

April 3, 2022
The Fifth Sunday in Lent
Pastor Matt Duerr

Eyewitnesses-The Disciple

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. Well as we continue our journey through Lent, and our witnesses for Christ; I'd like to just do a quick recap. In week one, we had the forerunner John the Baptist whose purpose in life was to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight His paths. In the second week, we had the insider, the pharisee Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin, who came to Jesus at night to talk to Him, who defended Jesus's right to have a court proceeding, and who ended up with Joseph of Arimathea, burying Jesus. Last week we totally shifted gears and went to the outsider. That Samaritan woman at the well who ended up running into the town and inviting the people to come out and meet Jesus, saying that she thought He might be the Christ. And as we saw last week, a large number of people from that town believed He was Christ, the Savior.

This week our fourth witness is the disciple; and we call the disciple John to the stand. I imagine an attorney might begin something like this; John, please introduce yourself to the court. Well, my name is John, and I am the son of Zebedee, brother of James and I must disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. So, John if you don't mind, tell us a little bit about how you became a disciple of Jesus. Well hold on a second here, I'm not real comfortable with that question because that question is about me. I thought I was here because of Jesus. Isn't this about Him? Isn't that why I'm here? Isn't it because I was a witness to Him? Isn't He the focus? I mean isn't He the one we really want to be talking about? I can tell you this much for sure, He's the one you need to know about. I'm not understanding this business. I feel very uncomfortable about the focus being on me. I don't want my name in this at all.

Well John, I understand please understand, I took the time to prepare, and I did read your writings. Your gospel as we call it today, of John. And I was kind of amazed that in the course of it, you just don't refer to yourself at all until the very end. So I understand where you're

coming for from you want this to be all about Jesus and so do I, but the court needs to understand why they can trust you. What it is that makes you John, a good witness. And maybe how you became a disciple would help.

Oh, Ok, I see. As long as the focus is on Him because I don't want any credit or anything in this. But well, I'm the son of Zebedee as I said and my dad's a fisherman and so my dad and my brother James and I, we were fishermen up in Galilee in the area of Capernaum. And we've got some really close friends, almost partners named Andrew, and Peter. Well Andrew and I are pretty close, and we heard about this John the Baptist fellow and so we went down the Jordan River Valley. And we met him, and we started following him, because we liked his message. It was straight out of the Bible: "Repent the Kingdom of heaven is near." And he told us very plainly, and everybody that was there, that his job was to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight his paths.

And then one day Jesus of Nazareth came and when He came, John pointed it out and said, "behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And then Jesus walked down into the water of the Jordan and wanted John to baptize Him. And John told Him, 'I'm not worthy of baptizing you, I'm not worthy of untying the sandals on your feet.' But Jesus told him this needs to be done to fulfill all righteousness. And so, John baptized Him and well that's when I guess you could say, the show well began, because out of heaven came a dove that came down and lighted on Him. And then a voice from heaven came and said, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

Well John had always told us that when the Messiah came, he, John would become less because the Messiah had to become greater. So, we went, and we asked Jesus if we could follow Him. Andrew, we always joke about him, if you want to get a job done give it to Andrew because he just does it. Andrew right away went and told his brother Peter, 'hey you need to come, I think we found the Messiah.' But we followed Jesus, He said it was OK, and that night we spent the night with Him. The next day when we got up, He told us He needed to go to Galilee. Then we did too, we needed to get back to fishing. So, we headed up towards Galilee and when we got there we met Phillip. And He asked Phillip to follow

Him. And Phillip agreed to follow Him as a disciple. But first he wanted to go and tell his buddy Nathaniel. When he told Nathaniel, 'you know we found the Messiah.' Nathaniel's response was, 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?' I'm sure you know that feeling. There are places in this world that I'm sure you look at and think well nothing good could come out of that. But when Nathaniel came, we were all amazed because Jesus looked at him and said, "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Nathaniel was caught off guard and said, "how do you know me?" It was an honest question. Jesus' response kind of knocked the socks off. He said before Phillip got to you, 'when you were sitting under the fig tree I saw you.' There was no way Jesus could have seen him, and yet He saw him. And that is something that God could do. And Nathaniel said, "My Lord, my God." He understood. And so, he began to follow also.

From there we went to Cana and went to a wedding feast. Jesus changed water into wine and well you read my book, you know what I said, it was quote "the first of His signs." Yes, I remember reading that. And I have a note ask you about that. What exactly do you mean by the first of His signs? Well, for us, the Jewish people, when we look at the Torah (you call it the Old Testament) God is revealed many times through miraculous signs and wonders. It's when God is at action in this world and well, he does what only God can do. He does miracles. And so, a miracle being something that only God can do, is what causes people to wonder, or stand in awe.

There was a little bit of that happening when crossed the Red Sea, or when fire came down from heaven and burned up Elijah's sacrifice. It was a miracle! It was a wonder! But they were also a sign. A sign gives direction and it directed people to look and see this God of Elijah. He's the real God, this God of Moses. He's the real God. And the same with Jesus. That miracle was a wonder. How could He do it? But a sign, H's the One.

