

# THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

## JOHN 1.19-28



T. M. Moore

*A Scriptorium Study*

*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,*

*He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27*

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The Gospel of John: John 1.19-28  
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## Introduction to *John 1.19-28*

John the Baptist attracted multitudes to his preaching. An air of expectancy pervaded Jerusalem and Judea, as desperate folk looked to John for hope.

But the religious powers of the day looked at John as a threat – a portent of how they will respond to Jesus. They sent interlocutors to find out who this radical preacher was and what he was up to. Those who are entrenched in positions of control do not easily let go their privileges. John may have been a threat, and they needed to find out more.

What they didn't count on was John being the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and the pathfinder heralding a new epoch of divine redemption.

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T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

## 1 Who Are You?

*Read and meditate on John 1.19, 20.*

Having introduced John, and his role as a witness to the Light, and a summary of his preaching, John now expands on the Baptists' ministry somewhat. His purpose in this is to set the historical stage for the coming of the Word of God, and to introduce other players who have a role in the story he is reporting. We want to let this section of John 1 bring us into some of the expectations and tensions existing in Judea and Jerusalem at the time of Christ's coming.

*<sup>19</sup>The Jews sent priests and Levites unto John, who from Jerusalem arrived as one to hear his testimony. "Who are you?" they asked. <sup>20</sup>John answered, and he said unto them, "I am not the Christ."*

- John 1.19, 20

*Reflect*

1. Quickly read Luke 3.1-18. How would you summarize John's message to the people who came to him at the Jordan? Given the content of that message, why do you suppose so many kept coming (v. 7)? Complete this prayer: *Lord, I long to see the day when, as in John's day, people...*

2. The Jews heard about John and sent investigators to learn more. Briefly look at Acts 5.33-37 and Acts 21.37, 38. What may have been motivating "the Jews" in sending these men to John? *Lord, how should we as witnesses to the Light distinguish ourselves from...*

3. Who were the "priests and Levites"? What role did they play in the life of the people of Jerusalem and Judea? The Jews had Roman soldiers at their disposal (cf. Matt. 27.62-66). Why did they send religious leaders rather than civil magistrates? What does this suggest about their motive? *Help me to understand, Lord, the desires and fears that lodge in the hearts of...*

4. John's answer to their query is striking. Without being prompted, he disabused them of any thought that he might be "the Christ." What does this suggest about the word that was spreading about John? Why would people have supposed this might be so? John "did not deny, but confessed" that he was not the Christ. Why does the apostle John make this so emphatic? Does this suggest anything about being a witness to the Light? *Lord, is there anything in my life that might lead others to associate me with Christ? Or...*

5. Tension is in the air from the very beginning, and the religious powers-that-be have their antennae up to detect any threat to their authority and place (cf. John 11.45-48). They want to know who John is because they intend to control him, or at least, to allow him to function within their parameters and purposes, to do his religious thing on their terms. Sound familiar? Explain. Bring your prayers from questions 1-4 together into one prayer.

*Summary*

"In all probability the scribes and lawyers were already expecting the one awaited (deriving his time from the Scriptures). This is why Theodas had sprung up who had gathered no small crowd by claiming to be the Christ, I think. And after him, Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxation, had done something similar. Since therefore Christ's sojourn is rather heatedly expected and discussed, it is with good reason that the Jews send priests and Levites from Jerusalem to John, intending with the question, 'Who are you,' to see if he will admit to being the Christ." *Origen (185-254 AD)*

The Name of Christ creates interest and response. Some, moved in their hearts by longing, will want to learn more, and to prepare for receiving Him. Others, for other motivations, will want to exert their control over Him. How is the apostle John preparing us for our calling to be witnesses for Christ?

*Closing Prayer*

Do not fret because of evildoers,  
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.  
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,  
And wither as the green herb.  
Trust in the LORD, and do good;  
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.  
Delight yourself also in the LORD,  
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.  
Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him,  
And He shall bring it to pass.  
He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,  
And your justice as the noonday.  
Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him;  
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,  
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

Psalm 37.1-7

Psalm 37.1-6 ([\*Neumark: If Thou but Suffer God to Guide Thee\*](#))  
Let not the wicked make you worry;  
Envy not those who break God's Word.  
Like dying grass will they be sorry,  
And fade like every dying herb.  
I trust You, Lord; I'll do Your will;  
Keep me in grace and faithful still.

