

I Witness

Introduction

Ok Guys. Here is the deal. God who existed forever...who is eternal...I know crazy right? Well He became a man. Slipped the fullness of God into human skin. He was a homeless man who traveled around with His groupies that He called disciples. This Godman came to save His creation but they hated Him and Killed Him instead. They not only killed Him, they crucified Him like a lamb at slaughter. Then after He was dead, He came back to life. I know...crazy right?

Then He said that we get to do the same thing...only sort of in reverse. To remember that we are to drink His blood and eat His body until He returns.... Well, figuratively at least. If we believe His story and promises then He says we will never die. We will become children of God and born again into God's family. Crazy right? And we will have perfect unity with God and live with Him forever. Oh and because of Him the world will hate you, persecute you, conspire against you and possibly kill you.

But don't worry, because He came down from Heaven, we will get to go to Heaven. Die to yourself, surrender everything that you have....your hopes, your dreams and your money....hate the world, hate you sinful self, make sure you love Jesus more than your family...ok more than anything....seek His agenda first and above all else. Give up your life and gain His. Do you realize how crazy this idea seems?

What human in their right mind would ever believe this stuff? The answer is no one. Your human mind should instantly reject Jesus. That is what it is wired to do. And John tells us that is exactly what happened.

John 1:9–11 (ESV) 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

John claims that the long awaited Jewish Messiah came to those who were looking for the Jewish Messiah...the learned ones...the priests, the scholars, the smart people and they rejected Him. They violently rejected Him....They made a point of making Him suffer for these claims....and die for them...publicly, shamefully, and to set an example for anyone else trying to start a new Mesisah cult.

So if you are in your right human mind....He was crazy. He was an imposter, and He was worthy of death...because on top of all of these claims...He claimed to actually be God. Not to just know Him, but to be Him. Blasphemy gets you killed pretty quick.

No one born of Adam and Eve would give this story a second thought. We naturally reject this craziness.

But throughout this story, throughout this man's life and even beyond, crazy things started happening. This man started doing God stuff....calming storms....giving sight to the blind....teaching lame and paralyzed people how to dance....commanding demons who have to

obey Him....feeding thousands with essential a single happy meal...He stopped a funeral by having the dead guy come back to life...He raised people from the dead...

He didn't just claim to do these things...He did them...in public...with lots of witnesses...most of whom still thought that He was crazy. But they could not deny the miracles so they tried to discredit the man. The scholars told them to Ignore everything He said and did...We are the brightest and best humans with years of study...Nothing to see here...move along. Don't entertain His crazy thoughts.

But....there were some witnesses who could not deny what they had witnessed. No man does these things. Only God can do the things that Jesus did. Those who stopped to ask the question...Could this be the Messiah? knowing it or not...had taken a step toward God and He met them there with the Holy Spirit. We will soon meet one of those people..a man named Nicodemus.

So along the way, some began to believe...or at least to wonder. The evidence was piling up. Each event seemed more and more supernatural. Then as if to say I told you so, Jesus walked out of His own grave. Who does that? Crazy right? And again there were hundreds of witnesses.

He claims to give those who believe in Him His Spirit....He says that they are reborn and now eternal beings who will be with Him forever. They would be given the power of the Holy Spirit and that power was manifested through ordinary people who ebelieved. He clearly has a Messiah complex. He believes and demands that those who follow Him agree with Him. They must profess that He is Jesus the Christ...The Messiah...the Lord.

John 1:11–14 (ESV) 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Those who lived during that time...saw it all or at least knew many people who had witnessed it all. They could decide for themselves...Most of the Jews rejected Him because He was not who they were looking for.

But when John picks up his pen to write....it is now 50 years later...the original eyewitnesses are dying off....all of the apostles sans him are dead. The scriptures are just now being written and collected together. Each generation seems to be moving farther away from Jesus...what was once eyewitness testimony of history is now being portrayed as myth that their parents believed.

How could people reject history so easily? They are wired to reject anything that they don't like or want to change. One of the greatest signs of fallen man is the rewriting of history. To discount the witnesses, the events, and the artifacts so that they can write their own narrative. John experienced it and we experience it. Today people are trying to rewrite the Holocaust, the Civil War, the moon landing, the assassination of JFK, the civil rights movement, and almost every current event in the news today. But the main story that man has always rewritten is the story of Jesus who is the Messiah.

