

Bearing Witness

We often think of John as one of the most touchy-feely of the New-Testament authors. In both his teaching and the examples he cites of the teaching of the Lord, he spends a lot of time discussing “softer” topics like unity and love.

However, we should not allow this doctrinal emphasis to distract us from the true purpose of the gospel of John. John defines this purpose in John 20:31, where he tells us, “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” John’s goal is to convince his readers of the deity of Jesus, and in pursuit of this goal, the “apostle of love” takes a hard-nosed, evidence-based approach. Over and over again, he pauses in his narrative to point out the witnesses, both human and otherwise, that support the truth of Jesus’ claims to be divine.

Nor was this a plan of John’s own devising. Instead, he cites the command of the Lord to His apostles in John 15:27, which reads, “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.” John writes in obedience to this heavenly command, and the witness that he bears is unique in our records of the Lord. None of the other gospels are founded on the eyewitness testimony of the author to the same degree. Luke is quite open about the fact that he bases his gospel on the recollections of those who were eyewitnesses. Mark’s account appears to be a record of the memories of Peter. Even Matthew, though an apostle, was not one of Jesus’ inner circle, and so did not see events like the transfiguration of Jesus for himself.

None of this is true of John. If it was an important event in the ministry of Jesus, John was there to see it, and he recorded everything that he thought was most important. This is particularly striking in John’s account of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and it is responsible for the unique features of his narrative. John actually saw Annas’ interview with Jesus. He watched as water and blood poured from the side of the dead Savior. He saw the abandoned grave-clothes lying in the empty tomb. The gospel of John is as close as we will ever get to Jesus until He returns, and it provides us with everything that we need to know so that we too may believe.

About the Author

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That You May Believe

A Study of John 13-21

M. W. Bassford