

Order of Worship for October 2, 2011, Communion

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship: Isaiah 52:7-10 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“How Deep the Father’s Love for us”

Overhead

“Jesus Saves”

Overhead

“There is a Hope”

Overhead

Offering and Offertory

Celebration of the Lord’s Supper

Preparation in Song: “Come, Share the Lord”

Song # 462

Invitation and Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of Consecration and Distribution of the Elements

Response in Song: “Give Thanks”

Song # 170

Message: “The Witness” (John 1:19-34 and 3:22-34)

by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “Freely, Freely”

Song # 436

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word
Hebrews 13, Preparing for the Coming Kingdom
5:30 to 7:00
The Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

October 2, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **Lois McMartin and EFCA ReachGlobal Ministries:** the Spirit will gift Lois with strength for travel and wisdom for counsel as she travels overseas to missionary families; the Lord will raise up both short term and career missionaries for worldwide missions, the financial downturn and economic recession will not compromise the worldwide effectiveness of the Free Church missions
2. **President Obama:** God will give him freedom from personal ambition and a deepening love for this nation and its godly heritage as the foundation for its freedoms; the Lord will protect his and his family’s health and security
3. **Trustees:** God will give them unity of mind and spirit as a board regarding the maintenance and the upgrading projects for the church; the Spirit will move in the congregation to supply adequate resources and personnel for the work needed to be done.
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: Cole Wagenaar, Army SPC** (brother-in-law of Pam Cervantes): that he listen to the Lord’s leading in the decision to stay in the Army and change specialties or to leave the army and seek a civilian job
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Tim Sundahl, Butte College** (son of Kirk and Marcia Sundahl): strength to focus on studies and for a steady job
- 6.

Please turn in your scriptures to John’s Gospel. In the Gospel John the Baptist is introduced to us as a witness. You find that in 1:6-7. This is what John the Gospel writer says about John the Baptist. We’ll try to avoid mixing those up as we look at this. He says, “*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.*” The witness itself actually begins, the substance of it, begins at verse 19, and that is where we will turn in chapter 1:19-34 and again in 3:23-30. I don’t know that we will make it all the way to the end of that, but that is the section that covers what John the Baptist did as far as John the Gospel writer wants us to understand.

What I think it is good for us to recognize when we look at the account given to us, is part, certainly that what God is about, is preparing us to be like John the Baptist, that is, to be those who witness, that we would bear a witness on behalf of our Lord. So as we look at these verses, as we think about what John talks to us about, we should be asking the Spirit of God to help us apply in our self-understanding that we would be God’s servants.

Perhaps the first thing to notice, going back to the first statement in 1:6-7. And primarily in verse 7 and see what John says there. There are two points. The first one is, “. . .he came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.” In that brief statement there are two principles of great importance that you and I want to be clear about when we step out the door, as it were, and encounter the world and we say, “I am God’s servant and I am here to announce His presence.” The first principle is that John was clear that his purpose was to bring people’s focus to the light. That is the first. The second principle was that John’s goal was that people would believe in the light. No you may say, “Well, good heavens, this is as obvious as the nose on my face.” But my observation that sometimes we get very caught up with thinking that the attention to be brought to me as the witness, and I must be really, really perfect. We become hyper self-conscious about ourselves instead of remembering that the intention is to bring the attention of people around us to the light. That is the first things. The second things is that I don’t think we always keep in mind that the objective is not to get people to agree with us, but to believe in God and in Jesus. We will talk some more about that because these are guiding principles that run all through what we are told about this remarkable man named John. It is good for us, therefore, to remember that witnessing is not about us; it is really about the Lord. It is not about all the blessings we have received. We may mention them as a way of bringing [in] people’s attention. But have you ever been around someone who starts to witness for the Lord and they go on and on about “Me!”? You begin to think, “OK, OK, OK!” So want to be thoughtful about this.

