

**John 1: 19-34; “The Confession of John the Baptist”, Sermon # 5 in  
the series – “That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by  
Pastor Paul Rendall on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

As we come to the Lord’s Table, later on in during this service, we will want to think together of our individual and corporate confession of Christ. It is important that we hold fast our confession of Christ individually, and it is also important that we hold forth our confession of Him as a church before the watching world. The reason that we need this ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is so that we might regularly remember how very much we needed Christ to die for us. We were sinners in many ways before we came to saving faith in Him. We did not think that we were totally depraved in our nature until the Lord revealed it to us through His Word and by His Spirit. Perhaps we did not realize that Adam’s sin in the beginning had affected every part of our nature, so that our mind, our heart, our will, and even our conscience, had been affected by sin. We did not want to admit that our Lord Jesus had to work out a perfect righteousness on our behalf by obeying God’s holy law in every jot and tittle. We thought that it was not necessary for Jesus to suffer, bleed, and die for the salvation of our soul. But when our spiritual eyes were finally opened to see the sinfulness of our heart, and our inability to do anything to merit our salvation, then it was that we believed, and then it was that we began to confess to others around us, and to the church, that we had to have Christ or we would have perished in our sin. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” “I once was lost, but now am found; twas blind but now I see.” “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” “How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.” That is what we need to remember this morning; the preciousness of Christ and His grace.

Here in these verses which I have read to you, we have the confession of John the Baptist. And I am hoping this morning to use his confession as a model for our own confession of Christ as we come to the Lord’s table. In verse 20, when John was asked by the priests and Levites from Jerusalem who were sent to ask him, ‘Who are you?’, he confessed, it says, and did he not deny, but confessed and said, ‘I am not the Christ.’ At this hour this morning I would like to ask you this. If you are asked by other people around you: Why are you different from what you once were? Or, how do you think about yourself now that you have become a Christian? I hope that you would be able to make confession of Christ and say, even as John did so long ago, three things about yourself as a Christian. I would hope that you might say this: First – I confess that am not a great religious person; I am simply a voice speaking of what Christ has done for me. (Verses 19-24) 2<sup>nd</sup> – Even though I am not worthy of Christ and His grace, I publicly take my stand for Him in baptism. (Verses 25-31) And 3<sup>rd</sup> – I confess that I have also very much needed

the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which I received at my conversion, because without Christ's power in me, I would not be able to live the Christian life. I pray that our study in the next few minutes will contribute greatly to excite our thoughts and prayers as we gather to observe His death in just a little while.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Do you, like John the Baptist, confess that you are not a great religious person; that you are simply a voice speaking of what Christ has done for you?**

These priests and Levites came to John the Baptist and they asked him, "Who are you?" And he immediately confesses that he is not the Christ. The Jews of that day were anticipating their Messiah, the Christ, but truly most of them were not ready for His appearance. This was the great need of that day; powerful preaching. And this is the need today. The multitudes who came out to listen to John heard that very thing. And as they listened to him, they began to wonder in their hearts if he was the Christ. Such a plain and simple man; such a powerful preacher. Such a self-denying man; perhaps this was the Prophet predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18; their Messiah. Truly, they had never heard anyone among their own teachers, preach with such authority. But John the Baptist knew what his mission was. It was to be the herald of Christ Jesus. He was to be his forerunner. He knew that his mission, being a man sent from God, was not to put himself forward in any sense as being someone great, and so he says in verse 23, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness; make straight the way of the Lord." He was simply to be a voice crying in the wilderness. He did not consider himself to be a great man. Now, that he was indeed a great man, of that there can be no doubt. He was actually the fulfillment of the coming of a very great personage prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. Turn with me over to the book of Malachi, Chapter 3, verse 1. "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me." "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant in whom you delight." This first messenger mentioned is none other than John the Baptist. He is the one who would prepare the way before Me, God says. That is, John would prepare the way before first coming of the Lord of glory, our Lord Jesus Christ. He would prepare the way for the messenger of the New Covenant, who would make His public appearance to Israel in the temple, following John's profound and successful ministry in the wilderness. The Lord Jesus' coming to Israel with "the words of eternal life" and His entering in to His public ministry, would be the culmination of all of John's personal and public ministrations. The Lord Jesus was the One whom John's powerful voice pointed to.