Yes, but you wrote first. What do you mean by first? Oh, I guess you haven't read Matthew, Mark, Luke, my good friends. I think if you remember back though, to the end of my book, I summed it up pretty clearly I believe, when I said "were every one of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be

written.” I saw all of the signs, the miracles, the wonders. He made the blind to see, He made the deaf to hear, He made the mute to speak, He made the lame to walk, He made the leprous clean. I was there and saw Him raise three people from the dead. And one of them had already been buried. Those are miraculous signs and wonders. I saw them all. Yes, I understand that, but you shared very few in your account, why? As I mentioned, Matthew, Mark, and Luke already had done that. And the result was people were starting to look at Jesus as just a miracle worker. And they and they started to not look at Him as the Messiah. So, that's why I wrote my book. To validate His claim.

What exactly was that claim? Well, He was the Messiah, that He's God! He claimed that. That's beyond dispute. Really, how did He claim that? Well, we have to go back again to the Old Testament, when God called Moses from the burning Bush, told him to go down to pharaoh, and tell pharaoh let my people go. Moses said, 'I can't. I don't know your name.' And that's when God gave us His name, “Yahweh. I Am.” He told Moses you go down to pharaoh and tell him “I Am has sent you.”

And Jesus used that name for Himself. If he used it when He said, “I Am the light of the world.” He said it when He said, “I am the bread of life, I am the door of the sheep, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth, the life; I am the true vine.” And did you notice there were seven of those? Seven is, in the Hebrew language the number of perfection. He's the perfect Messiah that is all these things.

Well, John that's of course, your slant on it. Couldn't it be metaphorical that he was speaking there? No, no, no, look at the context in my eighth chapter. When Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, and He reveals to them that they were going to die in their sins unless they accepted that He was going to die for their sins. They challenged Him, and He spoke of Abraham and said that Abraham had seen His day and rejoiced. And they asked Him, 'how could you see Abraham? You're not yet 50.' Now listen carefully to Jesus' response. He said to them, 'Amen, Amen. I say to you, before Abraham was born, I Am.' He said He was Yahweh. The Pharisees tried to kill him right there on the spot for

blasphemy. But for some reason they couldn't throw the stones. And He just walked through their midst.

And you know probably the other thing you don't need to know about me, I had a very unique position among the disciples as well. I knew Caiaphas with the high priest so that night when Jesus was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, I saw those soldiers come to arrest Him. I saw Him ask them, 'who do you seek?' And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. He said, "I Am He." Notice again, the "I Am." And all of them were knocked to the ground. He showed His power over them. Yet when they got up and they went to arrest Him. He let them. When Peter tried to stop them and cut the ear off of the high priest slave, Malchus. Jesus put that ear back on. He healed him. There's a miracle for you.

Since I knew Caiaphas, I was able to follow Him to the high priest's house. I saw Him fulfill scripture as accusations were hurled at Him, as they hit Him, spit on Him, pulled on His beard, did all the things that were prophesied to Him and yet He stayed absolutely quiet. I saw Him taken to the cross where He was nailed to the cross and lifted up just as He had told Nicodemus. I saw them continue to mock Him, jeer at Him. I saw and I heard Him pray for them. I heard Him talk to a thief who recognized He hadn't done anything wrong and recognized that He was the Messiah. And I heard Jesus tell him that that day he'd be in heaven with Him. I was there when Jesus told me to take care of His mom, told His mom to follow me.

I was there when He cried out, "it is finished." I saw the sun that was darkened for three hours. I saw Him die. When I got home, I heard from a friend of mine that works for Caiaphas that at that moment Jesus died, the temple and the curtains torn in two from top to the bottom like God Himself had reached down from heaven and torn it apart. I grieved His death and I wondered what all this meant.

But I felt the earthquake Sunday morning. I heard the story of the women who had gone to finish the burial process and had run into an Angel who said that Jesus was had risen from the dead. I broke into a dead run, ran to that tomb. Peter followed me, but Peter is a bit of an old man. I beat him there. I stooped down, I looked in, I could see the linen

folded on the bench of preparation. Peter got there you know Peter, bold Peter, he just rushed into that tomb. I followed him and that's when I believed what Jesus was just who He said He was. Yahweh, God the Son of God. I was there that night when He came and joined us. I saw it wasn't a ghost. I saw Him eat. I was there a couple nights later when Thomas was with us, and Thomas was doubting. And Jesus said go ahead and touch my hands, touch my feet, touch my side. Touch, see it's Me. I saw Him ascend into heaven. I saw it all. I experienced it all. This, to get back to your question, was my focus in my writing not the miracles, not the miracle worker but what they were a sign of.

John that is a powerful testimony! Do you mind if I ask you just one more question? No, not at all. What is it? What exactly was all of this a sign of? Well, you said you read my work. It was inspired by the Holy Spirit. I shouldn't take any credit at all. But I did write it inspired by Him. What I wrote then I share with you now. "I wrote that so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God and that believing you may have life." Real life, eternal life, in His Name, Amen.