

John 5: 30-36; “A Burning and A Shining Light”, Sermon #35 in the series – “That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 14th, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.

Our Lord Jesus is speaking here of John the Baptist’s bearing witness to Him; that is, to His being the promised Messiah of Israel. Jesus brought this up at this time in order that He could set forth His true identity to those Jews who were skeptical, so that they might be saved. At this time in His earthly ministry Jesus knew that the scribes and the Pharisees and the rulers of Israel were not receiving His witness to them. He tells them first of all that He did not receive testimony from man; He did not ultimately need that, because He had the testimony of His works, the testimony of God the Father, and the testimony of the Scriptures to verify who He was. He would go on to mention this to them in verses 36-47. But here, He would point them to John’s great witness as a burning and shining light. He reasoned with them this way: If they thought that the light of truth which John had given to them by his preaching and teaching was indeed true, then they should realize that John was pointing them on to Him as their only Savior and Lord. John was the harbinger; he was the forerunner and the herald of Christ. He went before Christ in the power of the Spirit to be the greatest human witness to Christ of that day. For John was introducing Jesus to the nation of Israel. Jesus commends John’s witness to them, and calls him – “A burning and a shining light.” My proposition to you this morning is this: If you know the Lord Jesus, you should greatly desire to bear witness to Him, when you see that you can share the truth about Him with others. This morning I want to speak to you about John’s witness to Christ, and your witness to Christ. The Lord Jesus is telling us, through His statements concerning John, how you and I can be better witnesses for Him. I will put this into 3 statements of truth for you so that you will understand. 1st of all – A good witness to Christ does not bear witness to their own greatness, but to the greatness and glory of Christ. 2nd – A good witness to Christ will be like a burning light. And 3rd – A good witness to Christ will be like a shining light.

1st of all – A good witness to Christ does not bear witness to their own greatness, but to the greatness and glory of Christ.

Verse 31 says: “If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true.” “There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true.” “You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth.” “Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved.” “He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.” Now, it needs to be understood that John the Baptist was a very great prophet and a very righteous man. Jesus said of him at one point that he was greater than all the prophets, (Luke 7: 28) and that he was the distinguished person who would go before Him to make Him known to Israel in the spirit and power of Elijah. John was such a great prophet and such a powerful preacher, he was such a godly man, that they wanted to know whether he was the Christ. Turn with me back to John Chapter 1, verse 19. “Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’” It says: “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.’” “Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us?’” “What do you say about yourself?” “He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.’” “Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.” “And they asked him, 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 there 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.”

I want you to notice how John answered these men. He answered them by telling them about himself in relation to Christ; that Christ was so much greater than he. Christ was the One whom they were looking for, and he knew who the Christ was. John did not want them to think that he was the Christ, or even as someone comparable to Him in greatness. Even though Christ Himself later said that John was the greatest of prophets, he himself saw himself as a voice crying in the wilderness. Jesus knew that he (John) was the fulfillment of the verse in Malachi 4: 5 and 6 – “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord”. But John Himself did not consider himself to be that Elijah referred to in the prophecy. He simply considered himself “a voice”. John had a very humble view of himself. John knew that his mission was to be a voice crying in the wilderness of this sinful world: “Prepare the way of the Lord”. He was a good witness, because his ministry was one of preaching to prepare people’s hearts and minds for receiving the greater ministry of Christ.

