

HUMILITY EXEMPLIFIED

John 1:19-28

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. John the Baptist is one of the central characters of the New Testament. His story – from his birth to his death – is told in great detail.

i. Birth:

1. His father and mother were Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were righteous, devout Jews, but they were barren, and very old. Zechariah was a priest, and while he was burning in incense in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he would have a son, and he was to be called John (meaning “God has been gracious”). Zechariah doubted, and so God struck him with muteness until John’s birth.
2. Elizabeth and Mary, the mother of Jesus were relatives. When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, Mary had just gotten pregnant and went to visit her. When Mary entered the house and Elizabeth heard her voice, John leaped for joy inside of her womb.
3. When John was eight days old, his parents had him circumcised. When people asked what he would be called, Zechariah wrote on a tablet the name “John.” Then his voice was restored and he immediately praised God.

ii. Ministry

1. At some point John went to live in the wilderness, and he stayed there until God called him to preach – to the office of prophet.
2. God had a very special purpose for John. He was to be Christ’s forerunner. His mission was to prepare Israel for the coming Messiah. The angel told Zechariah, “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother’s womb. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people (Lk 1:15-17).”
3. Zechariah said of John on the day of his circumcision, “And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins (Lk 1:76-77).”
4. He was the first prophet in Israel in Israel in four hundred years.

5. He preached in the wilderness of Judea. He told people to repent of their sins to prepare for the coming Messiah, and to prove their repentance by getting baptized.
6. Eventually even Jesus went to John to be baptized in the Jordan river. John wanted to be baptized by Jesus, but Jesus insisted.

iii. Death

1. Shortly after the baptism of Jesus, John was imprisoned by Herod Antipas, a ruler of a fourth of Palestine. This was because John had been telling Herod that it was sinful to commit adultery with his brother Philip's wife, Herodias.
2. At a birthday party for Herod, Herodias' daughter performed a dance for Herod, and in return he promised to give her anything she asked for. Prompted by her mother, she asked for John's head on a platter. And so it was.

iv. High Praise

1. Jesus said that John the Baptist was the greatest man who ever lived up to his time. Mt 11:11
2. Today we are going to see what made John so great.

II. TEXT: John 1:19-28

19 This was John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

20 He didn't deny it but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

21 "What then?" they asked him. "Are you Elijah?"

"I am not," he said.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No," he answered.

22 "Who are you, then?" they asked. "We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?"

23 He said, "I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord—just as Isaiah the prophet said."

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 So they asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you aren't the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?"

26 "I baptize with water," John answered them. "Someone stands among you, but you don't know him. 27 He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie." 28 All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

III. JOHN'S TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS

1. I am not the Messiah.

- i. This passage is not really about John, but about John's TESTIMONY of Jesus.
- ii. Verse 19 says, "This was John's testimony." The words testimony, testify, and witness (all from the same root word) are favorites of John. He uses them more than seventy-five times in his writings.

- iii. John mentions eight witnesses who testify about Christ, and John the Baptist is the first:
1. John the Baptist. 1:8
 2. The Father. 5:37
 3. Jesus' words. 8:18
 4. Jesus' works. 5:36; 10:25
 5. OT Scriptures. 5:39
 6. Some of those who met Him. 4:29
 7. The disciples. 15:27; 19:35
 8. The Holy Spirit. 15:26
- iv. "The JEWS from Jerusalem sent PREISTS and LEVITES to ask him, 'Who are you?'" Verse 24 says they had been sent from the PHARISEES.
1. We are introduced to some new characters that we will run into repeatedly, so it will be worth it to explain them.
 2. JEWS: Could refer to any Israelite, but in this context, and in most contexts in the NT, it refers to the Jewish leaders who were hostile to Jesus. The official name for this group was the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was like the Senate, or the Supreme Court for the Jews. It was their national ruling body. It had 70 members, plus the high priest, who served as the leader. The primary objective of the Sanhedrin was to protect the Jewish faith, and so they took it upon themselves to investigate any new prophet or religious leader. So they sent a delegation to inquire about John the Baptist.
 3. PHARISEES: Verse 24 says specifically that it was the Pharisees who sent the delegation. The Sanhedrin was made up of two Jewish religious groups (like denominations) – the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These two groups competed for the control of the temple, and the Sanhedrin, and the hearts of the people. The Pharisees were the religious conservatives. They were extremely strict observance of the Mosaic law. Their name means separate ones or holy ones. They believed that only the worship and obedience of a holy people could preserve the nation of Israel from further judgment. These were Christ's biggest critics.
 4. PRIESTS: Verse 19 says that the Jews (i.e. Pharisees) sent priests and Levites to investigate John. The Jewish priests were human intermediaries between God and man. They officiated at the religious ceremonies. They were the theological authorities in Israel. They served at the temple two weeks out of the year, and then the rest of the year they served as local experts on religion. The priests were descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses.

