

Radical Witness to the Gospel

John 1:19-34

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Radical is too tame a word for John the Baptist. That would explain why thousands of people made the trek on foot, nearly 30 miles, to go from Jerusalem down to the Jordan River to see him (see Matthew chapter 3). He must have made quite an impression on these folks...dressed in camel's hair, eating wild locusts and preaching to the crowds. His fame spread far and wide and his legend grew. Soon people thought John himself was the Christ, or some other promised figure from Old Testament Prophecy. Truth is, John the Baptist was one of the most amazing characters who ever lived—but the real reason for his greatness was the role he played in pointing men and women to Jesus Christ. The greatness of John the Baptist was his radical witness to the gospel.

Keeping the Focus Where it Belongs

The genius of John the Baptist was his relentless focus on Jesus Christ. When people became enamored with him, he deflected their attention and put it back on Jesus. In a sense, John just kept saying over and over, "it isn't about me, it's about Jesus." This is one of the most important lessons of the Gospel of John. The word "witness" or "testimony" is a constant theme in the Gospel. John was first and foremost a witness. John 1:8 puts it like this: "He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." That's what he faithfully did throughout his ministry. When they asked him about himself, he refused to talk about himself. He didn't want fame, titles or power. His response was simple: "I am a voice crying in the wilderness" (John 1:23). Then he told them more about Jesus.

His example is emphasized right from the beginning of the Gospel, because every Christian and church needs to learn this lesson—to always keep the focus where it belongs, on Jesus Christ. It's easy to focus on some peripheral issue of theology. It's easy to focus on all of our "ministries". It's even easy to focus on our own church or pastors or leaders, especially if things seem to be going well. But none of this will do. The first priority of every Christian and every ministry is to keep the focus where it belongs, on Jesus Christ!

Going to the Heart of the Gospel

John knew how to keep the focus on Jesus; but he also knew how to go to the very heart of the Gospel. That's why he proclaimed these famous words about Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). These are powerful words. They are powerful because they come so early in the Gospel: just 29 verses into it! We need to couple these words with the incredible words we have already seen in the prologue. Jesus is the eternal, almighty, creator: He is God (1:1). But He became flesh: God incarnate (1:14). This is astounding. Barely before we have a chance to take all that in, we learn something more—something overwhelming: Jesus will also die a sacrificial death for the sins of the world! Yes, that is the meaning of the phrase, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." We realize, as we read the first chapter of John's Gospel, that these first few verses give us a radical witness to the Gospel. It comes through the prologue (1:1-18) coupled with the testimony of John the Baptist. In these verses, we have been taken directly to the very heart of the Gospel. Do we know how to go the heart of the Gospel? How to focus there? How to share this with others?

Remembering What Matters Most

Here is my favorite verse about John the Baptist: "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true" (John 10:41). I love this verse because it reminds me of what matters most. I would love to perform miraculous signs—how awesome would that be! But that's not what matters most. What matters

most is that we speak the truth about Jesus Christ...the full truth and nothing but the truth. This is what John the Baptist did. This is what John the Apostle did. This is what Christians are called to—what our church is called to. In a world of darkness, there is nothing more important than this. May the Lord help us to live as radical witnesses to Gospel! But remember, to be a witness to the Gospel we must speak of Jesus Christ—we must present the full truth of who He is. God is going to use the Gospel of John to show us that amazing truth. He asks us to respond in personal faith and then, to share that truth with our dark and hurting world.