

**Personal Evangelism in Biblical Perspective:  
iShare—Encounters with Jesus in John's Gospel  
The Testimony of John the Baptist**

**John 1:19-42**

**By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)**

*April 1, 2012 – Morning Sermon*

We will have a reading from John 1. This is the start of the Holy Week and we have a devotional of following the steps of Christ for your personal, family devotions. Now let's look at John 1:1-5. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. John 1:1-5 says

[1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

We are in a theme for this year calling it iShare and that is that Jesus has called each of us to share the Good News of Christ, of salvation with our family, friends and others. Our iShare series has covered iShare what, iShare who, iShare when, iShare why and then we've gone to particular texts of Scriptures to help us. Now we're going to make a little shift. The iShare series continues and we're now on study number ten but we're now going to go on an overview, not an in-depth view, of the Gospel of John in the coming weeks to follow the iShare moments of Jesus. We are calling them the encounters of Jesus with lost people and learning from Him how He shared Himself and we'll be working through the Gospel of John on this in the coming weeks. After this study, the next one on this will cover how the first two disciples are the result of an iShare moment and I look forward to that.

So in this study we're starting by opening up John and building upon what we talked about in the last study which was our personal testimony as an instrument of evangelism. There are three axioms we said that we're very crucial to us in this study. The first one is the incarnation ministry of Christ. Why did Jesus come

into this world? Jesus told us five times “I have come to seek and to save the lost” and He demonstrated it multiple times.

The second axiom is the indisputable ministry of the Christian and the Church and that is to seek and to save the lost. Before Jesus ascended to heaven He said “As the Father sent Me (to seek and to save the lost), now I send you.” So each Christian and each church is on a mission to seek and to save the lost.

The third axiom is the incredible opportunity for each Church and Christian to develop a strategy for personal evangelism. I want to focus on us personally as a Christian how we can develop a strategy for personal evangelism. The reason this is important to think about is because while all of us are sharing Christ (the Gospel) with lost people and there are certain things that are common to all of us in our testimony, there are also some things that are very unique.

God has given you a certain kind of personality that other people don't have where you can share Christ in ways that other people can't. God has given you interests in your life. In mine its history and golf which are two instruments that I use to get with people in order to share Christ. God has given you some hobbies, some insights, some abilities and your unique relationships. He gives you Divine opportunities that you can seize in that moment and take advantage of them. So we all have that strategy that we begin to put in our life. That strategy would include training like in a Bridge to Life class or Evangelism Explosion. There is door to door visitation you can do with your small groups. These are just some strategies you can take advantage of.

Recently, we had a political man visiting our church that is running for president and this friend of mine went up to him and said “Hey Newt, how are you doing?” Newt said “Fine.” The man said “I think I might vote for you but I have one question.” Newt drew near feeling ready for that political question. The man said “Have you got Jesus in your heart?” That was an iShare moment. Most of us are concerned about whether we'll get our picture taken with him or something but this man realized this was a moment. Then he left and went up to two secret service guys and said “Do you have Jesus in your heart?” I wish I could tell you this man was but he disappeared right after he asked the second secret service guy and we haven't seen him since then. I'm hoping he might come back. He may return one day but we all have these wonderful, divine opportunities that are multi-faceted and very unique in your life.

Here is the one thing that is in the strategy tool box of every single Christian and it's called your testimony. That is how your story becomes Christ's story in your life. We all have it. Zacchaeus used it, the woman at the well used it, Nicodemus later would use it, the blind man used it, the demoniac used it and Paul used his testimony five times to share Christ with Jew and Gentile alike. He told how his story became God's story as Jesus became his Lord and Savior. We all have a testimony.