How I delight in Your salvation!  
Lord, grant me all my heart's desire!  
To You I trust my every station;  
Let Your good purposes transpire.  
Your righteousness a blazing light  
Bring forth in me against the night!

## 2 Elijah? The Prophet?

*Read and meditate on John 1.21.*

OK, so he's not the Christ. But *who is he?* He has to be someone significant, otherwise the multitudes would not be flocking to him. We see in the follow-up question posed to John an awareness on the part of the religious leaders of someone great anticipated, from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end. There's a lesson here about how to read our Bibles.

*21 And when they pressed him, asking, "Then Elijah?" he confessed, "No, I am not Elijah." "Are you then the Prophet?" they persisted. He again denied, and answered simply, "No."*

- John 1.21

*Reflect*

1. Perhaps John is Elijah? Where did they get *that* idea? Look at Malachi 4.1-6. What did the coming of "Elijah" portend? Why would this have concerned the Jews in Jerusalem? Complete this prayer: *O Sun of Righteousness, rise today...*
2. John only answers their question: "I am not." He's not very forthcoming about his identity. John wants to hear their thinking before he explains himself. Why? What advice for us as witnesses might there be in this? *Lord, help me to understand the people you've sent me to in my Personal Mission Field. Today...*
3. Who is "the Prophet" about whom the priests and Levites ask? Look at Deuteronomy 18.15-19. Why would the Jews be concerned about the coming of this One? *Let Your Word speak to me today, O Lord, so that...*
4. Again, John is succinct: "No." He has let them expose their *assumptions* about his identity, without clarifying his role and calling. What kind of assumptions do people today have about Christians and our message? Is it a good idea, when we're talking with someone about the Lord, to try to understand whatever assumptions others may have about Jesus and His Gospel? Why or why not? *Lord, how can I begin to learn...*
5. John seems downright reticent to identify himself with the Christ. Or is he? Is he merely allowing the tension to build before he reveals his mission? Is he trying to pique the curiosity of his inquisitors? Or is he being succinct so that he doesn't say too much too soon? What do you think? Bring together into one prayer the prayers you wrote from questions 1-4.

*Summary*

"See how [the priests and Levites] press him more vehemently, repeatedly urging their questions on him without giving up. John for his part first removes their false assumptions about him and then sets before them what is true." *John Chrysostom (ca. 344-407)*

John's witness is concise, conversational, and not in the least pushy or hysterical. He's just answering questions, waiting patiently for the opportunity to reveal himself and his message. Evangelizing lost people is a *process*, not an event. What can we learn from John about *managing* that process?

*Closing Prayer*

But I will hope continually,

And will praise You yet more and more.  
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness  
*And* Your salvation all the day,  
For I do not know *their* limits.  
I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;  
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.

Psalm 71.14-16

Psalm 71.3, 12-16 ([\*Solid Rock: My Hope is Built\*](#))  
O God, be not too far from me; my ever-present Helper be!  
Consume and shame my enemies; let them reproached and humbled be.  
A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;  
My Rock and Fortress ever be!

But as for me, my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!  
With saving grace my soul will swell Your never-ending grace to tell!  
A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;  
My Rock and Fortress ever be!

### 3 We Really Need to Know!

*Read and meditate on John 1.22.*

We feel the exasperation rising in the priests and Levites who have come to inquire of John. They *really* want to know who he is, and there's a good reason: "Higher-ups" want to know, and people with power will not accept an uncertain reply to their query. The tension continues to rise.

<sup>22</sup>But they  
kept at him: "Who are you? What do you say  
about yourself? We need an answer for  
the ones who here have sent us. So once more:  
What do you say about yourself?"

