

“Pointing People to Jesus”

The Bible tells us that we are not to boast in ourselves, but only in the Lord.

The apostle Paul, when citing our reading from Jeremiah 9, says to the church in Corinth, a prideful bunch of Christians, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. (I Cor. 1:31)

The OT often utilizes poetry to communicate its message, especially in the Psalms and the preaching of the prophets, and it is with great frequency that you will read in those sections of scripture things like the “prideful and haughty” being brought low to their knees, and the “lowly and humble” being “lifted up.” The reason it does this is because the chief sin of the Israelites was pride and arrogance (closely related to idolatry). This is also one of the chief sins of many nations today. Israel’s story is our story.

In Proverbs 6:6-7 it says that there are six things the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him. The first one listed is “haughty eyes,” which is pride.

Everybody is heard of the seven deadly sins, a list of mortal sins developed by the Catholic Church. Pride is the first one listed.

Adam’s chief sin was pride. I don’t need you God. I don’t need your rules. I will do it my way. I will make it on my own.

Really, pride is everybody’s chief sin. It is the one that comes before all others.

Again, the Proverbs tell us that “Pride goes **before** destruction, a haughty spirit **before** the fall.” (Prov. 16:17-18).

Nobody likes a bragger.

Our least favorite people are those who are constantly boasting about themselves and all their accomplishments, and the people we like most are those who have a spirit of humility, who aren’t out intentionally seeking recognition for their feats, and who are always looking for ways to give credit to others.

Today, in our text, we encounter the preaching and testimony of John the Baptist.

John was a scorcher of a man. He was not very refined. He lived in the wilderness and he ate grasshoppers. He did not wear fancy robes like the priests of the OT, or Presbyterian ministers today. No, he was a chip off the old block. He dressed like the prophets of old, wearing clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, just like Elijah, and just like an old country preacher today- nothing fancy. To top it off, he preached loud, fiery sermons of repentance in order to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus.

Ironically, because of his strange peculiarities, John the Baptist had a funny way of drawing attention to himself. But what John did is he used that attention as an opportunity to point others to the source of life and salvation, namely Jesus Christ. John was not a prideful man; he was always pointing others to Jesus. And that is what we are going to talk about today. We are going to talk about the importance of pointing people to Jesus.

Our Obligation to Point People to Jesus

The first thing that must be said as it concerns the importance of pointing people to Jesus is that it is our **obligation** to do so.

As Christians we must remember that pointing people to Jesus is not an option for us. We have been called by God to do this, all of us. This is a matter of obedience.

After Jesus had equipped his 12 disciples he sent them out on their own (though they were not by themselves, for they had the help of the Holy Spirit) to proclaim the good news of the gospel and to do ministry in his name.

After his resurrection Jesus gave the charge to the whole church to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

In I Peter 3:18, the rock, the apostle Peter encourages Christians to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks them to give the reason for the hope they have.”

If we expand the scope of our text this morning and go back and look at John 1:6 we will see that it says, “There came a man who was **sent** from God; his name was John. He came as a **witness** to **testify** concerning that light.”

This call to **witness** to the light seems to be connected to every person who has ever been called by God in the Bible.

The calling always seems, in some form or fashion, to go back to the purpose of giving testimony. It is God’s calling on **all** of our lives to **share** the good news of the gospel of Jesus with people.

The question for us this morning is are we thinking along those lines? Are we looking for those opportunities? Are we building friendships, with the aim of eventually sharing the good news of Jesus? Are we looking to open our mouths and declare his praises?

If we are honest with ourselves then we must admit that we are not always thinking along those lines. Sometimes never. We are timid. We are fearful of being offensive. Even worse, we may even believe the lie that people are basically good and do not need to have their sins forgiven, let alone have the shed blood of Christ on the cross to make atonement for them. God is calling us to repent of this silence today.

Can we do this? This the church will have to learn.

The other day I had a conversation with someone in the church and it was mentioned that church attendance is not what it used to be. This is true. I do not foresee this trend changing in the future until we all learn to share our faith again.

Why?

Because the church can no longer count on people coming to her anymore. We, the body of Christ, will have to go to the world. Just like the first disciples did and just like John the Baptist.

We will now have to decide whether or not we will be obedient to the gospel mandate to open our mouths and our lives and point people to Jesus. I am preaching to myself as much as anybody.

Be Bold in Pointing People to Jesus

Once we recognize our obligation to point people to Jesus we must then be **bold** in our proclamation.

When we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ we are in enemy territory.

By this I do not mean that we are to view those whom we might share the gospel with as our enemies, but rather that we are speaking with people who have not embraced or de-embraced Jesus Christ. Consequently, they are on a different plane than we. They do not understand the world as we do. They do not understand God as we do. They do not understand the cross as we do. They may or may not be hostile to our message, but regardless they are on a different plane than we.