Let me ask you whether you have a desire, as a Christian, to be a witness for Christ? Do you see yourself as John saw himself? Do you see yourself as a voice for Christ? Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. You might be able to share the truth about Christ with people around you. And God may give them ears to hear. You may be able to tell them that Christ is uniquely great among men. He is not simply a prophet, neither is He simply a great Man; He is God made manifest in the flesh. This is why Christianity is the one true religion, because Jesus alone was the One given by God who has the ability to save a person from their sins. He is the only One who could fulfill all of God’s expectations for man. Adam in the garden failed; but Jesus, by living a perfectly righteous life, succeeded. None of the other religions of the world has the true gospel except the Christian religion. Therefore, will you not, as a Christian, say a few words for Jesus? Do you see that your words and your actions will speak volumes for Him? God can take the feeblest words and make them powerful to save. It is true that you may not have not been given as prominent a platform to speak for Him as John had, but do you see that you are able by your words and actions to point to Him as the only Man who has ever lived who is perfect, pure, and holy? No mere man can claim that. But Jesus did, and John bore witness to Him. You, using the Scriptures, can do the same thing.

Well, you ask me – “What should I tell them?”. Tell them about the Person of Jesus; that He was born into the world without sin; born of the virgin Mary. Tell them that He always kept the commandments of God. Tell them that He was not proud, but He humbled Himself to the point of death; even the death of the cross. There He suffered, and there He shed His precious blood, and there He died for sinners. Tell them that all men are sinners; even the best of people fall short of doing and keeping God’s commandments perfectly. Tell them that they must repent and believe the gospel. Define for them that repentance is turning away from your sins and turning to God. This is what John preached. He preached a baptism of repentance, telling everyone to believe in the One who was coming after him. He spoke of Christ as being the great One, not he himself. He spoke of Christ as being the preferred One; the One whom God prefers before all men; not just John. Let us remember that the Lord Jesus should always be given the highest possible position of consideration when it comes to our witness. We should always give Him the highest station in our thoughts and in our speech, so that people might see who He really is, and come to believe in Him. If they do come to savingly believe in Him, they will then come to see themselves, in the first and primary sense, as people who are following Jesus, and not just another man. And, if they have seen humility in you, in your following Jesus, then it is much more likely they will not be eager to promote the disciple of the Master as the great one to be followed instead of the Master Himself.

Truly it is a sad thing, and I believe that it is a poor witness to Christ, when Christians begin looking at great teachers or preachers to get their latest information on what they should focus on in living the Christian life. They regularly pursue the latest things that he has said, as though he is the great one and not Christ. They follow the latest great or popular preachers because they are impressed with the man. No doubt, it is their hope that he will do great things for the advancement of the kingdom of God. And that is good. But it is possible that a Christian can fall into the bad practice of becoming the disciple of a man, rather than of being the disciple of their living Lord. They may put a man right up alongside of Christ, as to who they follow, and they do not understand that this is a form of carnality; a form of fleshly wisdom which will not profit them or other people.

Listen to the Apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 3: 1 – “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ.” “I fed you with milk, and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.” “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul, and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?” “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?” “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” “So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” Paul also said in 1st Corinthians 11: 1 – “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” “Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” This is the proper way to view great men and popular preachers: If they are following and imitating Christ, they are worthy to be supported and their teaching received and promoted. But let them take second place to Christ in your mind and heart.

Colossians 3: 23, 24 – “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” Let it be the Lord Christ whom you follow and serve, and do not become enamored with following the great teachers and preachers of our day if they are not doctrinally confessional. Certainly we can learn things from every Christian who is attempting to follow the Lord according to the Bible. But we do need to hold fast to the teaching of the pastor of the church that we are a member, as He bears witness to the greatness and glory of Christ; not himself, if he is wise. This is by the way, why Christ gave pastor-teachers to His Church. It says in Ephesians 4: 12, that He did so, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ.” Pastor-teachers were given as gifts by Christ to His Church so that they would preach Him and not themselves, and be good examples to the flock.

2nd – A good witness to Christ will be like a burning light.

