

The Ministry of John the Baptist

John 1:6-9

John 1:6-9 - *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”⁷ This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all through him might believe.⁸ He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.⁹ That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.”*

Background Notes

The “John” mentioned in verse 6 is, of course, John the Baptist. Why was he called “John the Baptist”? Was Baptist his last name? No. Was that his denomination? He wasn’t a Presbyterian, he wasn’t a Methodist, was he a Baptist? No. “Baptist” was his function. He baptized people who were preparing themselves for the coming of the Messiah. John’s baptism was not Christian baptism or “believer’s baptism.” It was a “baptism unto repentance.”

The Jewish people who underwent John’s baptism were basically saying four things. 1) I repent of my personal sins. 2) I repent of my part in the sins of the nation of Israel that has rejected the prophets of God. I repent of my part in this nation’s sin of rejecting God. 3) I am prepared for the coming Messiah, the true light of the world. 4) I am ready for the Messiah to set up his kingdom.

John the Baptist, then, was the forerunner of the Messiah. He was like a herald announcing the arrival of a king. John’s mission as the forerunner of the Messiah was predicted in the Old Testament, more than 400 hundred years before he was born: *“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts*” (Malachi 3:1).

Notice the contrasts between John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus in the first nine verses of the Gospel of John.

First, John was only a **man**. Verse 6: *“There was a man sent from God whose name was John.”* On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Christ was referred to as the **Word**, and the Word was **God**. Verse 1: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* John was only a man. The Word, the Messiah, was God.

A second contrast: *“There was a man...”* (v6). The man John came into being, whereas “the Word” always was (v1). There is a definite contrast in the Greek word that is used in verse 6: “there was” or “there came,” or “there came into being,” in reference to John. This is a clear contrast to the Word. The Word always was in existence. The Word was already in existence.

The third contrast is that John was only a witness to the light (v7-8). The Lord, of course, **is** the Light, “the true Light” (v9).

The theme of the Gospel of John is “Jesus Christ as the Son of God.” John’s purpose in writing this Gospel was to convince people to believe this truth, and as a result to have the light and life of Christ. So Christ as the Life and Christ as the Light are sub-themes running throughout the Gospel of John. *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”(v4).* As the Son of God, He is the Life and the Light. In verses 6-9 we see a continued emphasis on Christ as the Light. If people will respond to this Light, and believe this true Light, they will have life, divine life, new life - they will have Christ as Life.

Here are a few more verses from the Gospel of John where the sub-themes of Christ as the Life and Christ as the Light emerge:

John 8:12, *“Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”*

John 11:25, *“Jesus said to her [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.”*

John 14:6, *“Jesus said to him [Thomas], “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

The sub-themes of Christ as the Light and Christ as the Life run all the way through the Gospel of John.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The goal of witnessing is evangelism.

“This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe”(v7). Notice - John was not sent to witness by being a good neighbor, or by being a model citizen. He was sent to be a witness of Christ by **verbalizing the message** – the message that people would believe, and must believe, in order to have Light, in order to have Life.

We must do the same. That’s what evangelism is all about. Some Christians think, “Well, if I’m a good neighbor and a model citizen, I’ll be a good witnesses.” But we haven’t reached the goal of witnessing if we are just good neighbors and model citizens - because the **goal** of witnessing is **evangelism**. Your neighbors aren’t evangelized until they know the gospel and that they have to make a decision to believe. Have your neighbors been evangelized, or do they only know you as a good neighbor? Of course we are to be good neighbors and model citizens, but our witness must also include

evangelism. John was sent for that reason, and we too are sent. The Great Commission is “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel*” - and it definitely applies to us. The goal of witnessing is evangelism.

One of our neighbors is a single mother who has two children. Last summer we sent ten-year-old Justin to a Christian camp. Why? Just to be good neighbors? Just so that he would have a good time? No - much more! We sent him so he would be evangelized - so he would hear the gospel. The goal of witnessing is evangelism.

2. Christ is God's standard of perfection for everyone.

“That was the true Light [referring to Jesus Christ] that gives light to every man coming into the world”(v9).

What does this verse mean? Is it the Quaker idea that every person has the “inner light,” the so-called “spark of the divine”? No. Is this verse teaching *universalism* - the idea that everyone eventually is saved? No, certainly not!

It could mean that since Christ, the true Light has come into the world, that light is now available to all people. However, I believe the primary meaning of this verse is that as the Light, Jesus Christ sheds light on everyone, showing that everyone falls short of God’s moral standards. Jesus Christ is the true Light, the real, the genuine Light. He is God’s ultimate moral standard, because He is God!

When Christ came into the world, all of mankind - no matter what race, what background, what culture - all of mankind was exposed to the Light. That is, the Light shone on everyone. The Light showed everyone that they fall short of God’s standards. The idea is that the Light shone **on** them, not **in** them. It would be like a room full of dust. When the light is low or dim or turned off, you don’t see the dust - but when the light is turned on, the dust is exposed.

Suppose you were to get a call from a friend who lives out of town. They’re in your town, they’re going to be at your house in a half hour - and you haven’t dusted or vacuumed the house in some time. I have a suggestion: if you turn the lights down low, they won’t see the dust! Bright lights show up every speck of dust. And that’s the idea in verse 9. The bright Light of Christ shows people their imperfections. It shows that **all** fall short of God’s standards!

Notice that some translations refer the phrase “comes into the world” to Christ, and some to “every man.” “*That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*” No matter which way this is translated, the main point of verse 9 is that Jesus Christ is God’s standard of perfection for **everyone**.

Practical Application

You don't have to do miracles or have a lot of charisma to be a good witness.

We don't need to do miracles or have a lot of charm to be a good witness. We tend to think, "If only I could do a few miracles, my witness for the Lord would be so much more powerful, so much better." Let's learn a lesson from John the Baptist. He was a good witness, but he did no miracles.

In Luke 7:28 the Lord said, "*For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist...*" Think of the many miracles done by Elijah and Elisha - but Jesus said that John was greater! Why? Because he announced the King! The power of being a good witness is not in doing the miraculous, but in being sent by God to preach Christ. John was a man sent by God to be a witness for Christ; we are sent by God to be witnesses for Christ.

And we don't have to have a lot of charisma to be good witnesses. Again, we sometimes think, "If only I was more outgoing - if I had more charm! I could be a better witness if only people were naturally drawn to me!" Once again, let's learn a lesson from John the Baptist. John the Baptist didn't have a lot of charisma. No. People were not drawn to John the Baptist because of his charm!

John the Baptist grew up in the wilderness. "*So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel*" (Luke 1:80). John the Baptist wore unusual clothing. He ate locusts and wild honey. If John the Baptist were living today, some people would even call him a social misfit! But he was humble, he was sent by God, and he announced Christ. So you don't have to have a lot of charm to be a good witness!

John the Baptist was a very humble man. He referred to himself as "just a voice crying in the wilderness." He said he was not even worthy to untie the sandals of the Messiah, meaning that he was less important than a servant would be! No wonder God used him!

Let's be more like John the Baptist! We already **are** sent by God, just as John was. We need to be humble, and we need to announce Christ. Let's ask God to help us become more humble - humble enough to be a good witness.

Remember - you don't have to do miracles or have a lot of charisma to be a good witness.