

Mountain View 6 — The Witness to the Word

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Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to John 1:19]

This whole year we have been drilling into the truth that we become what we behold... what we look at and admire is what we slowly become.

Therefore we're climbing the highest mountain we can this side of heaven to gaze at the greatest view of the glory of God as displayed in the person and work of Jesus Christ who is God incarnate, by studying through the gospel of John.

We've worked all the way through the prologue of the gospel, made up of verses 1-18, and now we're entering into one massive section of Jesus' public ministry, which goes from v. 19 of chapter one all the way to the end of chapter 12.

Let's get this ball rolling again.

Tension:

I want to say something and see if you all agree with this statement: We each have this urge to know who we are... do we not?

For some of us, it is subtle and doesn't influence our thought life much; for others it is the driving question in our minds and often interrupts our day with anxiety and fear, am I right?

And so, because of this urge, we make an effort to "find ourselves."

Like in the show *The Office* © one of its characters, Andy, totally abandons managing the office and his girlfriend for three months to sail to the Caribbean in the hopes of "finding himself."

Any of you try that out to find yourself? I didn't think so. I don't recommend that strategy.

But goodness, we do all sorts of things to try to find out who we are, don't we?

I mean, how do we even answer that question, who am I?

Is it based on our culture, or our upbringing?

Is it based on our affections or our knowledge?

Is it based on our careers or our titles?

Then we try to take all these tests and self-assessments, right?

How many of you are a lion? What about a beaver?

How many of you are a Type A? An activator? A loyalist? a High 1?

One of my favorites I see all the time is those tests where you can find out which celebrity you most look like or which Disney Princess would be your best friend based on your personality profile.

Turns out, mine would be Snow White since I need a lot of sleep and everyone else around me is generally shorter than me, not that I took the test or anything.

But we really work to try to find out who we are, and what we're going to find out today, and yes, I'm going to go ahead and spoil it all for you up front, is this:

I can truly know who I am not and who I am in the light of who Jesus is.

Exposition:

Let's read through our passage to kick things off.

John 1:19-28 — ***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.***¹

If you can't tell, the main character of our passage this morning is John the Baptizer, Jesus' cousin, and so far we've already heard of John in vs. 6-8 of chapter one, where the author of this gospel, John, makes sure we all know

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:19-28.

that John the Baptist is not the Word, but was just a witness to the Word, so that people would believe in Jesus because of John's testimony.

And here, we start off this new section by hearing the words, **this is the testimony of John**, THE witness.

Like, if you ever want to know what it looks like to be a normal human being who follows Jesus and is a good witness to the world about Jesus, then look at John the Baptist, because he knew exactly who he wasn't, exactly who he was, all because he recognized and knew Jesus and who He is.

John is out in the wilderness calling all peoples to repentance and preparation for the kingdom of God to come, and he is making waves.

The Jerusalem Independent headlines were talking about John so much that the Jewish religious leaders had to figure out who John is, so they send this group of priests and Levites to John the Baptist.

And these priests and Levites get to John and they ask him a very important question at the end of v. 19, the question all our souls want the answer to...

"Who are you?"

This is an identity inquiry.

This conversation is primarily a conversation about identity: who is John the Baptist, and we're going to see John outline his response in three sections...

Who he is not, who he is, all because he knows who Jesus is.

v. 20 — He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

Apparently some rumors were going around and people were thinking this guy was the Christ, which is a Greek word which means the anointed, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah.”²

People were thinking John was the long-awaited, prophesied, “anointed one” sent by God to turn the world upside both religiously and politically, and set Israel free from Sin and death, though most misinterpreted that to mean He would free them from Roman rule.

Regardless, John clears up the rumors right away and says, “I am not the Christ.”

In other words, he says emphatically, “No way, I am not the guy, I am not Him.”

But then this delegation ask another question.

v. 21 — And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.”

This is where things get interesting... these Jews are thinking, “if he isn’t the Christ, then he must be Elijah...”

Elijah was that Old Testament prophet who called down fire from heaven and defeated hundreds of prophets of a false god after mocking them, eventually he was called up into heaven on a chariot of fire and apparently didn’t die.

² D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 143.

Your bible may have cross references, if it doesn't then I'd suggested circling Elijah's name and right next to it the address, Malachi 4:5, because, it turns out, Elijah was prophesied to return, just not for Jesus' first coming.

