

## **Not An Impersonator**

### **John 1:6-8, 19-28**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Perhaps at one point or another, you've come across the saying, "Fake it till you make it!" In other words, if you keep impersonating those who have attributes and things that you desire, and if you have the confidence and the mindset to accomplish something, you will eventually understand how to achieve the goals you have for yourself or the success you so desire. As it is, this phrase has a bit of an uncertain history. Still, it appeared in Psychology in the 1920s when Alfred Adler developed a "therapeutic technique that he called 'acting as if,' asserting that 'if you want a quality, act as if you already have it.' This strategy gave his clients an opportunity to practice alternatives to dysfunctional behaviors. Adler's method is still used today and is often described as role play."

Unfortunately, hypocrites of the church today often think that faith is a "fake it till you make it" mentality. The assumption is that if you can make the outward appearance that you are holy and fool the world into thinking that you are without sin, then perhaps you can also fool God. It follows that one might put on their best suit for church, donate as much as they can to charity, or pursue all sorts of good works, and in the process, compromise their faith by living in a lie of works-righteousness for so long that they start to believe that they are super Christians. These types of people are impersonators of faithful Christians. These seemingly natural methods of coming to Christ always fall short of the true doctrine of the faith. The question follows: if one does not come to faith from one's own doing or work, how in the world are we to know the true God?

#### **I. John The Baptist: Impersonator, Imposter, or Forerunner?**

The gospel of John the Evangelist addresses this question in its prologue, and the theme spans across his Gospel. Jesus, on numerous occasions, makes it clear that He is the Word made flesh and "the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6). And in John 8:12, "the light of the world." But before we dive into this, we have another important biblical figure to look at. As we continue our Advent theme, "Getting Ready," we reencounter John the Baptist. From John's birth, it was prophesied that he would bear witness to the Light (who is Christ Jesus). Our text for this morning in John 1:6-7 says this about him, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him." In correlation with these verses, Luke 1:76-79 tells us that his father Zechariah prophesied this concerning his son,

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

John the Baptist knew exactly what it was that he was placed on earth by God to do. He was not an imposter in the sense that he made up a fake identity, and he was not an impersonator convincing people that he was the light of the world. He was a forerunner for the one who was to come. He was called to bear witness to the Light. In other words, he was “to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,” as Zechariah prophesied. That forgiveness of sins would soon be on display at the cross and empty tomb of Jesus. And so, John never sought out his own light or glory, but rather, the light and glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. John was not “faking it to make it.” Instead, John denied any honorable title and presented to the people a confession concerning himself as a forerunner of Christ, preparing the way for the Lord by preaching the forgiveness of sins and administering a baptism of forgiveness. He refused to be the center of attention. He was happy being where he was pointing us to the true Light: the Lamb of God who takes away our sins! The world needed to get ready for the incarnation of the Son of Man, and John the Baptist was the man to do it.

## **II. What Does Light Have To Do With Jesus?**

At this juncture, you may ask yourself, what is all this talk about light? What does light have to do with Jesus? Light in this text is to be understood as all that can be seen, including all that can be known. Christ Himself is the Light. Through His teachings, everything is known because all things were created through Him. So therefore, as the source of revelation, Christ is teaching Himself. All that can be known comes from Him, and all existence comes from Him. So, for us as believers, and for John, to be His disciples means to conform to the will of God and all that is revealed in Christ.

In the Garden of Eden, man chose not to conform to His will. Man chose darkness over Light. In other words, we chose death over life. We chose godlessness over God. You’ve heard many times before that every person who has existed, does exist, or will exist would have made the same choice as Adam and Eve, which rings true. Sinful humanity has completely turned into the self to pursue evil passions that are contrary to the will of God, and because the will of God is revealed in Christ, who is the Light, man has completely turned away from Him. 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:8 says, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” And 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:6 says, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” You have your “fake it till you make it” mentality here. Here, you have the person who does not care about the commands of God. This person justifies their sin with all sorts of excuses that do not match up to true faith in Christ. They love to sin and do not care what God has to say regarding their sin. There is no struggle in their conscience between the Old and New Adam.