Now we are going to move over to 1:19 which comes right after the Prologue. Here is the testimony. Let us read verses 19-28.

“This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’” 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?’ 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.’ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, ‘Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.’ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.”

We are not told here – it is not John the Gospel writer’s point to elaborate on the ministry of John the Baptist, but if you go to the other gospels you realize that the ministry of John the Baptist had a large scale ministry amongst the Jews. There were people who literally came from all over Judah and Galilee, both the northern and the southern sections of the land that was still under the control of the Sanhedrin, and they came out to the wilderness. Lots of people came out from the city of Jerusalem inquiring, listening. John had made a considerable impact as he

preached righteousness and cleansing from defilement which was symbolized through a baptism. The people of that day, the Jewish establishment, were familiar with baptism, not the way we think of it, because it had not yet taken on the specific meaning of the New Covenant. But many things were “washed” in the Old Testament, cleansed of defilement. And already by this time people who were becoming “God-fearers”, Gentiles who were becoming Jews, they would be baptized much as we are as part of the process of becoming cleansed and acceptable to God as part of the Old Covenant.

When the Jewish leaders send out representatives to talk to John, you and I don’t necessarily understand by they were asking these questions, but the reason they are asking questions is to say, “You know, the people who are authorized to baptized are those who have been through the ceremonies, they are assigned to this and they are empowered by the authorities. Not just anybody goes out and baptizes. You need to be authorized by the authorities who are in charged. So who do you think you are?” That is what they are asking. “Why are you doing this?” There is another strain in Jewish history: you could be a priest or a Levite and you could baptize, and there is one another strain: you could be a prophet. The authorities understood that God as the right at anytime to call up a person and empower them with His Spirit with a word from God. This had great authority. So what actually is happening if you drop down and look at verse 30: they are trying to figure who John thinks he is. “We know you’re not a priest, and we know you’re not a Levite, and therefore, we want to know, are you a prophet? Is that what you think?”

But as the questions they ask bring to our attention, they had a perhaps more power concern. They wanted to know if he was the Christ. Now you and I anticipate that the coming of the Messiah will be an unquestionable event, that the Lord Jesus will return, as it were, on the clouds and it will be a moment of great glory. Their anticipation of the coming of the Messiah was not anything quite as publicly startling. They knew the Messiah was going to come. They anticipated the Messiah was going to be a great leader who would restore Israel in a variety of ways. There were some factors at play in the life of Jerusalem and Israel at this time that made these questions very pressing. I want to think about these. Since the return from the Exile in Babylon, the Jews have become avid students of the Bible. They had not been before. They know their scriptures. In the scriptures there are many prophecies of the Messiah. So they are alert to the coming of the Messiah. They are excited about that, they anticipate that, because they have become well familiar with the word. That is the first thing. The second thing is that Israel is in a miserable condition. It is under the domination of the pagan empires of the world. The worship of the Israelites is in many ways compromised by the presence and the power of these pagan powers. There is a third concern: when you read the other gospels you realize that already in the life of Israel at this time pretenders keep popping up, people who claim to be the Messiah, gather a following and set out to accomplish great changes in the life of the nation. This was very troubling to the religious establishment for two reasons: first, they knew that what the pretenders wanted to do was hopeless. There was no way they were going to call up a bunch of Jewish farmers and tradesmen that would be able to overpower and get rid of the Roman legions. They knew that was hopeless. Hopeless was the first reason. The second reason was that virtually without exception the pretenders not only intended to get rid of the Gentiles, but they also intended to reform the religious establishment. Of course if you are a member of the establishment, that is a bit troubling.

There are some things for us to think about here. Beloved, there are three false moves from an intense interest in prophecy: it is possible to have an intense interest in prophecy primarily as a form of escapism: “I would rather not deal with issues as they are; I would rather just hope that God comes back and takes care of them.” That ties into a second: it is that things are so bad today there is no hope of change. We cannot possibly turn the tide, reverse direction, and reclaim the land for Christ. Let’s just pray that Jesus comes back and burns them all up!” The third: “Why should we seek renewal and revival in the church? Let’s just pray that the end of the age is here.” Those three false motives I have heard; and they are not pleasing to God.

