

Witness to the Word (John 1:19–34)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (4/25/2021)

Introduction (John 1:6–8; 15)

1. The principle of *two*, the number that signifies *strength* and *confirmation*.
 - a. *Strength* is derived from *union* (marriage—*two* becoming *one*, which is the model of the church, Ephesians 5:30–32).
 - b. *Confirmation* is found in the *testimony* of two. No accusation of wrong is to be received except at the testimony of two or more (Deuteronomy 17:6; Hebrews 10:28; Matthew 18:16). Now hear from Jesus: “*Even if I do bear witness [martureo] about myself, my testimony [marturia] is true*” (John 8:14–18).
 - c. The number *two* is also used in the negative sense of *division*, *separation*, and *judgment* (Matthew 6:24; James 1:8; Matthew 24:40, 41). Jesus did not come only to bring people to God, He came to divide and separate the tares from the wheat (Matthew 13:36–43).
2. John introduced John the Baptist as God’s testimony to confirm the witness of Jesus, the Lord’s Messiah.
 - a. John was from the tribe of Levi. He lived “*the covenant of Levi*,” being very zealous for the holiness of God’s people. He declared, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2). This message prepared for the entrance of the King, as prophesied in Isaiah (Matthew 3:3).
 - b. In anticipation of a perceived problem in John, we read that the priest-representatives sent to John by the Jews (Pharisees), asked him if he was Elijah. John responded, “*I am not.*” If we believe that John was the Elijah prophesied in Malachi to come to “*make straight the way of the Lord*,” is his denial not a contradiction? I would simply argue that John was denying that he was Elijah, the person. However, Jesus clearly argued that John fulfilled Elijah’s role, as prophesied in Isaiah, and reiterated in Malachi (Mark 9:13; Matthew 11:12–15).

I. The Testimony of Elijah (John 1:19–23, citing Isaiah 40:3)

1. To whom was the prophet Malachi’s message directed (Malachi 2:1, 2)?
 - a. The priest and Levites were commissioned with the task of teaching the people about the Lord, His will and ways (Malachi 2:7). Note that *Malachi*’s name means “my messenger.”
 - b. The Lord blamed the priests and Levites for their failure in this work (Malachi 2:8, 9).
2. What was the Lord’s remedy to this failure?
 - a. John was the new Malachi (“my messenger”) to prepare for the coming of Christ (Malachi 3:1–5).
 - b. Even in Malachi’s day there was a remnant who feared the Lord (Malachi 3:16–18).
 - c. This remnant is remembered and provokes the Lord to pursue His perfect plan to bring in kingdom righteousness through judgment and deliverance. (Malachi 3:16–4:6).

II. The Testimony of Zachariah

1. God gave to John the Baptist's father this glorious prophecy regarding the fulfillment of Malachi's (Luke 1:67–80).
 - a. This prophecy revealed the Lord's purpose shown in Malachi to redeem His righteous remnant (believing Jews) and to "*spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.*"
 - b. This work would produce a people who would truly "*serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all [their] days.*"
2. This prophecy plainly states that Jesus was the "*horn of salvation in the house of his servant David.*"
 - a. This would expand the gospel to all the world, whereby "*the sunrise shall visit us [Jews] from on high to give light to those [Gentiles] who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*"
 - b. The glorious end would be the kingdom of God on earth after "*the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*"

Lesson

The failure of Israel to provide the light to the world, directing them into the kingdom of God, required God to turn to the true son of Abraham, the true Israel of God, Jesus Christ.

1. When God looks at you, does your life resemble that described in Malachi as those to whom "*the LORD paid attention and ... [declared,] 'They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession?'*"
2. The message of the gospel is clear: "*Repent and believe*" on the One who alone can take away your sin and guilt. The way to God has been prepared and the call has gone out: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*" (Act 16:30).
3. Also know that "*the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*" (Matthew 3:10). The day is fast approaching when the door of salvation will be fast closed and only judgment remains.