My friends in Christ, our wickedness and immorality do nothing but bring us farther away from God. As humans, we are experts at putting ourselves, our desires, and our pleasures in the place of Christ and His work for us. After all, we must look out for what we want, right? We have to “fake it till we make it!” Wrong. The punishment, the Hell, that we deserve for our sins, for a rejection of Christ, and a reliance on our own merits and good works is far worse than we could ever imagine.

### **III. The Word Made Flesh**

But do not fret, dear friends. We have for ourselves an intercessor. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man came into the flesh in His incarnation to take upon Himself the punishment that we deserve, thereby becoming darkness and death, so that we might have eternal life by faith in Him. This man that John the Baptist humbly pointed the people to has come into this world, so there is no need to “fake it till you make it.” Christ is the real deal. Despite all that has occurred in our treachery and rejection of Him, despite all of the sins we have committed against Him and His will, despite the destruction we have caused, Christ died for us! He is not an impersonator! In His incarnation, we are brought to the true knowledge of God through Christ. Christ has revealed all that we need to know and understand about God so that we might be saved. As the Word in the flesh, Christ has stooped down to our level, living a life without sin for us so that the price may be paid for our transgression. He accomplished this as complete God and a complete human being so that His Light may fill us rather than the darkness that has doomed us to Hell.

And do not be mistaken. Christ, as God and man, will return as He said to bring the final judgment upon the world to fruition. 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:2-5 says,

“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”

You are not in darkness. You are in the Light. You are not left with nothingness, despair, and shame. You are in the Light of Christ Jesus our Lord, The Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sin. And this Light has brought life to all those who believe in Him. As we await His glorious return and ultimate deliverance from the sin and death surrounding us, we are reminded through the Word of God that the true Light shines even now.

### **IV. The True Light Shines Even Now**

The true Light shines in the written Word, the Gospel of Christ, that you have sitting in front of you in your pew or on your nightstand at home. Through the Holy Spirit, we have been given this treasure so that we may continue to grow and help others to grow in the knowledge of our Lord. Because the Holy Spirit has emptied us of ourselves and filled us with Christ, the true Light also shines through us. Like John the Baptist, we are not impersonators of Christ either, but we are faithful witnesses of Christ. We do not bear witness to Christ with a “fake it till you make it” mentality. We do not bear witness to ourselves either. We do not present ourselves as if we have no struggle against the old Adam, against the sin that dwells within us daily. 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:10 says, “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” So that we do not make Him a liar, we witness to Christ with what we are: baptized and redeemed children of God who direct others to Christ through His Word precisely because we are sinful people with a deep and longing need for His redeeming work.

We who walk in Christ are those who, as 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:7 says, “walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.” The Holy Spirit has shaped and molded our hearts by no merit of our own to give us the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Even though God’s righteous Law pronounces us guilty and despite the just punishment for our sin being eternity in Hell, Jesus stands as our advocate. Christ knows that we are guilty, but He also knows that His sacrifice is more than sufficient to purchase us from sin and death. His righteousness imputed to us declares us debt-free! Christ continues to be our advocate forever. As His followers, we still sin. But when we do, we are commanded to confess our sins. To confess our sins and seek forgiveness means that when we stand before Him on the last day, we agree that there is no argument of our own to be made. On the last day, all will be laid bare. There will be no room for impersonators. Our sin will be shown for what it is: evil, rotten, and resulting in death. But Christ’s work will also be shown to be what it is: loving, merciful, righteous, and life-giving. Christ, our true advocate, steps before the Judge, showing the wounds He endured on the cross, pronouncing all those who believe in Him not to be impersonators of His witness but to be forgiven children of God.

Amen.