

“The Martyrs Witness”

Who is this John the Baptist – and is it important that we know who he is? Apparently the Jews thought it was important enough to know – because they sent priests and Levites to ask him. Apparently God the Holy Spirit thinks it is important – because He has St. Mark record the answer here in Holy Scripture.

And when you consider that God’s Word says that John came in order that “all might believe through him [that is, through John]” – then it certainly is important, because we are dealing with matters of faith and salvation.

And so, for our answer, we turn to God’s Holy Word – which is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path.

Who are you John? Are you the Christ – the Promised Savior? Are you Elijah – whom Scripture says will come and usher in the Messiah and the kingdom of God? Are you The Prophet – the One greater than Moses – who brings a deliverance that is greater than Moses’ deliverance?

Oh, what a temptation John faces. The spotlight is on him. The whole nation is yearning for a messiah – one to lead them out of their misery. What an opportunity for John to make something of himself --- but he doesn’t.

John doesn’t have a “Savior-complex.” When asked, “Who are you?” – he doesn’t beat around the bush – but gives a clear answer, with increasing simplicity – “I am not the Christ” – “I am not” – “No.”

Okay John, you’ve told us who you are NOT – now tell us who you ARE! Even then, he lets God’s Word give the answer. “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’”

The temptations are relentless. Then “why are you baptizing” if you are not the Christ? Look, he says, I told you I am nothing. I am less than the servant who is not even required to stoop down and untie the straps of his master’s sandals. “But among you stands One you do not know” – He is the One you need to know, and believe in.

John confesses that he is a nothing – and yet – God has great use for him. God sends John to “be a witness, to bear witness about the light.” God sends John to be a martyr (a witness is literally a martyr) – one who sacrifices himself. God sends John, His chosen instrument, so that “through him” all might believe in Jesus Christ.

John sacrifices his life – not only here before the priests and Levites – but also later before Herod and his party. John becomes a nothing. “I must decrease, HE must increase.” All must see Jesus as the Light and life of the world. John will not distract from Jesus – he will not dim or divert that spotlight – for salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ.

What does this have to do with you? It has everything to do with you – for anything that draws the light away from Christ – endangers your salvation. So everything must be martyred – sacrificed – so that you might believe in Jesus Christ alone.

You see, like John, you too are tempted to step into the spotlight. It’s tempting to shine the spotlight on all the good things you have done – for your family, in the church, and in the community. But they do not save you – and if you get distracted and begin to trust in the good things you have done – then you’re diverted from your only means of salvation.

That’s why God sends His servants to call you to repentance – and to shine the light on Jesus Christ, the only hope for sinners.

Like John, God has great use for you – to bear witness to the One who stands in the midst of your everyday life. Like John, you must learn that you are nothing – and Jesus is everything – for the sake of those whom God has given you to serve.

You are the martyr who sacrifices yourself so that others might bask in the light of Christ and all His gracious gifts.

You are the martyr husband who sacrifices his very own life so that your wife might see the love of Christ for her – who has given up HIS life for her salvation.

You are the martyr father who gives up everything so that your family might see the One who stands in their midst – providing all that has to do with the support and needs of the body.

You are the martyr who is faithful in your work – the farmer, the teacher, the supervisor, the custodian, the student – giving up yourself to serve your fellow man – and in so doing, bearing witness to Christ, who has given His life for them.

You are the martyr child of God – who even this day stoops down at the feet of your master, confessing to be a poor, miserable sinner – one who has not been a faithful servant in all your vocations – confessing the things you have done, and left undone.

When others see your good deeds, and ask – “Who are you? Why do live like that? Why do you give of yourself like that?” – you answer with John – I am nothing, but Jesus, my Savior, has provided me with everything needed for this life, and the next – setting me free to spend my life to serve you.

That light of the Gospel shines brightly today – as the Savior, Jesus Christ, stands in your midst – graciously forgiving all your sins. He has freely given up His life for you – so that you might not die, but live eternally.

And so, we rejoice to live by faith in Christ every day of our lives – even as we await the brightness of His glory when He comes again on the Last Day, when we shall see Him face to face. And so we pray – Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.