The questions, you see, that are directed to John are, “Who do you think you are that you have the right to be a witness?” You and I will face the same question in one way or another. We face it as much coming at us from the outside as we do from the inside: “Who do I think I am?” You and I need to be able to respond to that, sort out the issues in our minds.

The questions asked of John indicate two important biblical source for the anticipation of “who do you think you are” in the prophetic future. Are you Elijah, or are you the Prophet? Those two questions take us back to specific prophecies in the Old Testament. The first one is the Prophet. If you turn to Deuteronomy 18:15, there you will read what Moses wrote. Moses said that the day will come when God is going to call up a prophet “like me”. This is what Moses says, *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear against the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”* The next of the prophecies is from Malachi. This has to do with Elijah. If you turn to Malachi 4:1-6, the last book of the [Old Testament], you will encounter this prophecy.

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. (v.4) Remember the Law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. (vv.5-6) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

When you read the scriptures, you learn that it is Jesus who fulfills the Mosaic prophecy. Jesus himself is “The Prophet” and comes and fulfills that expectation. He is the prophet called out from the people who has God’s words in His mouth. He speaks to His disciples all that God tells Him. Particularly in the Book of Hebrews you can read of this, but if you were to go in John’s Gospel and look to John 5:45-46, this is what Jesus says to the Pharisees: *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me...”* *“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”* It is essential that we understand the mindset of the religious leaders [of Israel]. They believed in Moses. When they heard those words from Jesus the undoubtedly said, “Yep, that’s us! We’re the righteous ones! We’re the believers. We’re the ones who keep the Law, we maintain the Temple. We’re the ones who keep up the sacrifices. We’re right there with You!” They saw their authority as built on the foundation of the Law given by Moses. So we might wonder what these words of Moses meant to them. We know from the [Gospel] accounts is that what they didn’t mean [to them] was that they had to listen to Jesus. They were fully persuaded that they already knew what was going to happen; they already had it down! They were in the right place and the right time. They knew when the Messiah came that the Messiah would be primarily impressed with and pleased with them. Indeed it would not be unreasonable to figure that they assumed that the Prophet would take them in has his best men and build a new kingdom with them as his officers. Remember that it was of the Pharisees and the other religious leaders that Jesus said He did not come to save the righteous but only sinners. They did not consider themselves to be sinners; they considered themselves to be the righteous ones. So in that sense they were eager for the return of the Lord. What they looked for was a strong leader not to save them but to save the nation.

That brings us to Malachi’s prophecy and the prophecy of Elijah’s return. The Jews considered Elijah to be the greatest prophet since Moses and greater than all the ones who came after. If you read Malachi 4 with the eyes of a

Pharisee or a Sadducee, it sounds pretty exciting. You might think about it, how we read prophecy sometimes. Listen again to what it says: *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.”* Right? Let them burn! *“The day that is coming which will set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But you who fear my name...”* Can you see the Pharisees? “Ho, ho, that’s us! We are the Pharisees, we fear God, we’re the ones. Ho, ho, what’s it going to be like for us? It is going to be great for us; it is going to be wonderful! We are on the right side of this! *“...the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves...and you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.”* Then, look at this fourth verse; if you are a Pharisee this is music in your ears. He says, *“Remember the law (Yes!) of my servant Moses...”* Then you go to the fifth verse: *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”* Now that’s troubling.

If you read the gospels, you know that Jesus says John is Elijah. But that is not all that Jesus said. Jesus also gave the decree of utter destruction. If we look in Luke 21:5-6 and 20-24 this is what Jesus said:

“And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offers, Jesus said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down...But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are the days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

How would that sound in a Pharisee’s ears? That came to pass; it came to pass in AD 70 when the armies of Rome surrounded the city of Jerusalem and upwards of a million people were slaughtered. Jerusalem was destroyed. The Temple was destroyed. The Jews were scattered over the face of the earth, and they have been to this day.