Let me pause and apply this to you, dear Christian. Do you see yourself as a voice for Christ? Oh, I am not asking whether you are a prophet, or whether you have a public speaking gift, or a call to the ministry. I am asking whether you as a believer in Christ speak about him. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians Chapter 4, verse 13 says this: "And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I

believed, and therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore we speak, knowing that He who raise up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you." "For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God." This is something which you were called to, dear Christian; to speak when you know that you have been given grace, about your Savior. Now look over at Chapter 4 of Malachi, verse 4. "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

This is an amazing prophecy which you might think, at the first reading, refers to events at the end of this present age before Christ's return. For it speaks of this great Old Testament prophet Elijah being sent to Israel with a message which was designed to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of children to their fathers before the great and terrible day of the Lord." How are we to understand this? Well turn with me over to Matthew Chapter 11. Look at verse 7. "As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see?' "A reed shaken by the wind?" "But what did you go out to see?" "A man clothed in soft garments?" "Indeed, those who wear soft garments are in king's houses." "But what did you go out to see?" "A prophet?" "Yes, and I say to , and more than a prophet." "For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.'" "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." "and from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." "And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come."

What Jesus is saying is that it was not the literal person Elijah who would come and be His messenger to prepare His way for His ministry to Israel, it would be John. And the great and terrible day of the Lord is not the Second Coming of Christ; although that will be the ultimate great and terrible day of the Lord, but it would be Christ's first coming, and the day which was great and terrible would be the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the end of the Jewish political nation for several thousands of years. No, this John the Baptist was a very great man. He was so great that he refused to see himself as the fulfillment of this prophecy; as the Elijah who was to come, or as the culmination of all the prophetic voice of the law to the people of Israel. He simply saw himself as a voice crying in the wilderness, saying, "Prepare the way of the Lord".

How do you see yourself dear Christian? It is evident from this passage that no Christian needs to strive to be a great religious person. If you see yourself as a

voice in this wilderness of sin which you dwell in, it will be enough. Christ must have all the glory. You dwell in a fallen world, and live among many sinful people who need desperately to hear the gospel from your lips, and to see Christ working in you by His grace to do good works. The person who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John in that they have all the knowledge of the Apostles given to them, and all of the greater fulfillment of grace coming to them because Christ has come, and fulfilled the all the promises of God, not only to the Jews, but also in showing mercy to the Gentiles. All the promises of God are “yes” and “amen” in Him. This should be your confession to people around. Christ is your all in all. He is the great One, not I. He is the Savior of the world. He is the fulfillment of the law. He is full of grace and truth. I am nobody great, but He is greater than you can possibly conceive. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the bread from heaven. He is the righteousness of God. He is the Savior of sinners. I am a sinner saved by grace. And I will be a voice for Christ in this wilderness of the world that I live in.

**Now the 2<sup>nd</sup> Element of John’s confession which I hope will become yours also is this: Even though I am not worthy of Christ and His grace, I publicly take my stand for Him in baptism.** (Verses 25-31)

“And they asked John, saying, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’” “John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but here stands One among you whom you do not know.’” “It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.” “These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.” “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.’” “This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” “I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.” John publicly took his stand, according to the will of God, to preach baptism. His baptism with water was a baptism for the remission of sins. Turn with me over to Mark 1, verse 1. “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” “As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.’” “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’” “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Remission of sins means the forgiveness of sins. It means that Jesus Christ would come, and by His obedience to God’s law, and His sacrifice for the sins, the people who believed in John’s gospel would have their sins remitted; their sin debt would be paid, and righteousness imputed to them. John’s gospel was the Old Testament gospel of Christ; looking forward to His coming; glorying in His appearing. This was God’s will for him, to preach in this way, in regard to his ministry of pointing the people on to Christ who alone could be their Savior from sin. It was so that Christ would be revealed to Israel;

that was the reason that God had him come baptizing with water. Water was the outward symbol, in this case, of the spiritual cleansing of the heart and the conscience; the symbol of repentance and intended faith in Christ when he would be manifested to Israel. This was the gospel to Israel at that time when Christ was entering upon His earthly ministry. He was saying: Be baptized after you hear the message of repentance from my lips. Believe that there is One coming who will be the sacrifice for all of your sins; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Being baptized was the outward indication of a person's accepting the will of God for their life; that they would repent of all their sins realizing that it would take the grace of their promised Messiah in order for them to repent and to be saved from their sins.

