

Jesus the Witness

John 3: 31-36

Does the thought of witnessing to someone scare you to death? I mean, you know that as a Christian you are to be telling others about Christ, but somehow it just does not seem politically correct, so you are concerned about what people will think of you. Or maybe that does not concern you, but you are afraid you will say the wrong thing or stumble over your words. Remember what George W. Peters once said, *“The world is far more ready to receive the Gospel than Christians are to hand it out.”* It is true we do need to be loving in our testimony and it is also true that, like it or not, our lives and our actions speak louder than our words. Let us see what tips we can get from this morning’s message about effective witnessing.

The focus in this section of John chapter three is on witnessing, that is giving one’s testimony regarding the truth of the message Jesus was teaching. This is one of the key subjects in John’s Gospel. The Greek word translated “witness” or “testimony” is used forty-seven times. John bore witness to Jesus (John 1:7; 5:33), but Jesus was also a witness to the truth. Why should we believe His witness? We will find out shortly.¹

It has been a few weeks since we studied the last section of John 3, so we will go back a few verses to remind us of the context and then begin our study with John 3:31.

John 3:22-36 ESV:

22 *After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.*

23 *John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized*

24 *(for John had not yet been put in prison).*

25 *Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification.*

26 *And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.”*

27 *John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”*

28 *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’*

29 *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.*

¹ Ibid. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, John 3:31.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.”

31 He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.

32 He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John has already taught us a very important lesson in verse 30. If you recall we paraphrased this verse as, “*More of Jesus, less of me.*” John found satisfaction in the fact that Jesus was becoming more and more prominent as a teacher while his own influence was diminishing. John tried to make his position as clear as possible to his followers by giving them an illustration that they would readily understand. The primary purpose of the friend of the bridegroom at a wedding was to help the bridegroom in whatever way he could and to direct the attention of people, not to himself but to the bridegroom. John the Baptist’s work was to prepare the people for the coming of Christ, the “Groom,” and John found true joy serving in that capacity.

John 3:31 ESV:

31 He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.

Please understand the incredible fact that is presented in the first sentence of this verse. Jesus comes from Heaven. He is God, the second member of the Trinity, who has come to earth in human flesh. He is fully God and fully man, a reality that is difficult for our finite (limited in understanding) minds to understand. Such things regarding God should not surprise us, for He is a supernatural being with capabilities far beyond our human understanding. Some things we simply have to accept as true because God tells us they are true. There is no way we could understand such things in our present status as human beings. Jesus was supernatural, outside the realm of complete understanding.

Jesus was not conceived like all other children in the womb of His mother. This is yet another thing no one could possibly explain. Jesus came from Heaven and was placed in His mother’s womb so He would grow and develop just like any other human baby and be born after a nine month pregnancy just like any other baby. He would then grow from year to year into adulthood just like every other human being. Yet in his manhood He was still fully God and He had come from Heaven where He had lived from eternity past. If anyone would like to take a shot at explaining any of that, we are all ears. Jesus was from Heaven and that is why John can say in verse 31: “He who comes from above is above all.” And you might remember what Jesus said about John the Baptist in Matthew

11:11 NLT: *“I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!”* So John the Baptist is the greatest human being who has ever lived, and John says Jesus is far greater than he or anyone else on earth. Jesus considered John to be the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets and thus the greatest human ever. But after Jesus’ death on the Cross, anyone who accepted Jesus’ message and had all their sins forgiven, were considered by God to be without sin. They became part of the Kingdom of Heaven. We might call it the kingdom of grace where all who are saved are equal before God. Yet Jesus the Son of God is greater than all.

Jesus has more wisdom than anyone, more power than anyone, more love than anyone, more understanding than anyone, more everything than anyone, and He also had the capability of rising from the dead. Do you imagine anyone could ever do that on their own? Have there ever been great philosophers, or scientists, or teachers, or rulers, or church leaders who have ever risen from the dead? If you know of any, again we are all ears. No one in history has ever risen from the dead except Jesus Christ, and to prove He was God, He allowed Himself to be seen by over 500 witnesses, a number of whom were secular historians and not Christians. The only thing Jesus had less of than anyone else was sin. And He had none of that!

