth in the days of Ahab and Jezebel. The question put to John really had the meaning, *Are you the old Elijah who was taken up into heaven?* And John very properly answered, No.

Then they inquired, “*Are you the Prophet?*” that is, the great Prophet of whom Moses had said that the Lord would raise Him up to be the Leader of Israel? John very properly says, No; for that Prophet was the Messiah, and he was not the Messiah.

We see here that John delivers his testimony without fear. He knew very well that a plain answer of his would involve the loss of the admiration of the people which he was now enjoying and their adherence to him. But he was not influenced by a desire for earthly gain or fame.

The invitation that he proclaim himself the great King was not accepted by him. The prospect of a crown did not induce him to alter a single letter of his testimony.

Let John be an example to us in this respect. It is easy enough to confess Jesus when everybody else about us is doing the same thing. Joining in the hymns of the Church and in the confession of the Creed when it is recited by the congregation is not difficult. It is a good and God-pleasing thing to do, but it is not anything heroic, nor does it require great courage.

But when you are in the midst of enemies of Jesus and there arises an opportunity to confess Him, then the situation is altogether different. To declare your faith in Jesus under such circumstances is very trying. Many a time we falter.

At times the temptation arises that we modify our testimony of Jesus on account of some favour or advantage we might gain by such a move. We may be speaking to men that are influential and prominent, men who can assist us in reaching some coveted goal, and we say to ourselves that we must not utter anything that might offend them, and so we suppress what our conscience urges us to tell. In all such situations let us think of John and courageously, without fear and the attempt to gain advantages for ourselves, confess Jesus.

Perhaps someone says, I do not know what to say when there is an opportunity to confess. Friend, John does not say much. His replies are brief. Learn to say that short word “no.” When others ridicule Jesus and ask you to join them, say no, emphatically. That is a grand confession. Or simply recite the words of the Apostles’ Creed, stating, “These are my convictions.” Even such brief, sincere testimony is very effective.

## **2. John Testified At The Proper Place And Time.**

Again, John rendered his testimony at the proper time and place. He did not go to Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Alexandria, or Rome. No, he spoke in the region about Jordan, where God had placed him and where, according to God’s will, he was to do his work. Listen to what he says: *“I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness.’”*

There is a very important lesson implied here for us. The question arises, When and where must I testify concerning Jesus? Must I become a minister or teacher or missionary? Must I forsake my calling in order to attend to this work of confessing Jesus?

This question is answered here. The proper place for us to give witness of Jesus is in that calling in which God placed us. The proper time for the rendering of such testimony is the time when, in our calling, as we go about the performance of our regular duties, an opportunity arises to tell people of the faith that is in us. The Christians are light-bearers. Let them be light-bearers in the station where God has put them.

Let us, then, not understand the admonition to confess Jesus to mean that every one must enter the ministry. If God wants you in the ministry, He will indicate it to you in a way which you can understand. He will call you. You can and should be a witness to Christ without being a minister. Think of the maid of Naaman's wife.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. John Testified In The Proper Manner.**

We furthermore learn in what manner our testimony must be rendered. John speaks respectfully to the delegation that has come for an interview. There is nothing haughty, proud, arrogant or boastful in his replies. He is humble and courteous. He is but the voice of one crying in the wilderness; he is merely baptising with water, that is, he himself has no power to bestow spiritual blessings in baptism.

All this is important. Many a truthful testimony concerning Jesus loses its effectiveness and to all appearance does more harm than good because it is rendered in a proud, arrogant way, which repels the party who is being dealt with. Not one of us feels inclined to listen to a person who comes before us in a vain, conceited manner, whether what he says is true or not.

At the same time, John's manner showed that he was interested in the welfare of the people who had come to him. He told them the very things they needed to know. Let the one listening to you arrive at the conviction that you are really concerned about his eternal well-being, and your testimony, even if haltingly rendered, will be quite likely to make a deep impression.

### **4. John In His Testimony Emphasised What Was Essential.**

Finally, we learn here that our testimony has to stress those things about Jesus that are essential. John does not tell his questioners some interesting facts about the appearance and dress of Jesus and some other external matters, but he does make it clear that the Person he is speaking of is truly the Messiah, the Redeemer, and the great God. These are the essentials. What man must know is, How can I get rid of the burden of my sins? How can I obtain the pardon of the great God whom I have offended?

Let this be a hint to us. The discussion of some geographical matters mentioned in the Bible may be interesting enough and of some use, but it is not

essential. Our main aim must not be to entertain people by our testimony, but to save their souls by putting them in contact with the Redeemer.

Do you say, We have no strength or ability in ourselves to testify concerning Jesus as we should? That is very true, but God is willing to strengthen you through His Spirit, so that in this respect, too, we may show ourselves to be true disciples of Jesus.

He is doing it in the means of grace, the Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Prayerfully use these means, and you will be filled with willingness and strength to testify of the great love of the Saviour which manifested itself so strikingly in His lowly birth in Bethlehem. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. 11:14; 17:12-13

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 5:2.