Here we are at Palm Sunday and the journey of Christ has led through a three year public ministry. Jesus has now arrived at Jerusalem and thousands of people are saying "Hosanna to the King!" If we read the historians right thousands would have been there and I'm sure hundreds if not thousands are shouting "Hosanna to the King!" Because the journey to the King had come to Jerusalem and then in just a very few days it would lead to Golgotha. There the King would die so that we could have life evermore. The journey had come to His week of passion. The journey had come to Calvary because He had come to seek and to save the lost but it didn't start out with thousands shouting "Here's the King!" It started out with Him born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph, with shepherds and Him kind of off to the side. He came in humility, humbling Himself.

How did the King start His three year public ministry? It started in a little place called Bethany where He was baptized in order to be obedient to the Law because He was going to be Prophet, Priest and King. The Priest had to be baptized and the book of Numbers tells us about that. He is baptized by John and the account of it is given to us in the books of Matthew, Luke, John and referred to it in Mark. The writer of the book of John is known as the Elder, John the Presbyter. He wants to tell us about Jesus and then he wants to tell us about John the Baptist. So there is John the Elder talking about John the Baptist but first of all this isn't about anybody but Jesus.

John 1:1 says [1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He affirms the humanity of Jesus, the deity of Jesus and the fact that Jesus made every single thing by the speaking of a Word. It affirms that He is the Light, the light of salvation and whenever He comes the darkness of sin is dissipated. He gives you that declaration in those opening verses. Then he introduces us to the one who introduced the King. Jesus has thousands on Palm Sunday shouting out that He is King but when He began His ministry three years earlier He was coming out of the wilderness near Bethany beyond the Jordan. That was not the Bethany near Jerusalem but it was the Bethany on the outskirts of the wilderness. At Bethany beyond the Jordan is where Jesus starts His ministry. He doesn't have thousands but He has one man saying "Here's the King" and that man is John the Baptist.

We find out we can learn a lot from John the Baptist about a personal testimony. Let's look at who John the Baptist is. There are five affirmations about John the Baptist that are given to us. John 1:6-8 says [6] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7] He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light (speaking about Christ), that all might believe through him. [8] He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. So what are the five things we learn about John the Baptist here? He is clearly called the witness. Now what do we learn about the witness?

First of all he is a man named John. There was a man named John. So here is this man named John that has come.

The second thing we learn about him is he is a man named John sent from God. So he had a Divine calling.

The third thing we learn about him is he is a man named John sent from God to be a witness to the Light (the Christ). He has come to announce the identity of this One who has come to save sinners. One preacher said "John is the guy who gave the identity papers of Jesus to the world first. He is the forerunner. He came to be a witness to the Light that is Christ.

The fourth thing we learn about him is he is not the Light (the Christ). He was not the Light. He was not the Christ. He came to bear witness of the Light, the Christ. So, the first three are positive. He is a man named John sent (on a mission) from God to be a witness to the Light that saves people in the darkness of sin. The fourth one is a negative. Let's get this straight right up front. This one is not the Christ.

The fifth thing we learn is that his ministry was designed that all may believe in the Christ. He is not the Christ but he is a witness to Christ that all might believe, not in John, but in Him. Those are the five affirmations about John the Baptist. So he is a witness and if you're a witness then a witness has to testify. If you're going to be a witness you have to testify. If you testify then you give a testimony. Remember that all of us develop testimonies where our story has become the story of Christ in our life. Now here is the testimony of John the Baptist which is given to us in the text. John 1:19-28 says

[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." [21] And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." [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?" [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.

While Matthew and Luke spend a lot of time on the baptism, John tells us more about the testimony of John the Baptist, announcing the King had arrived. The testimony came in response to questions. The best way to share Christ is always

through questions, either you ask them or somebody else asks you. In this case, they came asking him questions. Sometimes you learn to ask questions like “if you were to die tonight do you know where you would spend eternity?” My favorite one is to be riding next to someone on the plane, turbulence comes and I ask the person next to me “Do you think there’s a heaven?” It’s an iShare moment if I’ve ever had one. Learning to ask questions is a good way to share your testimony but sometimes the questions are asked of you and they become your opportunity for a testimony. Questions either from you or to you are absolutely wonderful moments.