It was this claim that He was God that the Jews would not accept. In spite of all the miracles and prophecies that Jesus fulfilled at His first coming, 106 to be exact, they refused to accept Jesus for who He was. Yet in spite of this clear reliable witness, mankind as a whole has rejected His message. You may recall what John told us early on in his message in John 1:11 NLT: *“He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.”*

John the Baptist was not “from above,” nor did he claim to be. None of God’s servants or prophets came “from above.” Only Jesus Christ can make that claim and prove it to be true. Since Jesus came from Heaven, He represents the Father. Look at what Jesus said in John 6:38-42 NLT:

38 For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will.

39 And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day.

40 For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.”

41 Then the people began to murmur in disagreement because he had said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”

42 They said, “Isn’t this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know his father and mother. How can he say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

We cannot know, but we may form an opinion from their behavior, whether the Jewish leaders were simply fools, power crazed, or perhaps both. Because anyone who would reject God’s Son, God’s witness, was rejecting God the Father, as we are told in John

5:23 NLT: “*Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.*” But this was not unusual behavior for the Jews because they had been rebelling against God ever since God gave Moses the Law at Sinai.

Another point that can be made about the statement in verse 31 is that earth people are mortal and corrupted by sin. No one born on this earth, no matter how good they were, and that includes John the Baptist, has or ever will have the ability to provide the perfect sacrifice that was required for sin to be forgiven. Only someone without sin could provide that perfect sacrifice and the only place such a sinless person could come from would be Heaven.

John 3:32-33 ESV:

32 He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.

33 Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

Jesus is telling the people what He has seen in Heaven and heard directly from His Father, John 8:38 NLT: “*I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father.*” The Gospel of Christ is not an opinion that people are free to accept or reject as they would an editorial in the newspaper or on television.

The Gospel of Christ is fact. Christ is revealing to the world the mind of God, which contains the eternal truth that will affect our lives both here on earth and in eternity, which can only be spent in one of two places depending on whether or not we accept His Word as truth.

Anyone who is willing to give Jesus the benefit of the doubt and apply His teaching to their lives will come to know that what He says is true, John 7:17 NLT:

Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own.

They will come to know the truth of Jesus’ witness (teaching) because they will see His words changing their lives in exactly the way He has promised. So if you want to help lead someone to faith in Christ, you might simply suggest that if they are experiencing difficulties with life, they begin reading the Bible as if it were a self-help book and start applying the principles of Jesus’ teaching to their lives, while at the same time asking God in prayer to reveal His truth to them. When they see the changes that He promises occur, it will be easier for them to believe the teachings about what is necessary for salvation and eternal life.

It is when we obey His Word and put it into practice that we see its truth and experience its power.²

² Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 3:31.

In verses 32 and 33 John begins developing the understanding about the superiority of Jesus, which John the Baptist spoke of to his followers (John 3:28-30). Since Jesus has come from Heaven, His words mean far more than those of any religious teacher, because each human teacher is limited by his earthly humanity. Paul confirms what John is saying in Colossians 1:18 NLT: *“Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.”* Christ is also the head of the Church, which is His body. So He is first in everything.

Jesus’ witness or message has not, however, been universally rejected as verse 32 by itself might suggest. Verse 33 tells us that anyone who hears this message and believes it is in effect affirming that what Jesus is saying is the truth and that it comes directly from God the Father in Heaven. Again John is re-affirming the statement he made in 3:21 NLT: *“But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”* To reject what Jesus is saying through His testimony is the same thing as calling God a liar, 1 John 5:10 NLT:³

“All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don’t believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don’t believe what God has testified about his Son.”

This unbelief on the part of sinners is a source of grief to those who are saved. I know this grief repeatedly when people tell me that I am arrogant because I claim to know the truth and do not allow other people to accept what they believe to be true. The big difference here is that what I claim to be true is not what I myself believe to be true, but what Christ as the Son of God has told me is true. Their truth, for the most part, is based on what they made up from their own reasoning and want to believe is true about what God is like.

