

“LIFE IN HIS NAME”:
THE PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

BECOMING TRANSLUCENT CHRISTIANS
(JOHN 1:6-8)

I. To See Jesus More Clearly

II. John, the Messenger of God (Jn 1:6)

- A. In the past four sermons on the Gospel of John, we’ve been dwelling on this wonderful introduction to John’s Gospel.
- B. In the prologue to his Gospel, John introduces us to the Word of God. He shows us...
 - 1. that the Word was with God
 - 2. that the Word was God.
 - 3. that the Word created the universe.
- C. Precisely because he is the Creator, the Word also carries within himself the eternal light and life that will one day restore the world.
- D. But when we come to verses 6-8, John makes a brief digression to focus on John the Baptist: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”

III. The Mission of John (Luke 1:13-17)

- A. The Gospel of Luke gives us more details about John.
- B. In Luke’s Gospel, we learn that John was the son of a Jewish priest by the name of Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth.
- C. The uniqueness of John’s work was signified by the way his birth was announced.
 - 1. When Zechariah was serving in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that God was going to give him and his wife a child.
 - 2. These were the facts that Gabriel revealed to Zechariah concerning his child.

‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his

birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.' (Lk 1:13-17)

- D. John's mission was to prepare God's people for the arrival of the Lord himself. God's Kingdom was about to dawn on earth. And John's mission was to announce it and get people to turn away from their sins and return to God. And one of the rituals that John used to signify this was baptism, which is why he became known as John the Baptist.

IV. John as Witness (John 1:7)

- A. Notice how the Gospel of John describes John's work—in terms of *bearing witness*.
1. Verse 7: "He [referring to John the Baptist] came as a witness, to bear witness about the light..."
 2. Bearing witness about the light is another way of describing what it means to prepare the people for the Kingdom.
 3. To announce the Kingdom is to bear witness to the light, which is...
 - a. one of the gifts of the Kingdom
 - b. one of the gifts that the Word of God has come to bring.
- B. The word for "witness" here is *marturia*, from which we get our English word, "martyr."
1. *Marturia* is someone who sees something and then gives a solemn testimony in court to what he has seen.
 2. *Marturia* can be used...
 - a. for a witness in an ordinary court of law.
 - b. for the prophets, who testify about what God is going to do.
- C. We see an example of this use of the word "witness" in Isaiah 43:10.

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD,
"and my servant whom I have chosen,
that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor shall there be any after me.

1. In that part of Isaiah’s prophecy, God is telling his people about his coming salvation.
2. And you notice that God calls Israel to bear witness to what he has said. And so, we must understand the work of John in this prophetic sense.
3. The work of John the Baptist was basically to testify about what God was doing in the world—namely, that God was bringing his Light into the world.

V. That All Might Believe (John 1:7)

- A. John was also to do this with a specific goal: “that all might believe through him”—that is, people might come to believe in the Light, who is Jesus.
- B. So we come to yet another central concept in the Gospel of John.
 1. In our previous lesson, the Gospel of John introduced the concept of *life*.
 2. Now, the Gospel of John introduces us to the concept of *belief*.
 - a. In chapter 20, John stated his purpose for recording the miracles as “so that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by *believing* you may have life in his name.”
 - b. Now in 1:7, the word “belief” is used for the very first time in the entire Gospel.
—John the Baptist bore witness to the Light so “that all might believe through him.”

VI. He Was Not the Light (John 1:8)

- A. The Gospel makes a further note about John: “He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”
- B. Why does the Gospel writer see the need to make this additional statement?
 1. John may have been addressing people who...
 - a. thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah
 - b. accused John the Baptist of claiming to be the Messiah.
- C. At the end of the day, John’s role was primarily that of a *witness* to the Messiah.

VII. The Call for Translucent Christians

- A. Bearing witness for Christ is the role that all believers, not just John the Baptist, are called to do.

- B. While witnessing does not exhaust our role in relation to Christ, it is a pretty good summary of the Christian's job.
- C. As we read about John the Baptist—how he was not the Light but a witness to the Light—we see what we are meant to be as well. *We are called to be translucent Christians who allow the Lord Jesus to shine through us.*

VIII. Becoming Translucent Christians

- A. But what kinds of people do we need to be in order to become translucent Christians who will serve as good witnesses of Christ to others?
- B. To become translucent Christians, we need to admit that we are not the Christ, that we ourselves are not the supreme Light.
 - 1. Admitting to others and to ourselves that we are not the Christ means admitting that we are not perfect, and that we ourselves do not always live by the Law or the values that we preach.
 - 2. This is especially important in our pluralistic society, because there is nothing more off-putting to non-Christians than Christians who...
 - a. claim to be morally superior to others, yet show by their sins that they are clearly not perfect.
 - b. bang on the drum of some moral cause but fail to speak up for other legitimate and necessary moral causes.
 - 3. Perhaps the kind of Christianity that the world needs most today is a humble Christianity—Christians who will admit to their sins, their weaknesses.
 - 4. One value of admitting our sins is that we spare the name of Christ from being tarnished.
 - 5. The mechanics of doing this:
 - a. The general confession of sins in Church
 - b. Apologizing to our friends, colleagues, etc. when we have hurt them.
- C. To become translucent Christians, we speak about Christ the true Light and Savior of the world.
 - 1. See history as a story—and Christ as the main hero.
 - 2. Share what Christ has done and will do in your life.
 - a. How he saved you from judgment by his death and resurrection.
 - b. How he is helping you become a better person. Some examples:
 - Before, you were more prone to stress. Now you have more peace.
 - Before, you were more quick to get angry. Now, you are more likely to react in a gentle way because you know that God loves you no matter what.

- Before, you were a more anxious person. Now, you are still anxious—but less so, because Jesus’ promises are taking control of your heart.
 - Before, you were a more self-centered person. Now, you are more loving of others, because God has met your deepest needs and calls you to look out for others.
- c. How he continues to love and forgive you even when you fail.
 - d. How he will one day bring complete restoration to the world—and save those who have put their hope in him.
- D. Important: Being a translucent Christian does not guarantee that...
- a. People will accept what you say.
 - b. People will treat you more kindly and gently.
—Just the opposite might happen!!
- E. In the end, being a translucent Christian is about being a faithful witness to Jesus Christ and making sure that people see him clearly.

IX. Salvation Is of the Light

So we are reminded yet again that it is not what we do that saves. There is only one Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord. Our bearing witness to Christ is no guarantee that our listeners will come to Christ. It is no guarantee that our society at large will get better. Yet, that is what we are called to do, precisely because salvation does not originate from us but from Christ. May God help us to show Christ more clearly as our own hearts become more convinced of his power to save.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
Light of God,
you are the true Life of all mankind.
Breathe your holy life into our hearts.
Shine your loving light into our souls—
and through us, shine your light into the world.
Help us to speak boldly and lovingly of you.
Help us to offer you to those who are sad, tired, and broken by sin.
Grip our hearts by your love for us and for the world.
Amen.*

Questions for Reflection

1. What was John’s role in relation to the Light? (1:6-8)

2. How is the Christian's work in the world similar to the mission of John the Baptist?
3. Becoming translucent Christians involves us admitting that we are not the Light. How may God be calling you to do this in your little corner of the world?
4. Becoming translucent Christians involves us telling others about Jesus the Light. How may God be calling you to do this in your little corner of the world? What are some concrete ways has Christ benefitted your life that you can tell others about?
5. What fears hinder you from becoming a more translucent Christian? Ask God to show you your fears and how his grace can overcome them.