- John 1.22

*Reflect*

1. The inquisitors have grown weary of this "20 Questions" approach to fulfilling their assignment. What reason do they give for pressing the matter? Is this meant to intimidate John? Do you think John was intimidated? Complete this prayer: *Lord, when people seem to be getting nervous or upset about my faith in You...*
2. They put their question to John two ways, one more *objective* and one more *subjective* – "Who are you?" and "What do you say about yourself?" Is there a sense in which *our* witness for Christ has these two aspects? Explain. *Lord, what I say about myself is...*
3. Meditate on 1 Peter 3.15. What had provoked these inquisitors to ask John to identify himself? How might we expect others to see the *hope* in us? *Lord, today show Yourself through me by...*
4. The form of their question in this verse sounds almost like an ultimatum: Tell us, or else. Evidently, the apostle John has *Good News* to tell us in his gospel – about life and light and becoming children of God. Why does he begin his account on this note of high tension? What are we supposed to learn from this? *Lord, You have promised that in this world we will have trouble, and as Your witness, I expect...*
5. John's not the only one to begin his gospel with this note of tension. Read Matthew 2.1-3. Should we expect the Gospel to come into *our world* – our Personal Mission Field – without some note of troubling or tension? What forms do you expect this to take for you? Bring together your prayers from questions 1-4 into one prayer, focusing on the tension you expect to know as a witness for Christ.

*Summary*

"A certain prophet was specially expected who would be similar to Moses in some respect, to mediate between God and humankind, and who would receive the covenant from God and give the new covenant to those who became disciples. And the people of Israel knew so far as each of the prophets was concerned that no one of them was the one announced by Moses. As, therefore, they were in doubt about whether John was the Christ, so also they were in doubt whether he was 'the prophet.' It is not strange if those who were in doubt about whether John was the Christ did not understand thoroughly that the Christ and the prophet are the same." *Origen (185-254 AD)*

John is about to explain himself to his inquisitors, and he will do so in terms of the Ruler Who was coming to shepherd the flock of God. John could only explain himself in the light of Jesus. Is this true of you?

*Closing Prayer*

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,  
What is man that You are mindful of him,  
And the son of man that You visit him?  
For You have made him a little lower than the angels,  
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all *things* under his feet,  
All sheep and oxen—  
Even the beasts of the field,  
The birds of the air,  
And the fish of the sea  
That pass through the paths of the seas.  
O LORD, our Lord,  
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8.3-9

Psalm 8.5-9 ([\*Aurelia: The Church's One Foundation\*](#))

Lord, we in Your own image with glory have been crowned,  
To worship and to serve You throughout creation 'round.  
These works that sing Your glory in our poor hands are placed,  
That we may rule before You to magnify Your grace.

Let every beast and creature, in sky or sea or field,  
In our hands bring You glory, as we Your favor wield.  
Let all things sing Your praises, let all declare Your worth!  
O Savior, how majestic Your Name in all the earth!

## 4 A Voice Crying

Read and meditate on John 1.23.

How does John explain himself? In terms of Scripture, and in terms of the coming Lord. Now *that's* instructive!

<sup>23</sup>But John  
said only, "I am but the voice of one  
who cries out in the wilderness, 'Make straight  
the pathways of the LORD, and hesitate  
no longer,' as Isaiah prophesied."

- John 1.23

*Reflect*

1. John defined himself in two ways, first, in terms of the Word of God. Read Isaiah 40. How does this add to your understanding of how John understood himself and his calling? Complete this prayer: *Lord, thank You for coming among us to...*
2. Second, John defined himself in relation to the Lord. What was his role? How did he fulfill that role? How can John be seen as having created a pathway to the Lord? *Today, Lord, use me to show the pathway to Jesus by...*
3. We see here the apostle John reaching back to the Old Testament (again) to set the stage for his story. Why is this important? What Old Testament passage would you point to in order to begin telling the story of Jesus? *Lord Jesus, I see You revealed in many places in the Old Testament, and this causes me to...*
4. If you could choose one passage of Scripture that would explain you and your life, what would it be? Why? *Lord, the passage that defines my life is...because...*
5. If you were asked to explain your life in relationship to the Word-become-flesh, what would you say? John saw himself as a pathfinder. How do you see yourself? Bring together into one prayer the prayers you wrote for questions 1-4.