Will we be bold enough to point them to Jesus, even though they are coming from a different place or perspective, or will we let fear get the best of us?

In our text today John encounters some people who are on a different wave length than he. They are the priests, Levites, and Pharisees. Basically they were the religious leaders of John's day and they have come to check him out.

I sense that their coming was not based on inquisitiveness, but rather passive hostility. Something was up with John and the man to whom he was testifying about and they did not like it.

John could have buckled under pressure. He could have told them what they wanted to hear, or he could have just quit proclaiming the testimony of Jesus altogether. But John did not. When these troublemakers came to him he "confessed freely" (v.20) that he was not Elijah, or the Prophet, and he was definitely not the Messiah.

And when they pressed him about why he was baptizing with water John proclaimed to them "the one who stood among them that they did not know." (v.26) John proclaimed to them Jesus

Christ, the one who is “before all things and after all things” (v.30); the same one whom they were unworthy to even stoop down and untie his dirty, stinky sandals. John confessed his faith in Jesus “boldly and freely” to them.

Good Christian, do not be afraid to give testimony to Christ when you are in hostile territory. It is those people who need to hear the good news of the gospel. God is in the business of reconciling his enemies to himself and we Christians need to be in the world giving witness to him.

When Jesus sent his disciples out by themselves to preach the gospel he told them to proclaim the message. Shout it from the roof tops. And then he said to them, (in case they were fearful of doing so), “do not fear those who can kill the body when you witness to them but **can not** kill the soul. Rather fear the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” (Mat. 10:27-28)

Brothers and sisters let us not be afraid to give witness to Christ wherever God has placed us at. This is not a call to be brash or foolish in our witness, for we must be winsome, but let us witness, and let us be bold in doing so, especially when we are stricken with fear about what others may think about us if we do witness.

Now I have come on strong here, or we might say the Bible has come on us strong to us this morning. What I am teaching and preaching today is coming to us from the Bible, God’s holy, inspired, and infallible Word. But if this is feeling strong let me now give a word of solace. Something that will cause us to breath a collective sigh of relief.

When Pointing People to Jesus You Proclaim, Not Convert

When you share Jesus with others, realize your role. You are the proclaimer. Nothing more. It is not your job to convert them. Can you and should you call for a decision? Yes when the time is right. But it is not your job to convert. You are simply the proclaimer.

John the Baptist understood this clearly in his ministry of proclamation. He knew it was not about him and his words. He declared in v20, I am not the Messiah! It’s not about me. I am simply “the voice of one calling out in the dessert.” My job is to prepare people for Christ by proclaiming him and calling people to repent, but there my job stops. It is the role and responsibility of the Holy Spirit to convert the heart of the sinner.

John even said this about his own conversion to belief in Jesus as Messiah.

He says in v.32-34 that he saw the Holy Spirit come down on Jesus at his baptism, like a dove, and that he would not have known that Jesus was the Son of God and Savior of the world, had not God the Father spoken to him and revealed that to him. God does the converting, not us.

I like what the apostle Paul said about witnessing in I Corinthians 3:6-8. “I planted the seed of the gospel. Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. Neither Apollos nor I are anything, but only God- He’s the one who does the growing.

We will see this truth emerge strongly as we work our way through John's gospel. The Spirit blows where it wills and people will not confess Jesus as Lord until they are born of the Spirit.

This truth can be freeing for us. It takes the pressure off of us to know that we don't and can't convert anyone to faith in Christ. All we can do is be God's instruments, his mouthpieces.

Yes, we speak of Christ, we learn the gospel, we formulate our testimonies, we defend the faith, we share our faith and we call for decisions, but we let the Spirit of God convert the sinner's heart. Share the gospel, but let God be God!

Conclusion and Application

So today we have talked about pointing people to Jesus.

- We have been reminded of our obligation to do so- this is a matter of obedience to the gospel.
- We have been encouraged to do it boldly, in a world that is broken, hostile, and dark to the gospel. Fear must not get the best of us.
- Finally, we have been reminded that it is not our responsibility to convert someone, that's the Spirit's responsibility. We simply share our faith and call for a response.

The practical application of all of this is that we will be living into obedience to the commands of our Lord and Savior if we obey the message. That is always a good thing. Second, we will be giving the best gift that we can give to a person- the gift of Jesus. That is a good thing. Finally, if we do this the church will grow. One thing is for sure if we don't it won't. In order for it to grow we must learn to witness.

- How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Rom. 10:14)

May God give us the grace and faith to point someone to Jesus this week.

Amen.