So John is going to state the case for Jesus. He will give his own testimony, He will show how the prophets foretold of Jesus and Jesus alone, He will remind everyone of the Old Testament that is fulfilled in Jesus and Jesus alone...He will bring in John the Baptist as a witness, He will Bring the disciples as witnesses, He will bring the miracles as witnesses...John is going to remind everyone of the miracles of Jesus and the authenticity of the witnesses and this historic time in History.

These events are compelling if we are open to them. I know because they finally reached me. Most people reject Jesus He says the path is narrow and few find it. ...

That was me...I did it...I heard the stories of Jesus...some of the first books I ever read were about Him. I heard of his birth, his lambs, his miracles, His love....I accepted Him with child like wonder. And why not? My parents know everything and would not lie to me.

So you remember where you were when you were told that there is no Santa Clause? I do. I remember it like it was yesterday. It was vivid. One of my early recollections...I was 6 years old....We were turning left on to Illinois Avenue in Dallas after going to a nursery to buy some plants. My Mom just looked in the mirror and said, ...You know Frank...Santa Claus is not real...I was stunned.

Not that Santa was fake...I already heard that from my older brother and sister...and some of my friends...But I was shocked because my parents had lied to me.

At a young age, from that point forward, I was skeptical of stuff. It did not take me long to wonder about the Tooth Fairy...The Easter Bunny...and then Jesus.

Over time, I began to wonder about and challenge the claims of Jesus. I spent most of my time in Youth groups wondering...Yeah but what about this?

I was a skeptic. I wanted proof. I wanted to trust the witnesses... I wanted to be protected from being duped again. When I was in High School I began to voice those questions out loud...and was shamed and silenced. I really wanted to believe in Jesus but I could not allow myself to do it without some explanation or answers....I had so many questions. I was essentially asking a familiar question.

Mark 9:23–24 (ESV) 23 And Jesus said to him, “ ‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

No one it seemed at the church I attended was comfortable helping my unbelief. They should have invited me to study the Book of John but they didn't. They couldn't or didn't want to answer my questions and so I believed that there were no answers. So I included Jesus with the Tooth Fairy, Easter Bunny, and Santa Claus. For the next 18 years.

But as I have said, a pastor finally challenged me to read the Book of John with an open mind that desires to find truth...and I did. I want to give all of you that same challenge today.

Now I know that I am not the only one. I know that the vast majority of people are like I used to be...non trusting burned skeptic...than what I am now...sold out believer.

I know that every one of us rejected Jesus...it is the natural response of fallen humans full of pride to reject anything or anyone who challenges our control. Every believer of all time has had to believe in their hearts what their minds naturally reject. We have all been there and many are still there today. If that is you, don't worry, it took me 18 years to find this book and it was almost always within 100 ft of me almost all the time.

John knew skeptics would need two things to break down their resistance and only one thing to finally overcome it. They would need eyewitness testimony...they would need clear miracles that only God could do...and the complete surrender would be the work of the Holy Spirit. Who over time would help explain Spiritual things to new Spiritual beings.

John presents witnesses and miracles...God does the rest.

Witness #1

John's first witness is himself. The entire first chapter is John's witness to the truth about Jesus.

John 1:14 (ESV) 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John then adds to his testimony another John...Let's dive in.

Witness #2 John the Baptist

John the Baptist first witnesses to the Jewish Leaders from Jerusalem.

John 1:19–20 (ESV) 19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

Those sent to interview John had a task that was far from simple. The Baptist was a religious leader outside the mainstream. He appeared in the wilderness with an eschatological message, that is, a message about the expected time of God's judgment and restoration. But although his message was not mainstream, it was not unique.

The interrogation falls into two sections, the first concerning the Baptist's identity and the second concerning his activity .

Who are you?

