

Share His Story
Lesson #9
A Strange Witness

What did you wear to work today? I'm guessing your apparel might have been a bit different than that worn by our subject for lesson #9—camel's hair garment with a leather belt. John the Baptist, in method, message, and material goods was a throwback to another time and another era—a man out of place. There is a 400-year gap between the last writing of the Old Testament and the birth of Christ. John is the one who bridges that gap.

Read Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6.

Malachi predicted that, before Messiah would come, Elijah would return.

What would this new “Elijah” do?

What do you know about the first Elijah? Browse through 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 2 to review some of the Elijah stories.

How was John the Baptist like Elijah?

Read John 1:19-42.

What was John's role with regard to the coming Messiah? How did he carry out this role?

Compare John 1:21 to Matthew 11:1-15. Is John the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy in Malachi? Why do John and Jesus seem to disagree on this point? Who is right?

Compare John 1:23 to Isaiah 40:3. What are the differences in phrasing between these two passages?

Isaiah 40:3 uses road-building images to look to a future time when God would build a road to take His people home. Note the punctuation differences between Isaiah and John. In what kind of road-building effort is John the Baptist engaged?

John was baptizing at Bethany beyond the Jordan and he was baptizing Israelites. Those two facts open up some interesting insights in this story. Normally, only non-Jewish proselytes to the faith of Israel were baptized—not Jews. And John is having Jews leave the “Promised Land” and re-enter through baptism.

Why is John baptizing Jews?

What symbolism do you find in having them leave the “Promised Land” to re-enter through this baptism?

John's baptism was not Christian baptism. It symbolized the repentance of the individual. Why was this an important first step in preparing for the arrival of the Messiah?

What is John's witness—what does he tell his listeners about Jesus?

John calls Jesus "the Lamb of God." What Old Testament imagery is wrapped up in this phrase?

Why does our witness need to include elements of both Law and Gospel?

Under what circumstances might a person need to hear more Law at first?

Under what circumstances might a person need to hear less Law and more Gospel at the outset?

How do you know how and when to share the Gospel message with a friend or acquaintance? What role does the Holy Spirit play in your witnessing efforts?

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, we recognize our own sinfulness and rejoice in our Savior who rescues us from the consequences of our own condition. We also recognize we live in a world full of people—some of whom don't recognize their sin and some of whom despair because of their sin. Use us to be the witnesses these people need. Use us to speak the Law clearly and sternly when that is needed and to speak the Gospel sweetly and comfortingly when that is need. In the Name of the One who laid down His life for us. Amen.

Share His Story
Session #10
Come and See

You can probably relate many stories that involve Peter, probably some that involve John and James. But what about Andrew—how much do you know about him? You probably don't know much about Andrew because he doesn't figure prominently in very many Bible stories. But he does appear in three stories, and it is fascinating to see what he is doing in those three stories.

Read John 1:35-42.

What is Andrew doing in this story?

What is the full text of Andrew's witness in this story? What would the listener understand upon hearing these words? Why did he not need to say more?

What is the outcome of Andrew's witness? What impact would this have on the future of the early Church?

The Galilean fishing partnership involved Andrew and his brother and James and John. What is the significance of this foursome in the life of the early Church?

Read John 6:1-14.

What is Andrew doing in this story?

In what way is this an act of faith?

How might those listening have viewed his comment to Jesus?

What does Jesus do with Andrew's reconnaissance? What do you think Andrew was thinking and feeling as he helped collect the leftovers?

Read John 12:20-26.

When the text says, "Greeks," it may mean Gentiles or it may mean Hellenized Jews—Jews who had adopted Greek or Gentile customs. In either case, they would have hardly been considered *devout* or even *worthy* by other Jews.

What is Andrew up to this time?

There is a man in the Midwest who designs churches. In every church he has ever designed, there is a small plaque on the pulpit with the words from this text, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Why is this an appropriate plaque for a pulpit?

Andrew plays a significant role in only these three stories and in each situation he is bringing someone to meet Jesus. In none of these stories does he ever give a full-blown Law/Gospel witness. In each case his witness is more like “Come and see.”

Is there a place in our lives for a *come and see* type of witness? What circumstances might call for that kind of a witness.

In a survey done in the early 2000s, over 60 percent of unchurched people indicated they would come to church if someone invited them to go with the inviter. At the same time, over 75 percent had never been invited. What does this tell you about a *come and see* kind of witness?

Is there a difference between inviting someone to church and inviting someone to come to church *with you*? Which invitation is more likely to be accepted?

How could it be beneficial to the unchurched person to have him or her attend church with you?

Closing Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, we are most grateful for the invitation You have held out to us to be part of Your eternal family. We recognize we don't deserve it and are therefore all the more grateful. Lead us to extend that *come and see* invitation to those we encounter in our daily life. In Jesus' holy Name. Amen.

Share His Story
Session #11
“You Shall Be My Witnesses”

Farewell speeches are generally well thought out and often carry quite a punch. Identify the speaker of some of these famous exit lines:

“I shall return.”

“I am not a crook.”

“I’ll be baaack”

“Earn this.”

Th-th-th-that’s all folks!”

Read Acts 1:6-11.