Verse 35 says, “John was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.” To be a burning lamp or light, as John was, you have to be called of God and appointed to your work. All men who are called of God to the ministry should realize what they are being called to. They are being called to exhibit in their teaching and preaching, and in their private dealings with the people that they minister to, a zeal for the truth, a zeal for the conversion of sinners, and a zeal for the edifying of the saints. Let’s think about zeal for the truth for a few moments. Truth, the truth of God’s word and preceptive will, is the light that is shined by the gospel minister. A be a burning light is to have zeal in the preaching and sharing of truth of the word of God. You make it evident that your aim as a minister is to make disciples to Christ and not so much to yourself personally. You will recall that John the Baptist had his disciples when he began to preach and to baptize. But John also had a burning zeal for Christ’s

kingdom and His glory. When we look closely at his life, we see that by the time he ended his course, he had sent all of his disciples over to follow Jesus. His purpose was not to gather a following but to point people on to Jesus. In John chapter 3, and verse 26, John's disciples came to him and said: 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—Behold He is baptizing and all are coming to Him!' But John was not envious of Jesus. He answered them, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." "He must increase, but I must decrease", was his righteous response.

Now this grace to be zealous in a holy way, as John was, was related to his cultivating a real humility in his mind and heart as to who was going to get the glory for all of what he would do for the Lord Jesus. Let me ask you whether you believe in the sovereignty of God; whether you believe that all that you have been given in terms of spiritual gifts and abilities has been given you from God above? If you do believe this, then ask yourself whether you are more interested in gathering a following of admirers and friends, or whether you are interested in following Christ? Because God will test you on this. As you begin to follow Christ in earnest, you will daily have opportunities to point people to Him; to tell them that He is the great One, that He is the One who alone can save them, and build their faith, and keep them from evil, and work grace in their hearts which will lead them to be righteous and holy in the sight of God. If you are a minister or an influential teacher, you must learn by God's grace to turn people away from becoming enamored with yourself, or any mere man. Your burning desire is that they, as well as you, will more and more become Christ's servants. To be a burning light a man must be able to promote Christ's glory, not his own, and to see himself as Christ's servant in every situation.

To be a burning light for Christ, as a minister or any other Christian for that matter, you must have a burning desire to bring to all men the truth of God's holy expectations for them. Alongside of this desire will be cultivated a straightforward manner of speaking the truth of God to them. Indeed, John the Baptist is the very best of examples to us in this regard. He saw himself as unworthy of serving Christ, as a minister, but he did not hesitate to confront sin, hypocrisy, and wickedness when he saw it. He spoke of our Lord, in his witness, as the One whose sandal strap he was not worthy to loose, but he was when he preached he was fearless towards hypocrites and wicked men who had come to him to be baptized. Turn with me over to Matthew chapter 3, and verse 4. "Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey." "Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers!' "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'" "For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees." "Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry." "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

As a prophet of the Lord, John was a burning light because he had been given the Holy Spirit's anointing to help him to discern the spiritual state of people's hearts who were coming to him, and what they needed to hear so that they would be saved. He preached repentance and bearing fruits worthy of repentance. He warned the hypocritical Jews of his day against nominalism in their religious perception of themselves; that is, their thinking of themselves as those who knew the Lord, when they might not at all have been interested in living a sincere life of godliness. He would lay out for them the implications of these things in his teaching. Every

person who would not turn away from their sins and resolve to forsake them, everyone who did not bear the good fruit of learning to do what was right, he told them that they would perish in the unquenchable fire of hell. You and I can learn from this. If we would be faithful to people's souls in our preaching or sharing the word of God with them, we must not be afraid of telling them about what God expects and what He will do, if there is no repentance and seeking of Christ's grace to learn to do what is right. And we must not be hesitant to tell them that their becoming a faithful follower of Christ will require more than their engaging in religious services or ceremonies by themselves. They will need to be saved and to be baptized with the Holy Spirit so that they will come to know that God through the powerful working of His Holy Spirit has created a New Heart within them, so that their greatest most burning desire will be to live by faith in Christ and become holy in all their behavior. The minister can preach, and the people can share the word of God, but only the Spirit can give the New Birth.