Check this out:

*Malachi 4:5 — "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."*³

So it'd make sense at least this guy is Elijah right? But John denies it... "I am not Elijah."

But here's where things get really interesting. Who does Jesus say John is?

In the other three gospels, Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the promised Elijah.⁴

*Matthew 11:14 — "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come."*⁵

So was John having an identity crisis? Did he not know who he was?

No, he knew exactly who he was.

Here's the most reasonable explanation for this: *John didn't detect as much spiritual significance in his own self and ministry as Jesus did.*

He didn't elevate himself or his ministry; he remained humble.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mal 4:5–6.

⁴ Carson, 143.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: ESV*, Mt 11:13–14. Also see Mt 17:12; Mk 9:13; cf. Lk. 1:17.

Isn't it so much better for Jesus to speak the higher word over you than for you to speak it for yourself?

Isn't it much more accurate for you to let Jesus speak of who you are than for you to make yourself out to be more than you think you are?

Christians all too often make the mistake of not realizing who they are in Jesus' eyes.

Jesus saw John to be more than John saw himself to be, and yet John still here denies that he is Elijah, because, remember the whole reason for his existence, to be a witness to Jesus... John was pointing people to Jesus, not to himself.

John's whole ministry could probably be defined by this mantra, "Not me, Jesus."

Is that your life? Is that your legacy?

So far, John has denied that he is the Christ, he denied being Elijah, then this deputation asks him another seemingly strange question in the second part of...

v. 21 — "Are you the Prophet?" And [John] answered, "No."

Did you notice the decrease in the significance of characters named? The Christ? No. Elijah? No. The Prophet? No.

But who is this Prophet? I have another cross reference for you if you want to circle the word Prophet and write this next to it: Deut. 18:18

There's this promised prophet who is going to speak authoritatively God's word to Israel... and doesn't that sound a lot like John the Baptist?

He definitely is a prophet, which again, Jesus confirms John is a prophet and then some in Matthew 11:9.

But again, John doesn't elevate himself; he doesn't think more of himself than he ought.

Because he knows who he is not. This is what he starts with!

John is showing us that, to be a humble follower of and witness to Jesus: we cannot know who we are until we first know who we are not.

Here's why: our hearts are really good at telling us we're more powerful and important than we truly are.

Am I wrong?

When's the last time you made plans to lose some weight, resolved you were gonna white-knuckle it, "I can do this!" and two days later you were eating a sleeve of Oreos and binge-watching Downton Abbey?

And of course, we can confess with our words that we're not all that powerful or important, but we need our hearts to continually stay in line with that truth, because it loves to wander off into elevating ourselves more than who we are.

So just so we're all on the same page, here's some things that the bible says we're not:

We're not God

We're not the Creator

We're not perfect

We're not worthy

We're not intrinsically good

We're not all-powerful
We're not all-knowing
We're not the Judge.
We aren't all we need
We don't have everything together

And the great news of the Gospel is that we don't have to be.

This is where John starts—who I am not, and it is where we need to start as well.

But these delegates keep playing 20 questions because they can't report back to their leaders and say who John isn't... "Well, we've ruled out three possibilities..."

No, they keep going and they finally let John speak for himself.

v. 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?"

This is where we move to the second part of John's response... Who I am.

v. 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."

John's response doesn't elevate himself to anything but a voice crying in the wilderness.

John doesn't even state his own name, because John doesn't care if he is remembered or renowned... it is all about Jesus.

And so, instead of saying anything about him, He simply answers this question with what God says about him in His word.

“What do you say about yourself?” “Well, here is what scripture says about me.”

Then he quotes Isaiah 40:3-5 where Isaiah is calling for a metaphorical leveling of the hills and valleys and a straightening of the curves to accommodate the return of the covenant people from exile.⁶

John shows us it is ok to talk about who we are, but only to define ourselves by what scripture says we are.

So I came up with a short list of what all God’s word says you are, and I didn’t include a bunch; if you have a phone, maybe it’d be more helpful to take a picture instead of writing them down, if you’re trying to save them.

These are all true of us who are in Christ Jesus.