*Summary*

"What else is anyone doing who is preaching the true faith and good works but preparing the way for the Lord to come to his hearers' hearts so that the power of grace may enter them and the light of truth pervade them? He makes the Lord's paths straight when he predisposes the mind for good thoughts by his good preaching." *Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604 AD)*

Can you see how John the apostle's work of writing this gospel is similar to the work of John the Baptist? Explain. Can you see how your calling to your Personal Mission Field is like this, too?

*Closing Prayer*

I waited patiently for the LORD;  
And He inclined to me,  
And heard my cry.  
He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,  
Out of the miry clay,  
And set my feet upon a rock,

*And* established my steps.  
He has put a new song in my mouth—  
Praise to our God;  
Many will see *it* and fear,  
And will trust in the LORD.

Psalm 40.1-3

Psalm 40.1-5 (*Dix: For the Beauty of the Earth*)

I waited patiently for God; You inclined and heard my cry,  
Lifted me up above the sod, set me on that Rock on high!  
New songs in my mouth You gave, may You through me many save!

Blessed are all who trust in You, turning both from lies and pride.  
Countless wonders, Lord You do, and Your thoughts with us abide.  
Lord, Your worth who can declare? None with You can e'er compare!

## 5 By What Authority?

Read and meditate on John 1.24, 25.

John keeps increasing the clarity of the stage he is setting. Now it's not just "the Jews" who sent these pestiferous inquisitors. It was the Pharisees, the big bosses of Jerusalem religion. And they wanted more specific information about John's activities.

<sup>24</sup>Now those who questioned him had from the side of rulers known as Pharisees been sent.

<sup>25</sup>And so they asked him, and would not relent, "Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

- John 1.24, 25

Reflect

1. John knew who had sent these men. But John the apostle waited until now to throw out the word *Pharisees*. How do you suppose John's first readers might have responded to hearing that term read to them? Would they have said, "Oh, the Pharisees! O boy!" Or something else? Complete this prayer: *Lord, when I think of words like "atheist" or "evolutionist" or "unbeliever" I feel...*

2. Good writers don't just appeal to the mind. They want to engage the heart, challenge existing values and priorities, and point the way toward specific kinds of behavior. So far in our reading of the gospel of John, how can you see the apostle doing this? Summarize the primary *ideas* he has thus far presented. What *affections* does he associate with these? What *values* or *priorities* does his message challenge? *Lord, I want to become more committed to the Good News in...*

3. John was baptizing, and baptizing was a religious function that required authorization. The priests and Levites wanted to know who had *authorized* John to do this work, since he was neither Elijah nor the Prophet. What authority did John cite for his calling? Is this enough authority for your calling? Explain. *Lord, I see that Your Word clearly calls me to...*

4. This whole inquiry represents a threat to John's "religious freedom" – the Pharisees had the power to shut down John's ministry if he did not conform to their protocols and standards. Did that seem to faze John at all? Is there a lesson here for us? *Lord, there are many who might not like me to be a witness to Jesus, but for my part...*

5. Remember, this was probably not a private interview. Multitudes of people were present, and many would have heard this exchange and observed John's response. How do you think John's demeanor in this interview would have affected those who listened in? What can we learn from John about *being* a witness as well as *witnessing* to the Lord? Bring your prayers from questions 1-4 together into one prayer.

