

John 1:6-8 John's testimony about Jesus

Introduction

All of us who claim to be followers of Jesus are by definition witnesses of our Lord and Saviour through our attitudes, words and actions. The issue is only whether we are doing that well or are less effective at communicating God's wonderful love for people than we ought to be, at any given time. There are many people in our land who are searching for meaning and purpose in their lives today and who watch out to see if there are other people who have what they are looking for. There are times when our faith is challenged possibly by unthinking colleagues or a manager at work. A well known example came as a result of a shocking act of intolerance in British Airways nearly a decade ago. Nadia Eweida, a Coptic Christian of Egyptian background was quietly serving God through her work as a member of British Airways check-in-staff in London in November 2006. Her quiet witness in line with her background was by wearing a tiny cross, no bigger than a 5p piece around her neck, but visible for people with good sight to see. Yet B.A. senior staff who had no problems allowing adherents of other faiths to wear clothing or symbols associated with their faith- even if it was not required by their faith, only a cultural preference like the Muslim hijab were determined that she would be fired rather than allowed to show a Christian cross (*Daily Mail* 24.11.06). Thankfully British Airways, albeit with great reluctance, changed their policy when legal action was imminent in a case they couldn't possibly have won. Another battle that was of great strategic importance around the same time concerned Christian Unions on University campuses; in 2006 up to six British Universities are banning them from their grounds on the basis that they discriminate against non-Christians by not allowing them to serve in leadership positions. (*The Times* 24 Nov 06). Yet the same University authorities did not, for example, require the student branch of the Liberal Democrats to allow BNP members on their Executive or the Islamic Society to have Jewish members!! Edinburgh University had stopped its CU holding a 'PURE' course in its premises, promoting biblical morality –on the grounds that it will be taught that God desires sexual relations be limited to full expression between a man and a woman in the context of marriage. This was hardly new and revolutionary or was it - in November 2006! Praise God that over a number of years the atmosphere on university campuses has improved dramatically and Christian students are once more able to live out their faith openly where they live and work. However, in an increasingly secular society there will be both more opportunities to share our faith but also potentially more challenges from people ignorant of the significance of the convictions important to us. It is exciting to see us having more contacts with people in our community this year; we need to pray that God will be at work increasingly in the lives of each adult and child who crosses our path. What is most important is that all of us as Christians are called to be witnesses. Remember the words God gave to Joshua on the threshold of entering the Promised Land: *Be bold, be strong, for the Lord Your God is with you* (Joshua 1:9). The short passage for our reflections today in John 1:6-8 concerns John the Baptist, a person whose life had one simple aim – to point people to Jesus. In essence, although our daily routine will be so different to his, our calling is the same- to direct people to Jesus. How we do it will be very different, but the principles of witnessing to our Lord and Saviour are unchanged.

1. The Person who came (John 1:6)

There came a man who was sent from God, his name was John

(a) **His family background** John came from a devout Jewish home. His father Zechariah was a priest in the temple and his mother Elizabeth was also from a priestly family and a relative of Jesus' mother Mary. John's birth was unexpected as his parents were unable to have children- privately they had accepted their hopes for children would be disappointed as they were now past the normal age for being parents. However, God intervened through the angel Gabriel and an unforgettable encounter in the temple ensued for Zechariah while the people waited for him to emerge from the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple prayer service. John was brought up in a home that prepared him for his work ahead as his parents invested in his spiritual future. God over-ruled the problems they faced. Elizabeth in turn was able to help her young relative Mary face the calling she had been given. God does not make mistakes – it is human to err, but He knows just why He has made you as you are to fulfil the calling you have been given. God has no wastage in His economy! The experiences through which you have passed will not be wasted. I have lost count of the number of times I have observed Christians helping other people who are experiencing in the present what they went through in the past. In other contexts, using particular skills in His service that were not naturally seen as spiritual gifts! What is exciting in a local congregation is the range of skills that people bring to the community to share and assist one another in proclaiming our faith in word and deed. At any given moment in time a fair number of us will be wondering about the future direction of our lives. Why has this happened? Or that not happened? Sometimes a reason can be given but many times there are no obvious explanations. Proverbs 3:5-6 is so important to recall: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.*

