

# **Sermon: No One Greater Than John**

## **Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:3-5**

Due to biased translation practices, English-speaking people know of "John the Baptist." Correctly translated, he should be referred to as "John the Immerser." However, that is a discussion for another time, and it does not reduce John's significance in the least. In describing John, Jesus said, "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John." **(Luke 7:28a)** Is this not the highest commendation for which one could hope? How honored would you be to have this said of you by Jesus the Christ? Well, Jesus went on to say, "Yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." **(Luke 7:28b)** But how can this be? Simply stated, it is because "the least in the kingdom of God" is anyone who is in Christ and whose righteousness is not from himself, but from Christ. But why did Jesus commend John so highly? What was so special about him?

## **Luke 7:19-28:**

Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?' " At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind. And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

## **Isaiah 40:3-5 & John 1:19-23 (plus v24-28)**

**Isa 40:3-5** "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

## **John 1:19-23 (plus v24-28)**

This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to

him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

### **Malachi 4:4-6 & Luke 1:11-17**

**Malachi 4:4-6** prophesies thusly: "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." **Luke 1:11-17** declares the fulfillment of this prophecy: "And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' "

John was so significant because he and his work were the fulfillment of prophecy. John was "filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb." (**Luke 1:15**) Yet we actually know very little about this close relative of Jesus. Were it not for Luke's gospel, we would know even less. However, all the writers of the four Gospels record the same things about John's ministry.

First, the gospels record what he did. "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." (**Mark 1:4-5**)

### **Luke 3:2-6**

"in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;

as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH; AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.' "

## **Luke 3:21-22** Jesus Is Baptized

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

Second, the Gospels record what John said about himself and Jesus. "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." **(Matthew 3:11-12)**

As noted earlier, John said of himself, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." **(John 1:23)** So far as inspired scripture reveals, John had only "job" - to institute a baptism (immersion) of repentance into water **(John 3:23)** for the forgiveness of sins to make ready a people prepared for the Lord **(Luke 1:17)**. Seeing that John's only recorded work was of such importance that it was prophesied hundreds of years in advance, why is it that baptism is one of the most hotly debated, perverted, and ignored teachings in the entire New Testament?

Why did Jesus insist on being baptized (over John's objections) "to fulfill all righteousness?" **(Matthew 3:15)** Why did Jesus and his disciples continue this practice themselves? **(John 3:22; 4:1)** Why did Peter continue the instruction to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins the day he and the other apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit? **(Acts 2:4, 38)** If baptism were a minor, temporary, or insignificant ritual, why did Peter declare its continued importance by saying, "This promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." **(Acts 2:39)** Why does every example of conversion recorded in the **Acts of the Apostles** include an account of their baptism?

Why, why, indeed... We do not give Satan enough credit for his cleverness. He has not eliminated the Bible's teaching on the subject. He and his false teachers have just obscured, modified, and "watered it down," if you will forgive the obvious pun. Will he deceive you as he did Eve?

Or will you believe and practice the clear and simple plan from God that was prophesied, fulfilled, and instituted until the end of time? Your soul depends on your decision. Jesus said, "And why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" **(Luke 6:46)** Jesus also said, "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me." **(John 8:43-45)**

Will you, or have you, become "least in the kingdom of God" by being baptized into Christ? "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized (immersed) into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **(Galatians 3:26-27)** What - or better yet Who - are you wearing today?