If you are or have ever been part of a 12-step program to arrest some addictive behavior, you know that several of these 12 steps require a recognition of the power of God, which they also refer to as a “higher power,” to help a person stop doing whatever he or she is trying to stop doing. In other words they allow people who cannot stand God to create a god of their own making in their minds, a god with whom they are comfortable. That will often work for a person because they are then willing to accept all the principles of the 12-step program that refer to the real God and come directly from the Bible. When they call on God, they may then call upon their higher power, a god who makes no demands of them nor calls them to any accountability beyond what they are willing to accept. The reason this works even for this kind of acceptance is stated in John 3:32-33. As we mentioned just a page or so back, *“They will come to know the truth of Jesus’ witness (teaching) because they will see His words changing their lives in exactly the way He has promised.”* The people in these programs are using all the principles that Jesus brought with Him as a revelation of the mind of God. Over time, those who practice the 12-steps find that their lives change for the better and very often are able to overcome their

³ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:283.

addictions. Yet in spite of this the greatest majority of these people refuse to accept the true God as the source of this truth and healing power. They continue to believe some unknown force in the universe is the source of their healing. They prefer to believe that these principles God sent through Jesus and the help that healed them come from a god of their own choosing. That is nothing less than idolatry and their fate is told in verse 36: “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*” It may help them with their addiction, but it will not do a thing for where they spend their eternity.

Just listen to how Paul expressed his grief over the many who rejected the message of Christ.

Romans 9:1-3 NLT:

1 With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it.

2 My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief

3 for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them.

By believing in Christ we believe that all God has promised in the Old Testament is true including all the promises which he made concerning Christ. We confirm that everything that God spoke through His prophets is true. We are therefore willing to deal with Christ in complete trust and faith. In so doing we bring honor to God.⁴

John 3:34 ESV:

34 For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

Harper’s Bible Dictionary describes a prophet as “a person who serves as a channel of communication between the human and divine worlds.” God’s prophets were messengers that brought letters from Heaven; but Christ came more in the role of *ambassador*, someone who comes from a certain country with a message from its leader. He spoke the *words of God*, which means the whole message of God, and nothing He said revealed any human shortcomings. All of His teachings and comments were of a divine nature. When the prophets delivered messages from God, they temporarily were under the influence of the Holy Spirit, but at other times they also displayed their humanness as well. You may recall the books of the prophets in which they either displayed a reluctance to obey or they complained about what God wanted them to do as well as various other human shortcomings. When someone spoke with Jesus or heard Him teach they must have known they were in the presence of or hearing the words of someone who was unlike any other human being. Jesus proved in any number of ways that He was sent from God and therefore His words were to be received as coming directly from God. In John 3:2 we hear Nicodemus say: “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” (NLT)

⁴ Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume.* Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jan 3:22.

Jesus spoke as no other prophet could, and it is possible for this reason that many scholars interpret the latter part of verse 34, “God gave Jesus the Holy Spirit without measure,” to mean that the Holy Spirit was with Jesus all the time and filled Him completely. That would most certainly be true. You see in the Old Testament, God would send the Holy Spirit to indwell someone that He chose to perform a specific task or tasks. When the task was completed, the Holy Spirit was withdrawn.⁵

In the case of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was with Him constantly and guided all of His behavior. No one can speak the Words of God without the Holy Spirit of God. We see this confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2: 1-16 NLT

1 When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan.

2 For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified.

3 I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling.

4 And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit.

5 I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

6 Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten.

7 No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began.

8 But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord.

9 That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”

10 But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets.

11 No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit.

12 And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

13 When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths.

14 But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only

⁵ Numbers 24:2; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 24:20; Zechariah 1:1; Ezekiel 8:3.

those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.

15 Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others.

16 For, "Who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

The Old-Testament prophets had the Spirit, but in different degrees as we see in 2 Kings 2:9, 10 NAS:

9 When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."

10 He said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so."

God gave the prophets the Spirit by *measure*, but He gave the Holy Spirit to Christ without measure. The total fullness of God's Holy Spirit was in Christ. "The prophets who had the Spirit in a limited manner in respect to some particular revelation, sometimes spoke of themselves; but Jesus had the Spirit always residing in Him and therefore always spoke the words of God."⁶

So this is a possible meaning in John 3:34. But I cannot help thinking that for God to say He gives Jesus the Holy Spirit without measure would seem quite obvious and even repetitive after what has been said and implied in the previous verses. I believe there is a meaning here that is more accurate based on the original Greek that is used. So let us look at verse 34 from a little different perspective.

The Messenger of God, Jesus, speaks the words of God, which means the entire message of God, and thus shows Jesus to be worthy of their trust. He confirms His worthiness to be trusted as the Son of God by further *giving the gift of the Spirit in full measure to anyone who believes His message.* "He gives the Spirit without measure." Not only does He Himself have the full measure of the Holy Spirit, but He proves it by giving the Spirit in full measure to all who believe.