Created by God (Gen. 2:7)

Seen, even before I existed (Ps. 139:16)

Fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14)

Known by God (Jer. 1:5)

Adopted before time (Eph. 1:5)

a Child of God (Jn 1:12)

a New creation (2 Cor. 5:17)

Declared righteous (Rom. 5:1)

Not forsaken (Heb. 13:5)

No longer an orphan (John 14:18)

Complete in Christ (Col. 2:10)

Alive with Christ (Eph. 2:5)

Free from sin and death (Rom. 8:2)

Born of God (1 John 5:18)

Filled with the Spirit (1 John 4:4)

a beneficiary of God's full grace (2 Pet. 1:3-4)

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 144.

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an Ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20)

Purchased by Jesus (1 Cor. 6:20)

Redeemed by Jesus' death (Eph. 1:7)

Rescued from darkness (Col. 1:13)

United with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17)

Crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6)

Made in God's image (Gen. 1:27)

Secure in God (Jn. 10:29)

In process (2 Cor. 3:18)

an Heir of God and His inheritance (Rom. 8:17)

Destined for Heaven (Rom. 8:18)

a Steward (1 Pet. 3:10)

a Servant (Acts 26:26)

a Solider (2 Tim. 2:3)

a Witness (Acts 1:8)

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Loved (1 John 3:1, Lk. 15:20-24)

Saved (Eph. 2:8)

Forgiven (1 Jn 1:9)

Healed (1 Pet. 2:24)

Accepted (Rom. 15:7)

His (Ps. 100:3)

In Christ, you are all of these things, and much more.

Anytime anyone asks you who you are or the Devil comes in to speak a different word, let God's word speak the higher word of who you are.

That is what John does, and he does this all in light of the third part of his response: [who Jesus is](#).

v. 24-28 — “(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.”

This struck deep with the Jews, especially the religious leaders.

These leaders often had students who would follow them around and was expected to do for his teacher whatever a slave would do.

Streets were covered in dust and excrement and trash, and with the closed-toe shoe not being invented yet, feet would get disgusting.

And so students would be expected to untie their teachers sandals and wash their feet.

But because this was just an incredibly demeaning thing to do, the Jewish leaders made a rule that students didn't have to take off their teacher's shoes, that task would only be reserved for slaves.⁷

And yet, John here claims that he isn't even worthy to be a slave of Jesus and untie his sandals.

This is such a beautiful picture of humble exaltation.

[John Calvin — "Man is never fully aware of its lowly state until we have compared ourselves with God's majesty."](#)

This is how important Jesus is, this is how worthy Jesus is, to take the highest place of our exaltation and esteem and affections, to be absolutely

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 146.

convinced that we aren't even close to being worthy to see him or be with him...

I am not worthy.

You know, Jesus was asked the same question John was, "Who do you make yourself out to be."

John's response, I am not this, I am not that, nor am I this... I am just a this...

Jesus was asked, "Who do you make yourself to be?" His response?

I AM!!!⁸

I AM the Bread of Life⁹

I AM the Light of the World¹⁰

I AM the Gate¹¹

I AM the Good Shepherd¹²

I AM the Resurrection and the Life¹³

I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life¹⁴

I AM the True Vine!¹⁵

⁸ John 8:54

⁹ John 6:35-48

¹⁰ John 8:12

¹¹ John 10:7

¹² John 10:11-14

¹³ John 11:25

¹⁴ John 14:6

¹⁵ John 15:1-5

Jesus is all of these things and so much more, and yet he invites us in and he takes off the sandals on our feet and washes us clean!

This is the amazing truth of the Gospel!

Jesus is the I AM, and you are not.

The sooner our hearts can grasp that truth and love that truth and see the beauty of that truth, the sooner we'll know who we are not and who we are and the sooner we'll be better witnesses to the world of this Christ who takes away the sins of the world!

Application/Challenge:

Brothers and sisters, can you see now that this statement is truth:

I can truly know who I am not and who I am in the light of who Jesus is.

If you're wrestling with who you are and trying to figure out that question, or maybe you're not sure how you should think about yourself...

You're most likely wrestling with those things because you haven't looked to Jesus to speak his higher word over you, or you've just ignored and not believed what he's said.

The answer is only truly found standing in the light of who Jesus is, getting to know him and love him and walk with him and obey him and exalt him and sacrifice for him and give it all for him...

Because only He is worthy.

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

What do you say about yourself?

More importantly, what do you say about Jesus?