

All Saints talk for Sunday 17 December 2023

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'Explain John's Gospel'

John 1:6-8 and 19-28.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

John the Baptist Denies Being the Messiah

¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders[Ⓜ] in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John 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.'"[Ⓜ]

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

I was really excited this week that I got to choose what I wanted to preach on.... So, I looked in the lectionary I found this reading was today's.

At college, one of the last essays I had to do was to read John's gospel and to describe what the message was.

The question was to explain the message of John's gospel to someone who had never read it.

You can imagine my excitement over this question...

So I chose this passage today, because for me, this sums up the message of John's gospel.

But in this piece of scripture, we are no longer talking about the Word.

We are talking about a different person.... This person was a man named John.

The synoptic gospels called him John the baptiser. He will also be referred to as the messenger and the prophet.

But in this gospel, the author does not call him John the baptiser. In this gospel, John is called the witness.

Notice in verse 6 our key word is 'sent'. Verse six reveals the Commission of John. John did not come about his task on his own. He was sent by God and divinely commissioned to be a spokesperson.

Verse 7 contains the next keyword, "witness"
John is a human witness sent from God. He came as a witness to give his witness or testimony concerning the light.

So keep this in mind: John's purpose is to testify to the light. This is very important to the theme of John's gospel.

Bearing witness only occurs twice in all three synoptic gospels combined. However, bearing witness occurs 33 times in John's gospel.

The purpose is more clearly stated at the end of verse 7.

John came as a witness so that all might believe in him. The author is not saying that all would believe through Jesus.

Jesus is the object of our faith. Jesus is what we believe in.

Through John's witness, people were to recognise that Jesus is the light and therefore believe in Jesus.

John is saying to listen to him so that you will believe in Jesus.

John's role as a witness was to recognise the true light when it appeared and call attention to it so that all might believe.

What I love about this passage is that the author of this book writes 'there was a man named...' Named!!!

God has chosen John by name as a witness.... Not just plucked him out of a load of people with their hands up saying "pick me" a man named John!

But to be a witness to Christ can be hard... especially in the world we are in right now.

Top of the most dangerous countries to be a Christian in 2023 is North Korea. Yet there are an estimated 400,000 Christians there.

In Somalia, there are still female Christians even though they face physical violence. In Yemen, it is illegal to convert to Christianity, yet people still are even though they are at risk of being killed. In Afghanistan following Jesus remains a death sentence, so Christians meet in secret.

Each and every one of these people has been called by name to be a witness to the light... To Christ. Even in the dangers of the world they live in.

John's witness comes at a time where there was darkness in the world.... He was to be a witness of the hope that was to come for all...

I don't know about you, but I feel like the world is a pretty dark place right now. There's so much hatred, so much anger, so much division, so much trying to get power!

This picture is of a nativity scene that Reverend Munther Isaac from a church in Bethlehem created. This comes on the back of Christmas being cancelled in Bethlehem.



“While the world celebrates Christmas with big festivities, in the homeland of Christmas, children are being killed, homes are being destroyed and families displaced” Reverend Isaac said.

This breaks my heart. This is what is happening. And this is what is happening at the birthplace of Jesus! This is the darkness.

John was the first witness to the light shining in the darkness. After John, the apostles were witnesses to the light shining in the darkness.

The apostles received the light and gave the light: the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to the world. They were reflections of the true light so that people could come out of darkness into his light.

So who are we? Are we witnesses? How are we testifying in this modern world?

John was named by God... so are we... Emma, Peter, Pippa, Paul... we all have a part to play in this.

This Christmas more than ever, in the darkness of our world, it is more important than ever to be a witness to the light.

To tell people who haven't heard it what the message of John's gospel is.... that Jesus is who he said he was!

Not just in an essay but to real people who don't yet know.

Jesus is God in human form, Jesus is God's intervention in the world. And with that, comes hope. John said " I baptise you with water, but he who comes will baptise with the Holy Spirit!"

The alpha course is coming up... let's point people to that light and send them to alpha. Witnesses to Jesus understand their proper role: to point to the light.

We do not point to ourselves. we do not glorify ourselves. We do not point to the people in the church to make up numbers.

Witnesses to Jesus point to the light. We glorify Jesus. We point people to Jesus. We show people Jesus through our own actions.

Jesus brings hope, Jesus brings love, Jesus heals war, Jesus brings peace, Jesus brings light in the darkness. Amen