In this case the questions were asked of the witness and he was asked to testify. There are five questions that come to John. The first question he was asked was ‘who are you?’ John answers “I’m not the Christ.” He doesn’t answer by telling them who he is but by saying “I’m not the Christ” and why does he do this? If you go read about John the Baptist in Matthew and Luke he was a big deal back then. He was a celebrity in his time. According to Luke everybody thought he was the Christ. So when they come out questioning him, he knows what they’re asking. They’re not really asking him who he is but they are asking if he’s the Christ and he says “I’m not the Christ.”

John 1:19-20 says [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.” Have you ever read anything more tortured? That just doesn’t read well. I think what they are trying to communicate is John wants to make sure that they know they need a Savior but it is not him. You need to know I’m not the Christ and I know a lot of people think I’m this ‘celebrity’ where all these people are coming out to see me here in the wilderness but let’s get this straight that I’m not the Christ.

Then the second question comes up which is ‘are you Elijah?’ The book of Isaiah and the book of Malachi had prophesied that before the Messiah would come then Elijah would precede Him. So when he said he wasn’t the Christ they said then you must be Elijah. Are you Elijah having come back? He answered “No, I’m not Elijah.” He is not Elijah personally but Jesus will later tell us that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of that prophesy, not because Elijah has come back but John the Baptist ministered in the Spirit and power of Elijah therefore he is the fulfillment of that prophesy, but he is not Elijah personally.

Then they asked him a third question which was ‘are you the Prophet?’ They are referring to the prophesy Moses had given. There are two great prophets in the Old Testament which are Moses and Elijah. So they asked John the Baptist if he was the prophet that was to come after Moses and who was greater than Moses. John answers “No, I’m not the Prophet.” Of course that is ultimately looking to Christ who is the final Prophet, Priest and King.

Finally they ask him a fourth question which is 'what do you say about yourself, if you're not the Christ, Elijah or the Prophet?' John 1:22-23 says [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." This is another reason why they're pretty focused on him because John the Baptist came out of the wilderness and if you go back and read the Bible, who met the Lord in the wilderness? The wilderness was where God's called servants went to meet Him, like Elijah, like Moses. He said "I've come out of the wilderness and I'm a voice. My voice is twofold. One you need to repent and make straight the way of the Lord. Two you need to believe in the Lord. So you need faith and repentance. The Christ is coming so make the way straight. Here is a call to repentance and a call for people to believe in Him. That's what he says he is here to do.

Now there is a fifth question that is asked and it was very perplexing to the Pharisees. In fact, it was somewhat of an affront to them because John was out there calling people to a baptism of repentance, a cleansing of repentance. Who was it that had to be baptized or go through the ritual of baptism in the Old Testament? It was a woman after birth, a female baby and any Gentile who was coming into the covenant community. Then the Gentile had to be circumcised to come into the covenant community but first they went through a ritual washing of baptism, declaring your uncleanness and your need of cleanness from the Lord. Who was John the Baptist calling to be baptized? He was calling the Jews. The Pharisees were clearly affronted by this. So they were asking John why he was baptizing. If you were the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet we'd understand, but why are you baptizing?

He answers them in John 1:26-27 [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." He is telling them that he is preparing the way for them to come to this Christ whom they don't know and they need to know but they can't know unless they come to Him, receive by faith, repent and turn from their sins. John says "I am preparing the way and baptism is the call to believe and repent. That's the call I'm making to you, a wayward people."

What are some lessons that come out of this that we can make use of in terms of testimony in our life? The first takeaway is as you give your testimony, do not exalt yourself. Let me stop though. You can't be a witness to what you haven't experienced and you can't testify to what you don't know. So before I go further about how to share your testimony, I want you to have one. I want you to come to Jesus Christ if you haven't. Perhaps you're reading this because you're seeking or curious or looking or wanting to know.