(b) **His particular calling** John was to be a Nazirite from birth (Luke 1:15). There are many references to Nazirites in the Old Testament. They were people committed to serving God from their birth (Numbers 6:1-21 gives details on their lifestyle.). A life characterised by wholehearted devotion to God and an avoidance of worldly living. God told Samson's parents (Judges 13) to bring their son up in this way; Amos 2:11-12 describes these people and points out how godless Israelites relentlessly persecuted them. *But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy* (v12). John like these Old Testament figures was set apart for God's service –but is that not the calling of every Christian *to be transformed by the renewing of (y)our mind? Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is –His good, pleasing and perfect will* (Rom.12:2 NIV). Peter told his readers in I Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.* Living for God is a tough calling, but in His strength we can accomplish more than we ever dared to ask or imagine. We prayed for years for new premises in another area of our community to assist us in carrying out our mission and numerous setbacks occurred until unexpectedly God provided for our need with what is now called Panmurefield Baptist Centre. When we started activities on that site we did not know what response we would receive but God had blessed and encouraged us in the range of activities we have offered. As we soon enter 2016 who knows what steps of faith and new opportunities will be presented to us. What is certain is that our faithful God will provide for our needs as we honour Him with dedicated service.

(c) **His special position** John was the last prophet of the old era, but the link with the kingdom of God ushered in by Jesus. Jesus said in Matthew 11:11 *I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* John was the bridge between two worlds. Yet is there not an element of truth in that for us –are we not proclaimers of a reconciling gospel bringing together God and sinful people? Are Christians not signposts of the way to heaven for people who need directions as they cannot get there without assistance? Every person who has come to faith with few exceptions has first had someone tell them about Jesus. John was an ordinary man but filled with the Holy Spirit. Surely that should be true of all of us –if we seek God the Holy Spirit to work through us for His glory. We need to remember that there are individuals whom no-one else in our congregation will meet as frequently or contexts through our work or family and social networks where we have a particular opportunity to live for the Lord. You may never be a public figure like John the Baptist but God created you to be you! Can He count on you and me to be faithful in the contexts in which He has placed us at this time?

2. The Purpose of his coming (John 1:7)

He came as a witness to testify concerning that light so that through Him all men might believe.

(a) **He came as a witness** One of the major themes of this gospel is that of ‘witness’. Fourteen times John used the noun *witness* and 33 times the verb *to witness*, in contrast to a total of six uses altogether in Matthew Mark and Luke! In John the Father bears witness to the Son (John 5:37; 8:18); the Holy Spirit testifies to Jesus (John 15:26); and Jesus also testifies concerning Himself. His works bear witness to the Scriptures (John 5:36). John the Baptist (John 1:29, 36; 5:33); the disciples of Jesus, the Samaritan woman (John 4:39) and on one occasion the crowd (John 12:17) testified concerning Jesus. Testimony was crucial for John the apostle who wrote this book –no-one can deny the word of a witness who saw or experienced something. Our testimonies regarding the difference God has made in our lives and is currently doing so are so important. However, a changed lifestyle is the best witness of all. When God comes into our lives our attitudes, speech and conduct slowly but surely changes as the Holy Spirit influences us. Someone may disagree with your opinions about something- and that is their right! However, your testimony of what God has been doing, and is doing in your life, can be incredibly powerful. The forms of witness are only limited by the extent of our imagination and creativity. I have enjoyed hearing very positive comments from people in the wider community about the meals that have been provided for people in a time of need by people within this congregation. God’s love in action is not a substitute for words, but on occasions can be more appropriate depending on the context. Let us ask the Lord how we can most effectively witness for Him where He has placed us. It may be that the Lord will open a door of opportunity for you in the coming months that you had not expected. Or one that you had sought with prayer for some time finally comes up. Be ready to seize the opportunities He gives to us.