I hope that you will understand today that people who think that they are good enough in themselves, righteous enough in themselves, will not believe in Christ. They do not think that they need a new heart. They think that they already have the power to do what is right inherently within them. But you see, if you really believe this, it will only lead to self-righteousness, and self-justification, and a rejection of Christ. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it", it says in Jeremiah 17: 9. This is why we must have Christ to be saved from our sins and accepted by God. Only those persons who see themselves as sinners who cannot save themselves from their sins will sincerely turn to Christ. All else is religious showmanship and works righteousness. But a person cannot be saved by the works of the law or their good intentions. Only grace will do. This is why John came baptizing with water; to preach the need of religious people to repent, and thus prepare them to receive Christ. If you have found the grace of repentance through faith in Jesus Christ, you are the most happy of people. All that grace, to turn away from selfishness and sin, came to you from Jesus Christ. You now justify God in your mind and heart for giving you the gospel, and showing you the light. Turn over with me to Luke Chapter 7, verse 29. "And when all the people heard Jesus, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John." "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."

Let me ask you now whether you justify God for giving you the gospel and the faith to believe it, or whether you justify yourself as someone who can supposedly save themselves by religious affiliation or religious good works? You are not saved by joining a church, but if you are saved you want to join a good Bible-believing church. If you justify God and the gospel, that you are sinner who had to have Jesus in order to save you from your sins and change your heart to do what is right, you should partake of this communion. You are making confession to God that you are not worthy of Christ, or the least of God's mercies, but you will, even now, confess how thankful you are for all the blessings of salvation. You were a sinner, but He has changed your heart. You used to justify yourself, but now you confess Christ. This is why we believe in believer's baptism. Believer's baptism is

related to your confession of your faith in Christ. When you believe in Him, you come to experience a real death to sin, and a real resurrection to life from being dead in your trespasses and sins. You are born again. You are forgiven. You are a New Creature in Christ. You now want to identify with Christ in the waters of baptism and confess Him publicly before the church. The ordinance of baptism leads to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Being saved leads naturally, and joyfully, into joining the church that preached you the gospel. You want to remember Christ in all that you do, so you come and partake of the Lord's Supper to remember that you need to seek Christ for grace to do what is right and live for His glory. So come down front now, and I will have a few more words to say to you about the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Element of John's Confession that I hope will become yours is that you confess that you have also very much needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit to have power to live the Christian life.**

Verse 32 says, "And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him.'" "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." The confession of John here was that he did not know who the Messiah was, positively, until it was revealed to him by God. God enabled him to know that Jesus was indeed the Christ by his experiencing this revelatory vision of the Holy Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and remaining upon Jesus. God told John; John hearing His voice, that this was so. John also then knew that Jesus Christ was He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. You and I, as we come to the table this morning are confessing; that in partaking of these elements, that we needed to be saved from our sins through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are also confessing that we continually need the power and the help of the Holy Spirit in order to live our Christian life. When John baptized Jesus in the river Jordan, he saw the Holy Spirit descending and remaining upon Jesus. Jesus had all the fullness of the Spirit given to Him for the accomplishing of His task; to bring salvation to all of God's Elect people, and also then to be able to give the Holy Spirit to each and every one of those believers; people who had trusted in Him for the free gift of salvation. Jesus paid the ultimate price of the cruel death on the cross so that the Spirit might descend upon you and remain with you. Each believer has been baptized with the Holy Spirit upon their conversion. Each believer, however, also needs continual fresh supplies of grace from the Holy Spirit in order to be holy, and in order to do what is right. This is what we confess as we come to partake of the Lord's Supper now. We feed upon the faithfulness of Christ in the Supper. We pray for greater measures of the Spirit's blessing upon all of our thoughts and words and actions in the moments and days to come. The Lord Jesus Christ baptizes each believer with the Spirit at their conversion. And Jesus Christ baptized His Church with the Spirit on the Day

of Pentecost. Jesus Christ baptizes you, dear believer, into the body of Jesus Christ, His universal Church when you are first saved. The Father then sends the Spirit into your heart and you cry, “Abba, Father”. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit would have every true believer in Christ to be baptized with believer’s water baptism so that they will publicly confess Him before men. (Matthew 28: 18-20) You should not confess, however, what is not a reality in your heart. But if the reality is there, the desire to be a part of the local church, and to partake of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper will be cultivated in your heart and mind by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. Let us now remember and confess what our Lord Jesus has done for us in His giving Himself for us at the cross.