Jesus’ last lines as a physical resident of planet earth are spoken in Acts chapter 1. The question that Jesus’ followers ask is indicative of their ignorance of His mission. They still don’t get it! They still think He had come to lop off some Roman heads and bring Israel back to the glory days of David and Solomon. They probably saw the death and resurrection as a pretty amazing detour in that process, but a detour just the same, and their question is designed to get Him to lay out His plans to overthrow the Roman government and set up His earthly Kingdom. It would take a Pentecost event to set them straight.

Israel’s expectations were too low! They were so focused on the temporal they couldn’t see the eternal. How are we tempted to view life similarly?

The Greek word for “power” used in verse 8 is the source for our word “dynamite.” How does that understanding impact Jesus’ statement?

The Greek word for “witness” is the same as the word elsewhere translated “martyr.” What is a martyr? Why would those two words—witness and martyr—translate the same Greek word?

Are Christians still called to martyrdom today?

Are there any ways in which you are or have been a martyr? How and when?

The place names in verse 8 are like the water rings going out when you drop a pebble in a pond. Jerusalem was the city in which they were. Judea was the province in which Jerusalem was located. Samaria was the neighboring province (the Jews hated the Samaritans, by the way). And the ends of the earth were, well ... the ends of the earth.

You are called to be His witnesses, too. What is your “Jerusalem” and how are you a witness there?

What is your “Judea” and how are you a witness there?

What is your “Samaria” and how are you a witness there?

How many countries can you name where Lutheran Hour Ministries has foreign offices? Your prayer and financial support for Lutheran Hour Ministries means you are a witness to “the ends of the earth.” Check out www.lhmint.org to locate all 31 overseas Lutheran Hour Ministries offices. Which ones hold special interest for you?

Closing Prayer: We thank You, O Lord, for that great cloud of witnesses and martyrs who have gone before us. Use us, we pray, to continue to spread that Good News to our *Jerusalems*, our *Judeas*, our *Samarias*, and to the ends of our 21st-century world. We pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen

Share His Story
Session #12
Sharing His Story with Christians, Too

Domitian! The very name had the power to strike terror in the hearts of late first-century Christians. Domitian was the Roman emperor from 81 to 96 AD and was just the latest (and maybe the worst) of a growing line of certifiably crazy Roman rulers. It had become the norm—if you were the current emperor—to declare yourself a god. Several of his predecessors had done it and Domitian followed suit. However, this guy took it one step beyond his predecessors—one quite bloody, deadly step. He required every resident of the Roman Empire to appear once a year at the local shrine established for such things and there burn a pinch of incense while saying, “Caesar is lord!” The penalty for refusing to do so was death—and Domitian had some creative and disgusting ways of enforcing this death sentence.

Now that sounds simple enough—unless you were a Christian. Tens of thousands of Christians refused to do that one simple act. They knew they had no Lord but Jesus, Himself, and they would not confess there was any other god and most certainly wouldn’t bestow that honor on the Roman emperor. So they died. Some were quartered (arms and legs attached to four different horses pointed in four different directions—you get the idea). Some were used to light up the night sky. Some provided entertainment for the masses as they fell to gladiators and beasts in the arena. *All* lived with the fear that the commotion they heard outside their doors would be soldiers coming to take them to their deaths.

Where and how are Christians being persecuted today?

Is any of this persecution happening in your country? In your life?

It is to people living in the midst of this history that John writes Revelation. It is his witness and the witness of the Holy Spirit to a persecuted Church. The end of the book gives a glimpse of heaven to those Christians undergoing persecution in the first century, to Christians undergoing persecution today, and to all of us who will one day deal with our own death and the death of loved ones.

Read Revelation 21:1-22:6.

Which phrases in this section give special hope to those facing imminent death?

Which phrases give you hope as you deal with your own most certain death and the death of loved ones?

In the preceding chapters, John has made it abundantly clear that this gift of heaven is just that—a gift. It is earned by the blood of the Lamb. Why is that important to you?

With Revelation 22, the Bible has come full circle. What began with a perfect world in the Garden of Eden has now become, by God’s grace, a new Eden.

Which phrases in chapter 22 are reminiscent of Genesis 1 and 2?

Most people probably see history as cyclical—one fool thing after another but always repeating itself. Christians see it as linear—always moving toward a goal. According to Revelation, what is that goal?

We most often talk about witnessing as if it only involved sharing our faith with non-Christians. John's witness in Revelation is directed toward Christians. What life situations give us the best opportunities to witness to each other as Christians?

What is the focus of the message we proclaim to each other?

The Lutheran Hour provides a solid Law/Gospel witness to over 600,000 people every week. In fact, in most communities in the US, there are more people listening to **The Lutheran Hour** on a Sunday morning than there are worshiping in all of the LCMS churches in that community. Many of those are Christian but as many as 60,000 listeners have no church home. On what station and at what time is **The Lutheran Hour** broadcast in your area? What could be done to help your congregation better see this broadcast as a way to assist your members in witnessing to Christians and non-Christians, alike?

Closing Prayer: O God of history, You hold the entire world in Your hands and You control the destiny of this world. We thank You for providing a Savior so that our destiny is secure. And we thank You for providing John's witness in Revelation so that we might get a glimpse of that destiny. Help us to openly proclaim the Good News both to those who already know and to those who don't. We ask this in our Savior's Name. Amen.

NOTE: For more background on John's Revelation, check out the Lutheran Hour Ministries **Men's NetWork** Bible study titled, *Explaining All The Scary Stuff in Revelation*. You can find out more about this and other resources at <http://www.lhmmen.com/studies.asp>.