I have the privilege to share with you what John the Baptist shared. There is a Savior and He's among you right now. He is at the right hand of the Father and He has sent His Holy Spirit who has invited you to come just as you are and put your trust in Him. If you haven't done that I'll pray at the end and I would like you to pray with me and commit your life to Christ. What a glorious season to come from death unto life, you personally coming to Christ. Then His story becomes your story. The One you didn't know, you know and He'll never leave you or forsake you. I'm not the Savior. Briarwood is not the Savior. Your friends aren't your Savior. Religion is not your Savior but there is a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Those of you who do know Him can use your testimony and you can learn from John the Baptist who was a witness, who testified. So the first thing is not to exalt yourself. There are two ways that Christians can mess up their testimonies by exalting themselves. The first way is we talk about ourselves BC (before we became a Christian, Before Conversion), extensively, predominately in our testimony. I have listened to testimonies where some say "I was a drug addict and I did this and this and this etc" and I get all these details of their life before they were saved for the next 35 minutes and then they get to the end and say "And then I came to Jesus. So let's close in prayer." It's amazing how we'll revel in our sinfulness in our testimony.

You might be thinking "Shouldn't I tell people I was a sinner in my testimony?" Absolutely, for Paul gave his five times but notice he didn't give the gory details about how he came to know Christ. He killed Stephen. He persecuted Christians and a persecutor of the church. He was guilty of pride and arrogance. You can identify yourself as a sinner but it doesn't really matter what the fashion of your particular sins were because what we all have in common is we assassinated the glory of God with our life because we wanted to make ourselves god. We found out that all that sin was empty. Satan kept promising me that in that sin was life but it was emptiness. It was vanity. It was nothing.

I want to put a parenthesis here. That doesn't mean that when you're conversing with someone and sharing your testimony with them that there isn't some point of identity in the conversation where you begin to go a little deeper where you were and where they are because there is a point of contact there. I'm fully and absolutely aware of that. Perhaps sports or a hobby or sexual immorality or perversion was your idolatry and in your conversation there is a point of contact there but in the basic testimony that we give it's pretty simple. I was a sinner. I was undone. I couldn't save myself. I was exalting myself and then feeding into the dregs of life because of that, but not this backdoor celebrity-ism of sin where we try to outdo each other.

This is why this is important to me. I had two people come to me last week and say "Pastor I don't have a testimony." I said "Aren't you a Christian?" They said "Yes." I said "Then you have a testimony." They said "No, I don't have one

because I just can't remember a time I didn't love Jesus." I said "That's a testimony. That's a great testimony of God's covenant blessing in a family where He spared you of the sophistication of sin before you got so deep. Now, you were a sinner lost and undone like everybody else but God in that covenant family has spared you the depths of it to bring you to Himself to give hope of what His covenant blessings would be."

People think just because they hadn't done drugs or alcohol or killed people that they don't have a testimony. Yes, you do. If you know Jesus then you have a testimony and your unique testimony is crucial. As far as my sin goes, whether I came to Christ at age 4 or 40 I came out of self exaltation, self absorption, pride, arrogance and we all have those categories of sin but we don't exalt ourselves with our "BC" testimony (before conversion).

The second way we exalt ourselves is by our AC (after conversion) testimony. Some might say "When came to Jesus I have led someone to Jesus every day since then." We begin to exalt ourselves when sharing our testimony. You can exalt yourself in your sin and after conversion. I think you want to share with people the joy you have in the Lord, the things God has allowed you to do and things He is doing in your life but the fact is that it is not about us. It is our story has become His story and it's the joy of the Lord that is coming through. It's not about us.

John the Baptist didn't have to worry about overdoing his pre-conversion testimony because he was converted in the mother's womb. So there wasn't time for him to be a drug dealer or anything like that but he could have exalted himself. John could have answered when they said 'who are you', "I'm famous. Everyone is coming out to see me." Who are you? "I'm a celebrity, even the Pharisees are sending out people to find out who I am. I think there are a couple of journalists who want to do an article on me." Who are you? "I had a miraculous birth. You should have seen the age of my mom and dad when I was born. I'm so important God did something miraculous at birth. By the way, this Jesus that I'm telling everyone about is my cousin." He didn't have to stop there he could have said "Jesus told others that no one greater among women has been born than me. I'm also a priest. I'm a prophet that has come out of the wilderness. God sent me for you. I'm filled with the Holy Spirit."

