

## “A Joyful Witness” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent 3 – December 17, 2023

- I. **John 1:7** – “<sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to bear witness about the Light, that all might believe through him.”
- II. **The last Monday Night Football game was in Las Vegas.**
  - a. While the cameras were showing different people in the crowd, there was a guy dressed like Elvis with a Raiders outfit on... Elvis Raider Presley.
    - i. If I heard it right, the announcers said that there are over 6000 Elvis impersonators in Las Vegas.
    - ii. It’s hard to believe that people could make any money being an Elvis with so many others doing the same thing.
  - b. We all know that Elvis is long gone, so it’s obvious when we see someone impersonating him... but other times it can be hard to tell an impersonator from the real person!
    - i. While I attended my nephew’s wedding in Estes Park, Colorado, I stayed in the Stanley Hotel.
    - ii. This hotel was where they filmed scenes from The Shining and Jack Nicholson’s famous role... which most of you probably know they used the Timberline Lodge for the outside scenes.
    - iii. At the Stanley, they have a Jack Nicholson impersonator that would be difficult to figure out if you saw this guy on the street. [picture]
  - c. Today we have the story of John the Baptist being a witness for Jesus, but not an impersonator.
- III. **John the Baptist was drawing a big crowd.**
  - a. If you think about what John was doing in modern terms, it’s like a pastor that’s getting so much attention by his preaching that everyone is going to see him in person.
    - i. That’s hard to imagine in our day of social media – we can see everyone from the comfort of our homes – but just imagine if people were getting plane tickets and going to the city where this powerful preaching was taking place...just to hear him firsthand.
  - b. Multitudes of people from Jerusalem and the surrounding area were going to see John the Baptist out in the wilderness... out in the desert.
    - i. As the Pharisees, or the religious leaders, heard about this preaching in the desert, they sent out some guys to investigate what John was up to and find out who he was.
    - ii. The Jewish religious leaders wanted to know if John the Baptist was legitimate... or just some impersonator.
      1. First, they ask him if he’s the Messiah, or the Christ – to which he says, “I am not.”
      2. They ask him if he’s Elijah – because if you remember, Elijah went to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2) and some

expected him to return – to which John the Baptist says, “I’m not.”

3. Finally, they ask if he’s the prophet, which means the prophet Moses talked about in Deuteronomy 18:15 that would come at some point in the future – and John replies... “Not.”
4. It’s interesting, because first he uses the exact opposite wording of Jesus, who often says “I AM” to questions about who He is.
  - a. John says... “I AM NOT” – I’m not Him and I am not some kind of impersonator.
  - b. Then John gets short with them... his next answer is shorter... “I’m not...” Elijah... and then the last answer in the Greek literally says, “Not.”
- c. John does admit to being someone from Isaiah’s prophecy though.
  - i. John the Baptist is not the Christ... but he is the one who is pointing to the Christ... as Isaiah said, he is “...the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” (vs 23)
  - ii. So, John is literally paving the way for the Savior to make His entrance, and the religious leaders were already questioning the whole process.
  - iii. John makes it clear that he’s not the Savior, but he is all about pointing to the Savior, and even tells them, “Among you stands one you do not know, even He who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” (vss 26-27)
- d. John did not want to be the center of attention.
  - i. His mission was not about his own glory, but about the glory of God.
  - ii. He could have gotten a big head and told everyone he was important... but instead he told them he’s lower than the lowest household servant.

#### IV. **It’s hard when the attention is directed somewhere else.**

- a. We like the attention – even if we are introverts and say that we aren’t looking for the spotlight, we still want to be noticed, patted on the back, and given credit for things.
- b. Some of us love to be the center of attention – like all those impersonators in Vegas as the crowd flocks to us.
- c. Our sinful nature is never satisfied with the status of “lowly servant”, because we always want to be and feel more important than that.
- d. Remember when Jesus’ disciples were struggling with the same issue?
  - i. Jesus catches them arguing about who was the greatest.
  - ii. Jesus tells them that the world is full of people trying to be the greatest, but don’t fall for that stuff.... Then He tells them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (see Mark 9:34-35)

- iii. That was John the Baptist – he knew his place and what he needed to do – and it was not putting the spotlight on himself.
- e. Our Gospel lesson tells us that John was a witness.
  - i. In verses 7-8 it uses the word, “witness” three times... to make it very clear that he is not the Light, or Jesus, but will witness about Jesus.
  - ii. I once saw a famous altar painting in France that shows the crucifixion of Jesus, but there’s something out of place, because it shows John the Baptist with his finger pointing at Jesus.
    - 1. Of course, John was dead long before Jesus was crucified, but the artist wanted to show John pointing to Jesus along with the verse from John 3:30 – as John the Baptist said, “He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.”
    - 2. John never considered himself too important to point to Jesus... because he knew that his place was to be a witness.
  - iii. When you think about it, pointing to Jesus on the cross is the main thing – nothing matters more than Jesus dying for our sins!
    - 1. Even now this is the center of our faith... that Jesus paid for our sins on the cross and we are forgiven by His glorious resurrection from the dead. (Romans 4:25)
    - 2. His gift of salvation creates in us a joyful witness about Him.

V. **How many people in your life were John the Baptist?**

- a. Go back over the years and think about all those people who put Jesus first and gave you the story of salvation.
  - i. Some of you would say mom or dad, or grandma or grandpa.
  - ii. Some of you might say your Sunday School teacher.
  - iii. Others might say a pastor, a teacher, or a coach.
  - iv. Maybe you even had a stranger witness the love of Jesus.
- b. Whoever they were, we can only thank God that many John the Baptists were witnessing to Jesus so that we might know Him too.
  - i. These people were not impersonators of Jesus, because that would be stealing the spotlight – but they were imitators of Jesus and willing to set aside self in order that Christ might increase.
  - ii. By the way, an impersonator is only looking and acting the part – an imitator in the Christian sense truly believes and wants to be like their Teacher... and even promote their teacher!
- c. Yes, each of us are John the Baptists as we joyfully share the message of Jesus and Him crucified...
  - i. Just like John pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) – we too point to the cross and say the same thing.
  - ii. Just like John... be an Advent person – the one who points ahead to Jesus and witnesses to the love and forgiveness that is only found in Him.

d. Jesus is the Light... He is the only hope... and we can joyfully witness about Him until He returns again. Amen.