

## **John 1:19- Don't Shoot the Messenger**

The context for today's Scripture is very interesting to me....the setting, is not unlike a wild west gun fight.....picture a scene from Gunsmoke or Bonanza, or The Rifleman..... You are standing on the wooden sidewalk just outside of the saloon.....to your right, a few yards down, in the center of the dirt street is John the Baptist.....to your left, a few yards down, are some righteous Jews, .....they are ready for a confrontation.

John is not there of his own accord.....God sent him

The Jews are not there of their own accord.....their synagogue leaders sent them

Both opposing parties are just the messengers....they are there on behalf of someone else

The Jews yell down the street at John, "Who are you? What's your name?"

John hollers back, "I am not the Messiah."

They respond, "Then what or who are you? Are you Elijah?"

Now keep in mind how John looked. He lived and foraged in the bush.

He ate honey and locusts. He dressed in animal skins. Elijah had been dead for many years. Perhaps it looked as if John had been too.

"I am not Elijah", John replied.

"Are you a prophet?"

"No."

"Then who are you? Give us an answer. Who sent you here? What have you got to say for yourself?"

John responded, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, just like the prophet Isaiah said."

His Jewish opponents thought about this. "So why are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

“I baptize with water,” said John. “But there is one of your own who is coming, and he is so far above me that I am not even worthy to tie his shoes.”

Just from that no gun gunfight scene, there is a lot for us to learn, and with the help of some further study of Scripture, there are some things we need to know before we can truly appreciate that scene.

1. They ask John if he is Elijah. Do you know the reference?

Malachi, is a minor prophet, and in the Old Testament, chapter 4:5 it is written, “Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statues and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Lo I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. Elijah will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.” The Jews would have known this passage well. They thought that John might have been Elijah and now was the time for the fulfilment of this passage.

2. The Jews would have been very well schooled in *Isaiah's* prophetic words in *Isaiah 40:3*, "A voice cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Hearing John say these very words, would have given John some significant credibility in their minds, and confused them at the same time.
3. Chapter 3 of Luke references the *Isaiah* passage but goes on to say that those who heard John are not quite sure what it meant for them when he said to make straight the paths. How are they to respond to that? What does make straight the path even mean? In *Luke 3:11* the explanation is given – 'whoever has two coats, share one with anyone who has none, and whatever food you have, share it with someone who is hungry.'

It is helpful to know these references when trying to understand more fully, this important passage in John.

This wild and wonderful character, John the Baptist comes to a community that is filled with expectation for the coming Messiah. No one has seen the Messiah, but as the Son of God, naturally they would have all sorts of expectations about what he would look and sound like, and how majestic his arrival would be! Certainly being announced by this beast of the forest John, would not fit easily into their expectations!

So there they stand, at opposite ends of that dusty street, onlookers holding their breath. Each opponent there, not of their own accord, but on behalf of someone else. Who will be the first to draw their gun?

This is what John brings to the fight:

1. It is essential to John that he deflect all attention from himself to Christ. The drawing of crowds and the baptizing that John is going to do are merely tools in the stages of preparations for the one who is to come. John is preparing the way, he is getting their

attention, he is preparing their hearts, and then he is going to step aside.

As an example for each one of us, John's crucial role is to witness to Jesus Christ. It is the importance and the significance of Jesus Christ that matters.....the importance of Jesus Christ, rather than John and rather than ourselves. We would all do well to keep that in mind.

Are there times when, unwittingly or otherwise, we attract attention and praise and adoration to ourselves....when we move into the spotlight rather than direct it to Christ.....?

We need to remember, like John, he was getting peoples' attention, not for his own glory but for Christ's. It can be a thin and nuanced line sometimes.

I remember in a church I used to attend, one of our friends sang a beautiful solo in worship one day. Another friend complimented him on it. He responded, "Oh that wasn't me, it was God."

Our other friend responded, “Oh that’s odd, I could have sworn I saw your lips move.”

I think it is important that we acknowledge that in all things it is God who enables us to do what we do. But it also requires a willingness, a process of skill development on our part, a desire to serve in whatever capacity. We participate in the ministry. We are co-creators of beauty and blessing. God shines Go’s light through us. Not us, but God in us.

We can take a piece of land and let it go to weeds, or we can create beautiful gardens, and walking paths, and places to sit and rest.

Doing the best we can with what God has given us. Acknowledging in all things that it is only by the grace of God that we can be part of the plan.

John is emphatic on this point. Yes, it is John out in the wilderness, calling people to be baptized, calling people to sort out their lives, straighten out and fly right.....the Son of God is coming! It is not

John that needs the attention or who will do great things, it is the one who he comes to bear witness to. John is just doing his part in God's work. This is an important lesson for each of us.

John was living out his call to be a voice in the wilderness.....a voice that could be heard above the noise and above the silence.....a voice that called attention, not to himself but to the one who was above himself. John knew his mission, his call, his purpose, and he attempted to be true to that.

How does this apply to you? Are you calling attention to Christ, or to yourself? Are there times when you are able to make your voice heard above the noise or above the silence? Are you using your God-given gifts well? Are you able to serve and minister, and then get out of your own way so that others might see less of you and more of Christ in you?

How are you able to say, "Not me, but Christ in me?" When you really think of it, we are always limited by our own resources. Even

though there are many who pride themselves on being independent, self-made men or women.....I challenge that.

Consider raising a family, getting healed, building a house, sourcing the food you need....yes it is good to be independent, but it is essential to recognize that no one is an island completely unto themselves....we need one another, a sharing of gifts, and talents and expertise. No one person has strengths and gifts in every area of life! So we share all of the functions within the body of Christ, and together, combining all of those various functions, we can accomplish great things.

We are God made, at the beginning of life, and if we are really honest, God made and God enhanced and God blessed throughout our entire lives. We move through this world with God as co-creators. It is important to find ways to recognize and live this out in our daily lives.

John lived out his calling.....he got the attention of many people, he called out words of preparation throughout the wilderness, he helped to prepare their hearts for Christ.....and then he got out of the way.

“I am not the Messiah. I am not the prophet Elijah. I am simply a voice in the wilderness...make straight the way of the Lord.”

How do you relate to any of this? What do you make of this notion of co-creator with God? Are you conscious of putting God first?

God bless you on your journey.

Amen