Look at all of the things that John the Baptist might have said or he could have said but he didn't say. He said "I'm a voice crying out in the wilderness. Here's the Lord. That's what I am. I'm not even fit to untie His shoes. In fact, He must increase and I must decrease." How many times have we said "I want Jesus to increase" and have you really sought to decrease? He must increase, and I must decrease. No, my story is not about me, it's about Jesus. So what do you do?

The second takeaway is you do exalt Christ. Christ is your life. You want to point people to Christ, how He found you and how He saved you. Maybe He saved



you out of a covenant home or out of the degradation of addictions of sex or drugs or out of self righteous religious arrogance. I don't know what He saved you out of but that's the story of God's redeeming grace in your life. You want to get to the point of saying "Look, my testimony is this and there's the Lamb. There's the Light, He's Christ."

So the third takeaway is what will you say? What will you do in these Divine moments when someone comes up and says "Harry, what do you do, what about you?" What happens when that question comes into your life? What about you? What are you going to say? First of all, I hope you can be a witness. Because John was a witness, you're a witness. The Bible says in Acts 1:8 [8] *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

Secondly, I hope you'll pray, enjoy and revel in that moment to be a witness. I can ask a question to open up the opportunity to share or somebody may ask me a question and now here is my opportunity. Last week I used an illustration about planting two churches and I've received a number of comments about that illustration but two of them that continually come to me are one when a person said "Pastor Reeder why did you stop it when you did because you stopped it before they could get to me." I didn't want to stop it because I was just watching this movement taking place and people were saying "Come pat me on the shoulder."

The second comment I received was "Nobody came and tapped me on the shoulder and I kind of felt left out." So how many of your family, friends and neighbors might feel left out? You haven't shared it with them. When I get to heaven I'm imagining this conversation with John the Baptist that goes like this. "Hey Mr. John the Baptist, how are you?" "Fine, Harry, were you a witness? Did you testify?" "Yes sir."

"What were your hindrances or the things that caused you to be quiet and not testify?" "I was embarrassed. I was afraid of rejection." "Oh really?" Do you know what happens to John the Baptist the last time he gives his testimony? He loses his head. The missionary Wycliff was burned. Huss, Tyndall, Latimer, Ridley were all killed for their faith. I'm afraid they might not talk to me at the office or the guys on the team may not like me.

It's really this. It's not in comparison to someone else like "I feel guilty if I don't share the Gospel given what others have paid the price to share the Gospel" but it's just the joy of knowing the Lord. You're John the Baptist. You might think you're not but you are. John the Baptist was a man, what are you? You are a man or a woman. John the Baptist was sent by God. What are you? Jesus said "As the Father sent Me, so send I you." John the Baptist gave a testimony so that

others might believe and he was a witness. So can you so that others can come to Christ.

John the Baptist was a voice to the Lord. You are the voice of the Lord. When you speak, He speaks through you and faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of Christ. So speak O Christian. Speak clearly. I'm not the Christ. I am what I am by the grace of God. Here He is. He is right among you. Come He is ready to receive you and bring you from the wilderness to glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together. Thank You for the privilege to be in Your Word. Thank You for its majesty and its glory. King Eternal, thank You for dying on the cross. Thank You that You're risen. Thank You that You're ascended. Thank You that You're ruling and reigning. Thank You that we can be Your voice to seek and to save the lost. Lord, help us to be clear. It's not about us. We don't exalt ourselves. We're sinners saved by grace but Father let us also be clear that it's not about us but it's all about Jesus. Thank You Jesus that by Your grace our story has become Your story so we can then tell our story that others might hear the old, old story of Jesus' love to save sinners, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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