John 1:21 (ESV) 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”

As the interrogation begins, John emphatically denies that he is the Christ. They then ask him, almost as if they were working through a check list of expected figures, if he is Elijah or the Prophet (v. 21). Elijah was expected to return just before the day of God's

wrath to turn people hearts and thereby avert God's curse (Mal 4:5–6); and the Prophet probably refers to the prophet like Moses. That prophecy we will learn later in the NT is fulfilled in Jesus. When John rejects both of these suggestions they change their approach and allow him to identify himself in his own way. He does so by referring to an entirely obscure figure—not really a “figure” at all but only a voice and quoting Isaiah.

John 1:22–23 (ESV) 22 So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” 24 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) 25 They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

In this brief interchange we see that the Jewish authorities believe they are capable of passing judgment on religious claims, presumably on the basis of their understanding of Scripture.

The Jews of Jerusalem are not interested enough to come themselves, and those who come are not themselves interested—they only want to have an answer for those who sent them. So even when they ask what seems to be an open question, they do so with a closed attitude of indifference

Neither John the Baptist nor Jesus will cast pearls before swine. But while such people are not ready for pearls, it does not mean they are not ready for instruction altogether. It is said you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. True enough, but you can feed him salt. Much of Jesus' teaching is a matter of giving salt, seeking to arouse a thirst deep enough to enable a person to come and drink. So John shares the salt of truth....words from Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:3 (ESV) 3 A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

The Baptist's reference to the “voice” of Isaiah 40:3 is a highly significant expression of who he is, what he is doing and why he is doing it. His identity is his task, and this task is directed entirely toward the Lord's coming and not his own. His reply does answer them and should arouse their curiosity. Unfortunately, it goes right over their heads; they do not even acknowledge it. It is outside their expectations, and they do not have the inner openness to be able to hear it.

They come to the Baptist as those who know God's ways, even possessing a list by which to evaluate him. But when the Baptist quotes from Scripture to identify himself they ignore it entirely. Despite their desire to be loyal to God, they lack an openness to God and his Scripture.

What are you doing?

They ask him why he is baptizing, but he does not respond to their question. He simply says that he is baptizing and then goes on to identify himself solely in terms of the one who comes after me. His statement among you stands one you do not know is an

obvious truth that they don't understand either. It is clear that these men do not know Jesus.

John 1:24–26 (ESV) 26 John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” 28 These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Even when he is asked to testify concerning himself he points to Jesus. Thus he is a model of humility, a key characteristic of discipleship in this Gospel. So the Baptist himself is a lamp both shining on Christ and exposing the ignorance of the opponents. We find in him a powerful example of humility, single-mindedness and witness.

Then John the Baptist witnesses to the assembled crowd.

John 1:29–31 (ESV) 29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Now John was Jesus' cousin. Jewish families were close. So John knew who Jesus was and knew that He was a godly man. Thus, John told Him you should be baptizing me. But when John says he didn't know him, He is referring to the confirmation of God that Jesus is the Messiah.

Remember that John the Baptist was the first person in the New Testament to have the Holy Spirit since birth. He knew that his life was to be different...set apart. That he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy....to make straight the way for the Messiah. John told people to repent and be baptized with water in order to get ready for the Messiah. John clearly expected the Spirit to reveal to him who the Messiah was. I don't think he was too surprised to find that Jesus is God's Chosen One.

John was preparing people. In fact, it is for this very reason that he came baptizing. John was simply acknowledging what we have all discovered. All of us are ignorant of Jesus when He is first introduced to us. We are skeptical and guarded....but some...are curious...open enough to explore. Willing to admit that we don't have all the answers. John is preparing himself for the arrival of the Messiah too.

Such humility is part of being receptive and obedient to God. One with such a heart is able, like the John the Baptist, to hear God. John was obedient and guided by the Holy Spirit. He is a foreshadowing of all believers who will come to know Christ. Reborn and transformed. Guided by the Spirit to testify to the truth.

Notice in this passage that the lamb of God comes to take away the sin...singular...of the world. He did not say the sins of the world. He is representing the collective sin of all mankind. This Messiah came to the Jews but offers salvation for everyone.

Those filled with the Holy Spirit must proclaim the truth of God. So John certifies His testimony.

John 1:31–34 (ESV) 32 And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

Image 1

John the Baptist may be guarded about his own identity, but he is not so about Jesus' identity. Here also there are two parts, the first identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God who comes after the Baptist and the second identifying Jesus as the one upon whom the Spirit rests, the Son of God.