What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire? Listen to Isaiah 4: 3 – “And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.” “When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night.” “For over all the glory there will be a covering.” Listen to Robert Hawker's commentary on these verses. “But when, in gospel days, Jesus is come, and the fountain in his blood is opened to the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin, and for uncleanness, then the filth of Zion shall be washed away, Zechariah 13: 1; 1st John 1: 1-7. But how is this to be done? By the spirit of judgment, and the spirit of burning; meaning, that God the Holy Ghost, in his seven-fold gifts, and by his gracious work on the heart, will glorify Jesus, in taking of the things of Christ, and showing their suitableness to the poor sinner. Is the sinner's heart hardened? The Holy Ghost will be to him a spirit of judgment; convincing, converting, enlightening, teaching him to feel his want of Jesus, and leading him to Jesus. Are his affections cold, and in himself *he* is not disposed to seek after salvation? The Holy Ghost will be to him a spirit of burning; to warm, yea, fire his very soul, in longings for Christ, that his sins may be done away, and both his filth and his blood *will be* purged, and *he* purified from all uncleanness. Oh! the wonderful process of grace, when God the Holy Ghost lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, Isaiah 28:17.” (end of quote) This, my friends, ties in with what it meant for John the Baptist to have a burning spirit as a minister. He preached in such a way that by the Spirit's power and working, people would be convicted of their sins, and they would be saved, according to the working and purpose of God. If you will learn from his example, this is how you may also become a good witness to Christ.

3rd - A good witness to Christ will also be like a shining light.

John was not only a burning light, but he was also a shining light. And the people who listened to him were willing to rejoice in that light for a season. What does this mean, that John was a shining light? Well, let us understand that our Lord Jesus Christ is the great spiritual Light of this dark and sinful world. It is He who illumines the darkness of any man's soul. Listen to John 1: 6 – “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.” “This man came for a witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.” “He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.” “That was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” The Cambridge Commentary says concerning the words, John was a burning and a shining light – “*The word in the Greek is - κείνος κ.τ.λ.* The A.V. is here grievously wrong, ignoring the Greek article twice over, and also the meaning of the words; and thus obscuring the marked difference between the Baptist and the Messiah: better, he was the lamp which is kindled and (so) shines. Christ is the Light; John is only the lamp kindled at the

Light, and shining only after being so kindled, having no light but what is derived.” (end of quote) So John’s light, of being able to understand correctly and communicate effectively and powerfully, the word of God, was something that he derived from God; not from his own natural or earthly gifts and wisdom. Spiritual light and understanding were imparted to his mind and heart so that he really saw very clearly the truth of God.

In Daniel chapter 12, verse 3 it says, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.” John the Baptist was one of those men, in his day. John’s being a shining light I believe means that there was a great beauty and clarity in the way that he preached the word of truth. When he preached, the truth shone forth from him in his words and in the way that he lived. And when he preached spiritual truths and doctrines became clear, and they were better understood. Spiritual light is that illumination which God gives upon the truth of His word preached or shared. This light which comes from Christ originally, is shined unto men in the specific way of revealing what they spiritually need for the salvation from sin, or the strengthening of their faith. Light is God and Christ shining forth through the Holy Spirit’s working in order to reveal or to discover to us truths of the highest importance and greatest significance to the way that we will live our life in His sight. The preacher and the mature and wise Christian will be light to this dark world. Matthew 5: 14 – “You are the light of the world.” “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.” “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

This was what John the Baptist was called to as a man and as a minister, to preach God’s expectation to the Jews; to show them that God is a God of great judgment as it relates to sin, and a God is a God of great mercy as it relates to His giving His Son. Christ is the Light of the world, but because of His giving us saving grace, He has made us into lights for Him, so that we will be good witnesses to him. “Do all things without complaining and disputing,” it says in Philippians 3: 14, “that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as light in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” This is what we are called to, as Christians, to bear witness to Christ and His word, as shining lights.