5. LEVITES: Verse 19 says that the Jews sent priests and Levites to investigate John. The Levites were the men from the tribe of Levi; they were required to serve as assistants to the priests. One of their functions was to serve as the temple police; they were security for the priests and the Sanhedrin. It is possible that they accompanied the priests for protection in this story.
- v. This group of men asked John who he was, and John said that he was not the MESSIAH. We are going to see this word often in our study of John.
 1. The word Messiah is the Hebrew word for “Anointed one.” In Greek it is Christ.
 2. In the Old Testament, the king of Israel was called the anointed one, because when he began his reign he was anointed with oil on his head. Prophets and priests were also anointed with oil.
 3. The OT prophets told of a coming Messiah – an anointed one – one who would be prophet, priest, and king.
 4. By the time of John the Baptist, the people were earnestly looking for the Messiah.
 5. There was wide speculation about who the Messiah would be.
 6. **William Barclay** “There was no one idea of the Messiah. Some people expected one who would bring peace over all the earth. Some expected one who would bring in the reign of righteousness. Most expected one who would be a great national champion to lead the armies of the Jews as conquerors over all the world. Some expected a supernatural figure straight from God. Still more expected a prince to rise from David’s line.”
 7. This is one reason why the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Most of them were looking and hoping for political, military leader who would deliver them from Roman domination.
 8. So, John denied being the Messiah. “I am not the Messiah.” The Greek in this verse is interesting because it places the emphasis on “I.” John was saying, “I am not the Messiah,” implying that someone else was the Messiah, and that he had arrived.

2. I am not Elijah.

- i. Next, they asked John if he was Elijah.
- ii. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament.
- iii. He is one of two people in the Bible who never died – Elijah and Enoch. The Bible says that God took Elijah to heaven in a chariot of fire.
- iv. Based on the prophecies of Malachi 3:1 and 4:5, the Jews expected Elijah to return in bodily form just before the Messiah, to prepare the world to receive the Messiah. It was believed that Elijah would settle all disputes. He would clarify what things were clean and not clean; who were the real Jews and

who were not the real Jews; he would restore estranged families. It was even believed that Elijah would anoint the Messiah for his kingly office.

- v. **Malachi 4:5** “Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.”
- vi. John said that he was not the Elijah.

3. I am not the Prophet.

- i. Then they asked John if he was the Prophet. This is based on the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.
- ii. **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** “15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. 16 This is what you requested from the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not continue to hear the voice of the Lord our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!’ 17 Then the Lord said to me, ‘They have spoken well. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. 19 I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name.’”
- iii. This was to be the greatest of all prophets, and the Jews were waiting for the appearance of this prophet. In fact, they expected the Prophet to come before the Messiah.
- iv. Later in the New Testament, both Peter and Stephen say that Jesus is the Prophet (Acts 3:22-23; Acts 7:37).
- v. **Acts 7:37** “This is the Moses who said to the Israelites: God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers.”
- vi. John said that he was not the Prophet.

4. I am a voice.

- i. After saying that he was not the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet, the religious leaders asked him again. Look at verses 22-23.
- ii. **John 1:2-23** “22 Who are you, then?” they asked. “We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?”
23 He said, “I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord—just as Isaiah the prophet said.”
- iii. Who did John claim to be? A voice in the wilderness crying out, “Make straight the way of the Lord.”
- iv. John was referring to the prophecy in Isaiah 40. In Isaiah 39, Isaiah predicted the Babylonian captivity. But in Isaiah 40, he comforts the people with the promise the glory of the Lord would appear.
- v. **Isaiah 40:3-5** “A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert. Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will be leveled; the uneven ground will become smooth and the rough places a plain. And the glory of

the Lord will appear, and all humanity will see it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

- vi. What did John mean by “make straight the way of the Lord”? In ancient times, when a king was about to visit a province, the roads were fixed and smoothed out.
- vii. John was saying that he was simply a voice crying out for people to straighten out their hearts in preparation for the coming king.

5. I baptize with water.

- i. Next the Jews asked John why he baptized with water.
- ii. **John 1:24-25** “24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 So they asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you aren’t the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?”
26 “I baptize with water,” John answered them.
- iii. Remember, John was preaching in the wilderness, and huge crowds were going out to hear him. His message was to prepare for the coming Messiah by repenting of their sins. And then he told them to get baptized to publicize their decision to repent by getting baptized.
- iv. This was unusual because baptism was the rite of conversion for Gentiles. When a Gentile converted to Judaism, they had to be baptized. But Jews did not need to be baptized, because they were already God’s people. They wanted to know why John was treating Jews like Gentiles.
- v. John did not give the answer here. But the answer is found in John’s preaching in Luke 3:7-9. John preached to the people to not feel secure just because they were the physical descendants of Abraham. Just because you are physical descendant of Abraham doesn’t mean you are one of God’s people. You must commit yourself to God and to His will. John wasn’t saying that the Jews were Gentiles who needed to convert to Judaism, but that they were sinners who needed to repent and turn to God.

