

John the Baptist - John 1:19-34

February 8, 2009 - Skip MacMillan

Unique Man

Called "John the Baptist" in Scripture, Matt. 3:1, and mentioned in all four Gospels and in Acts.

His Birth:

Zechariah and Elizabeth, older couple, without children, he was a priest; Gabriel came to Zechariah while in the Temple and told of the conception of a son, to be named "John" (see Luke 1).

The Man:

Lived in the desert **prior** to his ministry, "until he appeared publicly to Israel" (Luke 1:80).

No wife or children, no possessions, no religious titles; he has nothing and he has everything!

Never drank wine or other fermented drink, "came neither eating nor drinking" (Luke 1:15; Matthew 3:18).

John was "great in the sight of God" (Luke 1:15).

Clothes and food:

"made of camel hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4).

The uniform of the prophet – Elijah: "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist" (2 Kings 1:8).

Contrasted well with the robes and tassels of the Pharisees (religious leaders).

Symbolizing a "usurper" of the religious establishment, a reformer.

Not wearing what they wore, eating what they ate, living where they lived.

John had a message which did not depend on his clothes, a building, or outward appearances.

No miraculous signs: "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true" (John 10:41).

Huge following, "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan" (Matthew 3:5). Possibly a cult following (Acts 19:1-7).

People came confessing their sins and being baptized by John (Mark 1:5).

Why Baptism?

- Done in his day: Jews baptized new converts, Qumran community baptized every day; in both situations the baptism was self-administered (DA Carson)
- John was unique in that he was administering the baptism
- John's baptism was unique in that it was a physical expression of personal repentance and an individual's desire to turn to God
- The baptism was designed to prepare people for the Messiah
- His message and baptism suggested he was someone and had some authority

What authority did John have to speak and baptize?

- The Priests and Levites asked him by what authority do you baptize people?
- John claimed not to be the prophet, Elijah, nor the Christ
- He quotes Isaiah 40:3 and says his authority came from God (John 1:33).

Religious Clash:

Matthew 3:7-8 - "You brood of vipers!" Snakes don't have good connotations in Scripture; "coming wrath," and called them to repent as well as "produce fruit in keeping with repentance".

Question him as to who he was:

Are you the Christ, Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6), or the Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-18)?

John denies all titles and simply quotes Isaiah 40: "a voice of one calling out".

Does he recognize who he is? Or is this self-effacing?

"to eliminate or make indistinct by or as if by wearing away a surface <coins with dates *effaced* by wear> ; *also* : to cause to vanish <daylight *effaced* the stars>; to make (oneself) modestly or shyly inconspicuous" -Merriam Webster.

By not classifying himself, he disarmed the religious from finding a way to pin him down. If he claimed he was Elijah, they would then try to prove he was not, if a prophet or the Christ they would do the same, but by not identifying himself as anyone but quoting Isaiah 40, this left them disarmed.

What he does know is that he is to prepare the way of the LORD'S coming.

Messenger, Malachi 3:1, "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come says the LORD Almighty."

Elijah, Malachi 4:5-6.

Elijah is spoken of in the last book, in the last chapter, in the last verses of the Old Testament. The LORD will send Elijah before His great arrival. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes" (Malachi 4:5).

In dress, camel hair and leather belt.

In substance of his message, urgently calling for people to repent .

Jesus declares John to be more than a prophet: "among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11).

"... if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, who was to come" (Matthew 11:14).

He is the one who prepares the way for the LORD'S entrance into the world.

Unable to find fault, the religious end up saying "he has a demon" (Matthew 11:18).

Luke 7:30 - "The Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John."

Political Clash:

John spoke against the ruler's marriage, Herod and Herodias.

While Herod found John fascinating, he could not allow him to roam the street declaring his marriage illegitimate. John's life would end with Herod throwing a party, a seductive dance, a stupid commitment made out of lust, and one woman filled with hatred calling for John's head (Matthew 14:4).

Spiritual Experience with God

John baptized Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:9).

Saw God the **Spirit**, "...saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove" (Mark 1:10).

Heard the **voice of God the Father** speaking to Jesus saying: "You are My Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

He experienced the **Trinity**: Jesus, the Holy Spirit resting on Jesus, and the Father's voice.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth" (Luke 1:15).

Explains why he knew Jesus to be the Messiah and why he knew more than the Disciples.

Doubt, revealing the human side of John; he questioned at the end of his life, "are you the one?" (Matthew 11:1-5).

If you have ever struggled in your faith, wondered, doubted, then you can resonate with John.

John was feeling the price of his commitment to the LORD.

He was thinking through his choices, what got him in prison.

What if I'm wrong? Is this really true? Are you the One?

While struggling deeply, and being willing to ask the tough questions, John continues on, moving forward, never recanting, never coming off his commitment and faith in the LORD. It's ok to ask questions and to struggle with answers; even the giants did.

John was a unique man, whose sole mission in life was to declare the coming of the Lord and to prepare His people. He was Elijah, if you will accept it, the forerunner of the great and dreadful day of the LORD; he was the greatest prophet.

Those who opposed him tried to get him to shut up by confronting and imprisoning him. They could not shut him down; there was no building, no budget, no pride, no title, nothing of this world, yet he had everything and was everything in the eyes of God.

This is a unique man!