(b) **He came as a witness to Jesus’ coming in human form** Jesus was taking on *the likeness of sinful flesh but yet without sin* (Hebrews 4:15) –a body like ours with all the human limitations that is a part of human existence. To make such extraordinary claims about a person needs indisputable witness if other people in later centuries are to be expected to accept such claims. I John 1:1-3a begins with a repetition of the

statement declared in John 1:14 [*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*] *that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched –this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.* The ordinary people wondered if John was the Messiah, the Coming One. They watched his holy life and powerful preaching. Luke 3:15 states: *The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.* Huge crowds followed John and heard him gladly in the most obscure of desert locations, yet he was reminding some interested observers from the religious establishment in Jerusalem that the Christ was someone else *the One who comes after me, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie* (John 1:27). Most people don't see Jesus for themselves – it is part of our calling as Christians to introduce people to Jesus. Are you praying to that end for someone this week? Are you willing to be available to be used by God to be a witness for Him?

(c) **John's witness points forward to ours** *so that through him all might believe.* The grammatically minded call this a purpose clause! You and I are here **so that** people might trust Jesus; **so that** people might know what it means to be a Christian by our lives. All of us can be busy every day with a vast array of choices. What separates the average follower of Jesus with a smaller number of more effective Christians is the ability to select the best choices or priorities for their lives. Our lives have a purpose – a mission statement! There are many good options or choices we could take, but because they are not helping us fulfil our mission or calling we will need to leave them to one side. It can be helpful at the end of each year to spend a little time reflecting on our priorities of the past year and seeking to fine tune them so that we may be more effective followers of Jesus

3. The Problem to be dispelled (John1:8)

He himself was not that light; he came only as a witness to the light.

(a) **About his person** When people make claims we must evaluate carefully what they have said to us. Not every assertion or claim is either credible or valid. One of the most outrageous I have ever heard occurred some years ago in South Africa. A man called Charles Sibindana, aged 27, was fined the equivalent of approximately £100 for making up a false sick note in order to get a week off work. He had observed other staff members obtaining time off and thought he also ought to obtain such a benefit. However, his choice of reasons was inappropriate. Prior to his sick leave he had offered letters allegedly from gynaecologists claiming that he was pregnant rather than his girlfriend. He appeared to be unaware that pregnancy and visits to gynaecologists tend to still be exclusive to women!! (BBC News website 28 Nov 06) John was not the Messiah despite the hopes and aspirations of some of his followers. There were even some people who continued to believe that in Ephesus in Turkey a couple of decades after John's death, whom Paul met in Acts 19. Apollos, the prominent Jewish preacher and brilliant orator from Alexandria in Egypt (Acts 18:24), whom had come to faith in Jesus through Aquila and Priscilla had been a follower of John the Baptist! We forget how powerful John the Baptist was as a witness to God concerning His gospel. When Jewish religious leaders asked him who he was (John

1:19-20) *he did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Christ.* Plenty of people make false religious claims, Sung Mung Moon, Jim Jones, Moses Berg, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young are just a few of many examples of erroneous religious claims. There will be many more before Jesus returns. This is why I John 4:1 states: *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.* How do people around you and me evaluate our claims to be followers of Jesus?

(b) **About his mission** Was John empire building as some church leaders and many secular leaders do? No! Certainly not! Throughout his life John maintained a grasp of why he was here and when Jesus was present told his followers (John 1:29-30) *Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is the one I meant when I said: A man who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.* It is never my church, your church- only Jesus' church. It is His work in which we are privileged to be co-workers and fellow servants of the King of Kings. It is not for our glory and honour but for His. John 3:29-31 reminds us of this fact: *The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater I must become less.* The older hymn 'May the mind of Christ my saviour' has a verse which declares: *May His beauty rest upon me as I seek the lost to win, and may they forget the channel seeing only Him.* How was John's witness viewed? John 5:35 *John was like a burning and shining lamp and you were excited about his message.* How do people see your witness and mine –this is the challenge to take away. May our witness be as zealous as His for Jesus' sake Amen.