The primary focus, however, is obviously the bearing away of sins. The fact that it is the sin of the world that is taken away continues the theme of the universal scope of Jesus' ministry and the Baptist's witness. This Messiah will baptize...immerse you....in the Spirit...and you will be reborn.

So John the Baptist bore witness to the Jewish Leaders, The Jewish crowd and now he targets the new disciples.

John 1:35–37 (ESV) 35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

The two disciples here are Andrew and John. We studied in a prior week about how Jesus called Andrew and John....then Peter, and James to be His disciples. How they were family and knew each other...So we will not recount that today....but then we learn of other disciples.

So John has delivered the message. Now he shrinks back and allows Jesus to take center stage. He made the path straight and gave his testimony.

John 1:43–45 (ESV) 43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

The section begins with the calling of Philip. The main point to notice is precisely that now Jesus does call someone to follow him, unlike the first disciples' having taken initiative themselves. Andrew found Simon, and now Jesus finds Philip. Philip also goes to find another person to tell about Jesus, which suggests that such sharing is a characteristic of the disciples.

The new disciples have responded to the witness of John the Baptist, but they also recognize that that Moses, the Law and the Prophets all witnessed about this man. John continued to build his case for the Jews.

Nathaniel responds like most do when they first hear of Jesus.

John 1:46 (ESV) 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Note the skepticism. Every time the Gospel is told to anyone for the first time...it is met with some degree of skepticism. Also notice a key learning point for evangelism...They didn't get sucked into the argument about Nazareth...they just said...come and see....then make up your own mind. If we followed that advice most churches would be more full.

The reason Nathanael has trouble with Jesus' coming from Nazareth is probably because the Messiah was not expected to be associated with Nazareth. Nathanael's question is usually understood as a negative one but actually he was likely just reflecting what was known about the Messiah.

It is probably neither entirely negative nor positive but simply a genuine question, expressing his doubts. He has reason to question whether Jesus is the one promised, but he is open to the possibility that Jesus is, as his subsequent action and confession show.

John 1:47–48 (ESV) 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

This is a very interesting statement by Jesus. An Israelite in whom there is no deceit. Is he implying that most Israelites are deceptive? He is most likely sending a message to those religious leaders who claim to be true Israelites but are not. They are Jewish...Nathanael is a true Israelite. He is a genuine member of the people of God.

But remember, Nathanael comes with a good deal of skepticism. Yet he comes open, humble and teachable. He comes honestly seeking the Messiah. Examining the claims for himself. So Jesus calls him a man with no deceit.

Jesus is not saying that Nathaniel is sinless.....Rather, the word *dolos* suggests a more fundamental internal disposition in which there is no deceit. He is honest and clear-sighted, his vision is focused, he has a clear conscience. He is the sort who seeks God before all else. All of us are sinful in our flesh, but there are those who nevertheless desire truth before anything. Some are willing to admit they are wrong and Jesus is right. Most of us must be pruned for years before we approach such single-hearted desire for God yet Nathanael was already there.

So that which distinguishes Nathanael from the opponents is a teachable humble spirit that is open to God, willing to come and see (1:46). The "seeing" involved here is not just physical sight—the opponents also had that. Nathanael came with Spiritual eyes open and a heart ready to receive.

John 1:49–50 (ESV) 49 Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" 50 Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

Most likely Nathanael had a deeply spiritual moment under that tree prior to this encounter. So when Jesus mentioned it, he knew that God had been there and that God was here now.

Nathanael accepts that Jesus has seen into his heart and has seen him from afar, and this confirms the accuracy of Philip's claim to have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote

The reference to Moses and the prophets suggests the titles Nathanael uses for Jesus are messianic. One popularly held expectation of the Messiah was that he would be a king in the line of David

Thus, in calling Jesus the Son of God and the King of Israel Nathanael is the true Israelite acknowledging his King. This view of Jesus is right, as Jesus acknowledges when he affirms that Nathanael believes, but it is far short of the deep truth expressed by these titles

Nathanael still had a lot to learn but what he does know is enough to believe. Jesus is truly King, but Nathanael and all of us would learn that this kingdom is not of this world

John 18:36 (ESV) 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

He is indeed the Son of God, but in a sense far beyond anything expected by Moses and the prophets. Each of Jesus' titles affirmed in this chapter is true, so the disciples have glimpsed something of Jesus' identity. But much purging of error and further illumination will be necessary before they truly grasp what they are saying.