Summary

"John did not baptize with the Spirit but with water, since he was unable to take away the sins of those being baptized. He washed their bodies with water but not their hearts with pardon. Why did one whose baptism did not forgive sins baptize, except that he was observing his vocation as forerunner? He whose birth foreshadowed greater birth, by his baptizing foreshadowed the Lord who would truly baptize. He whose preaching made him the forerunner of Christ, by baptizing also became his forerunner, using a symbol of the future sacrament. With these other mysteries he makes known the mystery of our Redeemer, declaring that he has stood among people and not been known. The Lord appeared in a human body: he came as God in flesh,

visible in his body, invisible in his majesty.” *Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604 AD)*

We should not be amazed if we think the powers-that-be were troubled by John’s religious activities. They weren’t. Many idiots and nincompoops (as the religious leaders would have seen them) were doing the same in those days. What troubled them was not what John was *doing*, but that *multitudes* were responding. So they were determined to know how what he was doing was *different* from what others were doing, so they could shut him down. Do you think the powers-that-be in our day are troubled and concerned about us and our religious activities? Why or why not?

*Closing Prayer*

Do not keep silent, O God!  
Do not hold Your peace,  
And do not be still, O God!  
For behold, Your enemies make a tumult;  
And those who hate You have lifted up their head.  
They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,  
And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.  
They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation,  
That the name of Israel may be remembered no more.”  
For they have consulted together with one consent;  
They form a confederacy against You ...  
Fill their faces with shame,  
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.  
Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;  
Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,  
That they may know that You, whose name alone *is* the LORD,  
Are the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 83.1-5, 16-18

Psalm 83.1-3, 16-18 (*St. Chrysostom: We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought*)

O God, do not be quiet now, do not be silent, nor be still!  
See how Your foes erupt in a row, and those who hate You chafe at Your will.  
Shrewdly they plan, conspiring as one, against Your daughters and Your sons.

Fill with dishonor every face that they may seek Your Name, O Lord.  
Bring them to shame, dismay, and disgrace, and let them perish under Your Word,  
That they may learn Your infinite worth, O God Most High of all the earth!

## 6 One Greater

Read and meditate on John 1.26-28.

John understood his baptism to be strictly preparatory. It had temporal significance only, as a sign pointing to One yet to come. Jesus would honor John's work of baptism, as a sign *and seal* of the grace of God, by establishing it as a sacrament for all generations (cf. Matt. 28.18-20). John's work of baptizing pointed to Christ and prepared the hearts of those who submitted to it for His coming. The work God has given us to do is intended for this same end.

<sup>26</sup>But

*he answered, "I baptize with water. One among you stands, Whom you have not begun to know. <sup>27</sup>He's coming after me, but He must be preferred and honored more than me, I am unworthy even to untie His sandal."*

<sup>28</sup>*These events all happened by the Jordan River, near to Bethany.*

- John 1.26-28

Reflect

1. At first, it appears there is a disjunction between John's opening statement and his reference to the coming One. He omits what Luke records in Luke 3.16. He will come to that a bit later, as he continues to unpack the Baptist's witness to Christ (see v. 33). Can you see how even the way John the apostle phrases the Baptist's response, he is pointing from himself and his work to Christ? Should our work do the same? Explain. Complete this prayer: *Lord, today You have given me the work of...*

2. When John says that the One coming after him "is preferred before me," what does he mean? In what sense is this also true of us? *Lord, let my life lead others to prefer You. Help me today...*

3. John says that the coming One was "before" him. But John was six months older than Jesus (cf. Lk. 1.26, 39-41). In what sense was the coming One "before" John? Has the apostle John already prepared us to understand this? How? *Lord, You are before all things! Today, in my life, be before...*

4. Commentators differ a bit on John's reference to unloosing the sandal of the coming One. We may safely assume that this was a task assigned to servants, and may have been coupled with foot-washing (cf. Jn. 13.1-15). John was considered to be a great prophet, perhaps even Elijah or the Christ. But how did he regard himself – that is, how did he *explain* himself, with respect to the coming One. How does this instruct us? *Lord I want to be Your servant, and to that end I'm willing...*

5. The mention of Bethany (in the Greek; in the NKJV, *Bethabara*) is one of many historical referents John will season throughout his gospel. He wants us to think in terms of real places, and to immerse us in those places, so that we *enter* his story more personally and truly. To this point as well, John has been speaking of events in the *past tense*, using two Greek tenses (aorist and imperfect) to describe the action. That will soon change. Beginning in verses 29 and 38, John will employ the *present* tense more consistently. This *historical present* use of the verbs is another way he tries to make the action real to his readers. When we talk about Jesus

with others, do we talk only in terms of *what He has done*, or are we able to share freely concerning *what He is doing now*? Give some examples of the latter from your life. Bring together your prayers from questions 1-4 into a single prayer.

