

John 1:6-13

"R U Trustworthy?"

Do y'all know who Chuck Colson is? (pause) I first heard of Chuck Colson when I came across a Focus on the Family radio broadcast while living in Charlotte. I didn't agree with everything Chuck said. I still don't. However, just this past week I stumbled across this quote and it seemed to me to be a perfect fit for this week's Scripture coming the first Sunday after Easter. Chuck Colson wrote:

This morning's Scripture says John came, **"to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light"** (John 1:7-8).

"I know the resurrection is a fact and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world – and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible." Chuck Colson

Chuck Colson served in the White House under President Nixon. Chuck was involved in the Watergate Scandal and in 1974 he served seven months in prison in Alabama. In the midst of the scandal and trial Chuck Colson gave his life to Christ. Coming out of prison Chuck started a non-profit called "Prison Fellowship," and put out a weekly radio address called, "BreakingPoint." Chuck was a talented speaker and prolific writer. Chuck used these gifts and abilities to bear witness to all he had seen and experienced for Jesus Christ. Hence Chuck's quote comparing the 12 Disciples and the 12 men indicted in the Watergate hearings.

What struck me about this morning's passage of Scripture and this quote from Chuck Colson are the references to the terms witness and testimony. Witness and testimony are legal terms which go back before the Exodus. Witness refers to something we have seen, or heard, or touched, or tasted, or smelled. Witness refers to something about which we have first hand knowledge. John the Baptist came to bear witness or testify to the light. To testify is to tell or relate to others what we have seen or heard. The ninth commandment says, **"do not bear false witness"** (Exodus 20:16). Do not lie about what you know to be true. John the Baptist was sent by God and willing to bear witness to the light regardless of the cost. (pause) Sisters and brothers do you remember what price John the Baptist paid for the testimony he gave? (pause) John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod Agrippa.

Let's look at the fellas in the Watergate scandal. Jun 17, 1972 five men were caught and arrested for breaking into the Watergate hotel. When the police began investigating the crime they discovered ties between these five men and the committee to re-elect President Richard Nixon. Congress took over the investigation. They discovered President Nixon had been abusing his power as the President of the United States. President Nixon employed the powers of the FBI, the CIA and even the IRS to investigate and make life difficult for his enemies, and the people who scared the President. As the investigation continued it revealed multiple abuses of power. The result was 40 government officials being indicted or sent to jail including Chuck Colson. Perhaps more importantly, no president since the Watergate scandal, neither Democrat nor Republican, has enjoyed the full trust and respect of the American People. In America, most our leaders are elected by popular vote. However, without the trust of the people it is hard to govern, get elected or do much of anything. The Watergate scandal occurred in the 1970's and the lack of trust they created has damaged this country ever since.

But what about John the Baptist? Herod Agrippa was the king of the portion of Herod the Great's kingdom called Judea from 41-44 AD. Herod Agrippa ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. Herod had acted rashly and it would cost him. Herod had John arrested for speaking out to his marriage of his brother's wife who happened to be both men's half-sister. (pause) Yup. That's gross. (pause) But that's not the point. John the Baptist called Herod out for His disgusting behavior. Herod did not like it so he had John arrested. John had also called out the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, going to so far as to call them a, "brood of vipers" (Matt 3:7-10). Arresting John earned Herod brownie points with the Jewish ruling class and the Pharisees. However, Herod was afraid of the people which is why Herod did not kill John straight away. The people thought John the Baptist might be Elijah returned from heaven. This is why it took a drunken party for Herod to make the decision to have John the Baptist beheaded.

Here's the difference between the men caught up in the Watergate scandal and John the Baptist. The Watergate scandal very badly hurt the reputations of the President of the United States, the FBI, the CIA and the IRS, and I know what you're thinking. "Who has ever really liked the IRS?" But that's not the point. The Watergate scandal damaged the American people's ability to trust those lead this country and protect it because of all of the lies, the corruption, the cover ups, and the abuse of power. The testimony and witness of those involved in the Watergate scandal damaged the trust of the American people. The witness of John the Baptist did something else. Even before John the Baptist was arrested by Herod there were rumors John the Baptist was actually Elijah¹ or at the very least a prophet.² By standing up to Herod and calling Herod out for his gross behavior before God, John the Baptist fulfilled that role as a prophet. When John was killed it only seemed to add credibility to all John had testified about one coming after whose sandal John was not worthy to untie. One who will baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. A testimony of lies destroyed credibility. An honest witness gives credibility to an incredible prophecy. There is one coming who will baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit.

My sisters and brothers, last week we celebrated Easter, and it was wonderful. However, there are many people who doubt Jesus Christ can be anyone's king. (pause) How can Jesus be anyone's king if Jesus is dead? How will those who doubt know the truth if we don't tell them? How will those who doubt know our testimony about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is true if our witness is not trustworthy? Brothers and sisters, we don't have to know all the answers for our witness to be trustworthy. We just have to be honest. It is okay to say, "You know what. I'm gonna have to look that one up?" Or better yet, "Let's look that one up together." If we are honest about what we think, and honest about what we do not know; and if we are sincere in our willingness to look up the answers with those who have questions then we are building trust. If we are going to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ trust is important. This morning we have explored two very different examples of witness and testimony. One was trustworthy, and one that lied to cover their failures and insecurities. If we are serious about sharing the Gospel with others, then we have got to get real serious about what it means to be trustworthy at work, at school, in the community and in our homes. When it comes to the Gospel we need to ask ourselves, "R U Trustworthy?"

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen

¹ Elijah was a prophet of God who repeatedly called down fire from heaven to demonstrate God's sovereignty and power (1Kings 18; 2Kings 1:9-15). Elijah never died. God sent a whirlwind of fire and a flaming chariot to take Elijah to heaven (2Kings 2:11).

² The prophets of Israel were different from Israel's neighbors because the prophets of God in Israel declare God's messages even if the king does not like it – sometimes especially if the king does not like it.