6. The Messiah is far greater than me.

- i. **John 1:26-27** “I baptize with water,” John answered them. “Someone stands among you, but you don’t know him. He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I’m not worthy to untie.”
- ii. John says three things here:
 - 1. The Messiah had arrived. “Someone stands among you.”
 - 2. The religious leaders didn’t yet know Him. “but you don’t know him.”
 - 3. John was not worthy to untie his sandals.
- iii. Untying the master’s sandals was the task of the lowest slave. In those days, Rabbis had disciples, or students, and it was expected that disciples would do for their Rabbis whatever slaves would do for their masters. But there was one exception – untying and removing sandals. Rabbis were forbidden from asking their disciples to do this task.

- iv. Yet John said that he was not even worthy to be Jesus' lowest slave. He was saying that the Messiah had arrived, and he was far greater than John.

IV. JOHN'S HUMILITY

1. Before we close this study about John's testimony, I want us to look briefly at John's example.
2. John gives us a great picture of the Christian virtue of humility.
3. Definition: Humility is seeing yourself the way God sees you.
4. The opposite of humility is pride, which is seeing yourself to highly – better, smarter, holier, more talented, more attractive, etc., than every one else. Humility is seeing yourself the way God sees you.
5. Humility is commanded. **Colossians 3:12** "Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,"
6. God only blesses the humble. **1 Peter 5:6** "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time."
7. John exemplifies FOUR HABITS OF A HUMBLE PERSON:
 - i. **John did not talk about himself.**
 1. When the priests and Levites asked John who he was, he hesitated to talk about himself. He wanted to talk about Jesus.
 2. Proudful people do the opposite. They talk about themselves a lot. They want everyone to know all about them, because they think people need to know, ought to know, and want to know. They constantly talk about their opinions, their experiences, and their preferences.
 3. Humble people will tell you about themselves if it is appropriate, if people ask, but they don't assume that everyone wants and needs and ought to know about them. This is why humble people are good listeners, while proudful people are not.
 - ii. **John had a low view of himself.**
 1. When John finally told them who he was, his answer was simply that he was "a voice." Not the voice. Just a voice. John was saying that the only thing that was important about him was who he was talking about – Jesus.
 2. One **commentator** wrote, "The point of the quotation is that it gives no prominence to the preacher whatever. He was just a voice."
 3. **William Barclay** "His answer was that he was nothing but a voice bidding men prepare the way for the king."
 4. Humble people have a low view of themselves because they see themselves through the eyes of God. They see themselves as sinful as anyone else; as undeserving of God's blessings; as deserving hell; as fools in need of God's wisdom; as weak and dependent upon God's grace through prayer, and the Holy Spirit, and church family.

iii. John's goal was to point people to Jesus.

1. John said that his identity was wrapped up in pointing people to Jesus.
2. **John 1:23** He said, "I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord—just as Isaiah the prophet said."
3. Most people make it their goal to get attention. They want people to notice them, to like them, to appreciate them, to promote them, to praise them. They live for their own glory.
4. Humble people live to glorify God. Their goal is to win more fans for Jesus. To make Jesus look good. To make sure everyone knows who Jesus is, and how awesome Jesus is.

iv. John had a high view of Christ.

1. **John 1:27** "He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie."
2. John did not just have a low view of himself, but an extremely high view of Christ.
3. That is Christian humility. Not just a low view of self, but an exalted view of Christ.
4. Humble people see Christ as worthy of all adoration, affection, and allegiance.
5. Humble people see Christ as God, the only way to heaven, perfectly holy, good, and faithful; the creator and sustainer of the universe; the answer to humanity's deepest needs.
6. Humble people realize that Christ doesn't exist to help them achieve happiness and success; rather, they exist to serve and glorify Christ.
7. Christ is so exalted that they realize they are unworthy to serve Him at all; therefore they are honored to serve Him in any capacity, even if it means suffering or obscurity.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Jesus said that John was the greatest man who ever lived. What made him so great? It was faith, and attitude, and service to Christ. It was his humility toward Christ.
2. Your significance and success in life have nothing to do with you, but with your relationship to Jesus. You are only significant and successful to the degree that you worship, and serve, and point people to Jesus Christ.