*Summary*

“John, who had no concern for the crowd’s opinion or anyone else’s opinion, which he would rather trample underfoot, proclaimed to all with an attractive kind of freedom the things about Christ. And therefore the Evangelist marks the very place, to show the boldness of the outspoken herald. For it was not in a house, not in a corner, not in the wilderness, but in the middle of the multitude. This was after he had made his presence known at the Jordan when all that were baptized by him were present (for the Jews came upon him as he was baptizing). It was here that he proclaimed aloud that wonderful confession concerning Christ, full of those sublime and great and mysterious doctrines.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

The witness of John the Baptist provides a template or paradigm for all witness to the Lord. Our work and words point to Jesus. We seek nothing for ourselves, but only that the hearts of others might be readied for His coming. We do not occupy ourselves with what others might think, or worry about how they may try to intimidate or threaten us. We are called to a particular place and to the particular people God puts in our path. Our calling is to proclaim and point them to the King Who has come and is coming again. How’s that going in your life at this time?

*Closing Prayer*

Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the LORD *for* His goodness,  
And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!  
Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people,  
And praise Him in the company of the elders.  
He turns rivers into a wilderness,  
And the watersprings into dry ground;  
A fruitful land into barrenness,  
For the wickedness of those who dwell in it.  
He turns a wilderness into pools of water,  
And dry land into watersprings.  
There He makes the hungry dwell,  
That they may establish a city for a dwelling place,  
And sow fields and plant vineyards,  
That they may yield a fruitful harvest.

Psalm 107.31-37

Psalm 107.1-3, 33-38 (*Faithfulness: Great is Thy Faithfulness*)

You make the desert a river o’erflowing;  
You make a wasted life fruitful and strong!  
You bless the hungry with fields for the sowing;  
Bless and increase us who to You belong!  
Lord, for Your wondrous works, and for Your steadfast love,  
We give You thanks, we exalt Your great Name!  
We who from east and west, north and south gather,  
Boldly redemption in Christ we proclaim!

## 7 John the Baptist

*Read and meditate on John 1.19-28.*

This historical stage is now set for the drama that will begin to unfold in verse 29. We are to understand that John the Baptist and John the apostle are telling a story they want us to hear, embrace, and repeat. Whatever *our* place, and as many as may be the people God brings to us, we must be ready, like both Johns, to point people to Jesus, threats and intimidations notwithstanding.

*<sup>19</sup>The Jews sent priests and Levites unto John, who from Jerusalem arrived as one to hear his testimony. "Who are you?" they asked. <sup>20</sup>John answered, and he said unto them, "I am not the Christ." <sup>21</sup>And when they pressed him, asking, "Then Elijah?" he confessed, "No, I am not Elijah." "Are you then the Prophet?" they persisted. He again denied, and answered simply, "No." <sup>22</sup>But they kept at him: "Who are you? What do you say about yourself? We need an answer for the ones who here have sent us. So once more: What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup>But John said only, "I am but the voice of one who cries out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the pathways of the LORD, and hesitate no longer,' as Isaiah prophesied."*

*<sup>24</sup>Now those who questioned him had from the side of rulers known as Pharisees been sent.*

*<sup>25</sup>And so they asked him, and would not relent, "Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, Elijah, nor the Prophet?" <sup>26</sup>But he answered, "I baptize with water. One among you stands, Whom you have not begun to know. <sup>27</sup>He's coming after me, but He must be preferred and honored more than me, I am unworthy even to untie His sandal."*

*<sup>28</sup>These events all happened by the Jordan River, near to Bethany.*

- John 1.19-28

*Reflect*

1. John the apostle and John the Baptist establish a template for those who explain their lives in terms of Jesus Christ: Be His witness! In what ways does this describe your own relationship to Jesus? Complete this prayer: *Lord Jesus, I want to be a consistent witness. Help me to...*

2. John described his relationship to Christ in terms of *voice, unworthiness, pathways, and preference*. Use those four

words to write a prayer explaining your relationship to Christ.