There can be no doubt that John the Baptist, son of a godly priest, knew these prophecies. Luke tells us John was filled with the Spirit even from the womb of his mother. Being fully indwelt by the Spirit, John was uncommonly perceptive of spiritual truths and a man of exemplary moral life and spiritual discipline. If you go back and you read 1:20-21 we know that he was not tempted to see himself as more than what he actually was. John 1:20-21, notice John’s response: they say, “Are you the Christ?” He says, “I am not the Christ.” “Are you Elijah?” “I am not Elijah.” “Are you the Prophet?” “I am not the Prophet.” John was not tempted to see himself as more than what he was. His ministry is characterized by great courage with utter humility.

Where does John find his identity as a witness? O, he doesn’t find it either in Moses or in Malachi. He takes his identity from Isaiah 40:3. What is that identity? I am a voice. That is all that I am; I am a voice. I speak the truth that points to the light. That’s what I am. I make no greater claim. Notice what he says as well: “I am a voice crying in the wilderness.” What wilderness? Well, we might imagine he meant the wilderness of southern Judah. But I think we would be wise to understand he meant the wilderness of human sin. The voice of truth speaking into the darkness of lost souls, hoping that by the grace of God they would hear and they would believe.

We should not miss the significance of John finding his identity in Isaiah rather than in Moses or Elijah. Why is that? Well, it is very simple. We celebrated it today. It is in Isaiah that we are told that the Messiah is the Suffering Servant, and the Lamb of God. That is what we are told in Isaiah 53:7, *“He was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”* And in verse 29 of John 1, John lifts up his eyes, he looks at Jesus, and he says,

“Behold the Lamb of God.” That is our calling. That is what you and I are to do. We are to bear witness to the Lamb of God. And until the trumpet sounds, and the arch angel’s cry soars through the heavens, and the heavens open with the returning glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not pray for the destruction of the wicked: we pray for their salvation. We do not despair, we do not surrender hope that yet the day may come when the light of the gospel will shed abroad over the land and there shall be millions saved for the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not eagerly hope for the day of the Lord, hoping that somehow we can escape the necessity that is imposed upon us to live out the love of God in the midst of a wicked people and to be a voice that speaks, pointing to the Light. We are called to be those who walk with John, a voice offering hope to the dead.

Let us pray: gracious Father, we give you thanks for the immense comfort we find in the prophecies that look to the long future, yet Lord we would not betray our present responsibility in hopes that lie under Your sovereign care. Grant by Your grace that we shall be faithful, humble within our means, thankful for our opportunities, faithful to execute them. We pray these things giving thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you characteristically think of yourself as a witness for Christ?

2. As a student of the Bible, are you drawn to prophecies of the return of Christ and the end of the age? Is your interest primarily focused on your own well-being or on the sad (corrupt) condition of the Body of Christ in an age increasingly dominated by evil forces?

3. How do you respond to the recurrent emergence of spiritual leaders making great claims to know things or be something which is contrary to what the Bible teaches?

4. What do you see as evidence of the corruption of the church in our day, that is, its falling away from Biblical truth? How might the church be purified?

5. Have you ever wondered if our church and others who claim to be truly Bible-believing Christians (as opposed to the “other kind”) are really like the Sadducees and Pharisees of old, unable to hear what God is saying because we assume we already know it all? Do you think we may be overconfident regarding the Lord’s approval at His return?

6. Is it possible that the challenge/need for fathers and sons (generations) to be reconciled in Christ is a standard applicable to the church?

7. John the Baptist is presented as a witness of great courage and deep humility. Why is this a rare and difficult combination of character qualities? Why is it important for effective witness?

8. What is particularly striking to you about John’s understanding of his role as a witness?