Verse 35 would also seem to follow this sequence. Because God loves His Son, He has given Jesus the power to give the Holy Spirit to those who show their worthiness through faith. God has given the Son all things to administer according to His own pleasure and rule. Look at Matthew 11:27NAS:

27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

⁶ Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume.* Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jan 3:22.

A measure of the Holy Spirit was given to John the Baptist which was adequate for the work God had sent Him to do. The Baptist himself saw the Spirit descending in a bodily form upon the Son of God, and heard the voice from Heaven saying, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” The Spirit is thus Christ’s own. He gives it (δίδωσιν), to believers in its fullness. Thus Jesus said, later in [John 16:1-15 NAS](#).⁷

- 1 “*These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling.*
 2 “*They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.*
 3 “*These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.*
 4 “*But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.*
 5 “*But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’*
 6 “*But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.*
 7 “*But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.*
 8 “*And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;*
 9 *concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;*
 10 *and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;*
 11 *and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*
 12 “*I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.*

13 “*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.*
 14 “*He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.*
 15 “*All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.”*

I consider this to be the best explanation of John 3:34.

John 3:35 ESV:

35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

⁷ # Vincent, Marvin Richardson: Word Studies in the New Testament. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002, S. 2:106-

The Gospel of John refers to Jesus being sent from God thirty-nine times.⁸ This affirms Jesus' deity and heavenly origin, as well as God's sovereignty and love in sending Jesus to earth.⁹ God sent Jesus. God gave Him the Word. God gave Him the Spirit, and God gave Him all things. And Jesus was aware of all of this as John repeats later in John 13:3. To reject Jesus' witness was to call God a liar or tell Him in effect that you had no interest in what He had to say. A decision one will live to regret.

God does love this lost world (John 3:16), but John reminds us of God's love for His Son. Jesus is the Father's "beloved Son."¹⁰ Because the Father loves the Son, He has given Him all things, and He shows Him all things (John 5:20). It is a love that can hold nothing back. Therefore, when we accept Jesus' witness, His message, we share in the love of God that will bring forgiveness for our sin, salvation and eternal life. No wonder Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39). Jesus was not weeping because the Jews had rejected Him personally. He wept because they had rejected the Word of God. They had rejected Jesus' witness, both His messages and His miracles, and their rejection led to judgment.¹¹

The Son is endowed with all authority to accomplish the Father's purposes (John 5:22; Matthew 28:18).¹²

John 3:36 ESV:

36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

This is the only place in John's Gospel or epistles that he uses the word *wrath*. He uses the word six times in the Book of Revelation. This verse confirms what was said in John 3:18 and leaves little doubt that we have only two alternatives when it comes to Jesus. We either trust Him or we reject Him.

"Everlasting life" does not simply mean eternity in Heaven. The believer possesses eternal life the moment he/she believes. Eternal life is the life of God in the believer. The opposite of eternal life is eternal death, the wrath of God. A person does not have to die and go to Hell to be under the wrath of God. "*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*" (John 3:18 NIV). The verdict has already been given, but the sentence has not yet been executed. Why? Because God is patient and wants everyone possible to be saved, and continues to call sinners to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

⁸ John 3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23-24, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16, 28-29; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44-45, 49; 13:16, 20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21.

⁹ Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9-10, 14.

¹⁰ Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22.

¹¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 3:31.

¹² Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:283.

As you think back through John 3, you can see that the Apostle John is emphasizing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a living relationship that begins with the new birth, the birth from above. When we receive Jesus Christ into our lives, we share His life and become children in the family of God. It is also a loving relationship, for He is the Bridegroom and we are a part of the bride. Like John the Baptist, we desire that Jesus Christ increase as we decrease. He must receive all the honor and glory. It is a learning relationship as well, for He is the faithful Witness who shares God's truth with us. What a joy it is to receive His Word, meditate on it, and make it part of our lives.

We must never forget the cost of these blessings. For us to be born into God's family, Jesus had to die. For us to enter into the loving relationship of salvation, He had to endure the hatred and condemnation of men. He had to be lifted up on the cross so that we might experience forgiveness and eternal life. May we never take this for granted. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).¹³

¹³ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 3:31.