3. In this first chapter of the gospel of John we are given a lesson on how to understand the Old Testament, from Genesis (vv. 1-3) through the Law (v. 21b), to the last book of the Old Testament (v. 21a), and including the place of Moses and the Law (v. 17). John will continue this subliminal lesson throughout his gospel. How is he teaching us to read the Old Testament? How should this affect the way you read and study the Old Testament? *Lord, help me, as I read the Old Testament, to...*

4. John was faithful in his calling, and the Lord brought multitudes to him. Whom has the Lord brought into your life? Where is your “Bethany beyond the Jordan”? In what ways should you expect to be a witness to the Word-become-flesh in your place? *Today, Lord, let me be like John the Baptist, so that...*

5. Jesus described John the Baptist as the greatest person ever born (Matt. 11.11). Yet John seems to have regarded himself as lowly and humble. Was Jesus wrong? Was John? Were they both right? Explain. Bring your prayers from questions 1-4 together into a single prayer.

#### *Conclusion*

“[John] marks the places [Bethany beyond Jordan] also for another reason. Since he was not about to relate matters that were out of date, but rather those that had happened just a little before, he makes those who were present and had seen everything witnesses of his words and supplies proof from the places themselves. Confident that nothing was added by himself to what was said, but that he simply and with truth described things as they were, he draws a testimony from the places which, as I said, would be no common demonstration of his veracity.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

The stage is set for Christ to appear, and for the story of the Gospel to begin. The stage is *always* set in your Personal Mission Field. Are you as ready as John the Baptist to live your witness for the Lord? How do you prepare daily to go out into your “Bethany beyond the Jordan” as a witness for Christ?

#### *Closing Prayer*

I said, “I will guard my ways,  
Lest I sin with my tongue;  
I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle,  
While the wicked are before me.”  
I was mute with silence,  
I held my peace *even* from good;  
And my sorrow was stirred up.  
My heart was hot within me;  
While I was musing, the fire burned.  
*Then* I spoke with my tongue:  
“LORD, make me to know my end,  
And what is the measure of my days,  
*That* I may know how frail I *am*.  
Indeed, You have made my days *as* handbreadths,  
And my age *is* as nothing before You;  
Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor.  
Selah  
Surely every man walks about like a shadow;  
Surely they busy themselves in vain;  
He heaps up *riches*,  
And does not know who will gather them.  
“And now, Lord, what do I wait for?  
My hope *is* in You.”

Psalm 39.1-7

Psalm 39.1-13 ([Woodworth: Just As I Am](#))

I said, “My ways now let me guard, that I may not sin against You, Lord;  
When wicked men surround me hard, then guard my mouth, I pray, O Lord!”

No word I spoke, and sorrow grew; with burning soul I turned to You:  
“Lord, make me know what I must do to live this fleeting life for You.”

Though life is short and men are vain, who labor but for wealth and gain,  
Lord, rescue me from sin and pain. Redeem me, Lord, from ev’ry stain!

Remove from me Your heavy hand; against You let me no more stand.  
Reprove me by Your firm command – how brief the life of ev’ry man!

O Lord, give ear and hear my cry! No more be silent to my sigh!  
Look gladly on me with Your eye through all my life, until I die.

*The Gospel of John: John 1.19-28*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What kinds of threat and intimidation do we as witnesses for Christ face today? How can believers help one another to overcome these?
2. Jesus said we are to *be* His witnesses (Acts 1.8). Is there a difference between *being* a witness and *doing* the work of witnessing? How would John the Baptist answer that question?
3. Why did Jesus consider John the Baptist to be so great? Should we aspire to greatness in the Kingdom of God? What kind? How?
4. Why does John build so much tension into these opening verses of his story? How should this help to prepare us for *receiving* this story, and for *sharing* it?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from John 1.19-28? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Items for prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.