So Nathanael has a correct though limited understanding of who Jesus is, just as we will see that the opponents have a correct though limited view in their acknowledgment that Jesus is a teacher come from God .

John 3:1–2 (ESV) 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

The opponents will continue to question whereas Nathanael, instead, wholeheartedly accepts and confesses. Nathanael is promised further enlightenment and is represented as receiving it, for he is one of the disciples who meets Jesus after the resurrection

John 21:2–3 (ESV) 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Nathaniel is also called Bartholomew. John calls him by his more modern name.

In the Gospel of John, however, he is always referred to as Nathaniel. Bartholomew is a Hebrew surname meaning “son of Tolmai.” So Nathanael is the son of Tolmai, or Nathanael Bar-Tolmei. Just an FYI

At the end of this section Jesus—introduced as one who comes on the scene, moving silently past, and then shown as one who has extraordinary knowledge and authority—makes an amazing claim:

John 1:51 (ESV) 51 And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Jesus is speaking to Nathanael, but the verbs he uses are in the plural, so this is intended for the rest of the disciples also. In just a few words, Jesus is teaching about the fulfillment of a promise way back in Genesis. Jacob's dream

Genesis 28:12–14 (ESV) 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!

Jacob saw a pathway to Heaven. A ladder that reaches up from earth to God. A gateway for angels to go back and forth.

But note that Jesus changes that dream. He becomes the ladder. The connection between earth and heaven runs through or upon the Son of Man.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Jacob's dream. Jacob at Bethel realized that he was standing on holy ground. And the disciples are beginning to realize that everywhere Jesus goes is Holy Ground.

The disciples had believed based on what they knew and it was limited but enough. They were now ready for the miraculous. It was time for Jesus to begin to reveal His true identity to them.

It all plays out in Nathanael's home town of Cana..and we will see what good comes from there next week.

Let me bring this home a bit. There are three groups in this room. Some come like the Jewish Leaders...asking but not listening, not caring, mind closed and decided. Just going through the motions. A second group come like Nathaniel not sure but open to be convinced. Asking real questions and wanting real answers. Humble, teachable, and open to Jesus. The Third group are those who already believe and are trying to understand the depths of that relationship.

If you are closed off to Jesus I want you to consider why you are here today. How did you get here? Why did you stay through the whole sermon? If you are absolutely sure that your mind is made up, then we really have nothing to offer you. You will be separated in Hell from God for all of eternity. We don't wish that for anyone, but you can choose it for yourself. My only request is that you search with your heart and not your head. You have all of eternity to spend with your decision.

Those who come with openness coated in doubt...welcome. God created this place for you. This is a place where your doubts are understood and your questions are answered. You don't turn off your brain

to find Jesus but you do have to make sure your heart is driving the search. Remain humble and teachable and see what God does.

Now for those who are followers of Christ. I want you to think about the places that you go and the people that you see. Imagine some people came to you and said "Who are you and what are you doing?" Spiritually who are you...and what is the Spirit guiding you to do in this moment?

Every encounter that you have, every interruption in your day, all the activities of your day...are spiritual opportunities...chances to point to Jesus so others can see. We are to constantly seek God's guidance and purpose in everything we do. It is called being led by the Holy Spirit. You were led here this morning by the Spirit....have you asked Him what He wants you to do here today?

Is there someone who needs support, encouragement, prayer, understanding...is there someone God wants you to welcome? Is there a relationship that you need to mend. A confession you need to make? A financial gift you are to leave? Someone who needs to be comforted? Someone with challenging questions seeking answers?

God's church has never been about you or me. It has never been about your agenda or preferences. We leave all of those things at the door. Believers are here to worship... to learn... to surrender... and to serve.

So start the habit...everywhere you go...everything you do...ask God. Who am I and what are we doing?
Let's pray