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## John 1:6-8;19-23

### John the Baptizer

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Related Topics: Zechariah; Elizabeth; John the Baptizer; Angel Gabriel; Testifying About Jesus; Self-Identity; Humility; The Greatness of John the Baptizer; Parental Influence; Pharisees; Sacrificial Lamb; The Lamb of God; Isaiah 53; Abraham on Mt. Moriah; Passover;

John has launched into his account of the life of Jesus with that incredible prologue. Introducing the subject of his book with the words – *In the beginning was the Word.*

Last week we learned that the Word is eternal. The Word is a Person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with Him. The Word is God. The Word is the Creator. The Word is the source of life and light. And then John made the astounding statement – *and the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.*

Jesus, the Word, is God becoming a man and joining us on this planet. Light comes into darkness, truth comes into a world of lies, life comes into a world of death! **God comes to us in Jesus.**

This morning we begin the historical part of John's Gospel.

*6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

This morning we are going to talk about John, not the author of the Gospel, but the very odd cousin of Jesus. He is commonly known as John the Baptist. But since he wasn't a Baptist we will call him "the Baptizer", because that's what he did. But as we will see this morning he was much more than that!

The story of the Baptizer begins in [Luke 1:5-25](#)

John's dad, Zachariah, was a priest. He served the temple. We might say that John was a pastor's kid. John's mom was Elizabeth. Both Zachariah and Elizabeth are very old and childless. They are barren and there is no hope of them having kids in the near future. The emotional issues that accompany the inability to have children would have been exacerbated by the fact that in that time and culture barrenness was actually

considered to be a curse from God. This couple no doubt experienced deep grief and perhaps even some strife over it.

This is hard for our 21st century western world to process because it's view of children and child bearing is so antithetical to the Hebrew culture in the day of John and Jesus. In our culture, children are an inconvenience – and so parenthood is put off as long as possible. And if by chance a pregnancy is in conflict with your professional plans or any gender preferences you have in mind for your children, then the course of action is to do all you can to abort it or adopt it out. In our culture, kids impinge upon your freedom. Not in the Hebrew world of John's Gospel. In that world, children are gifts from all mighty God.

*Psalm 127:3-5 Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. 5 **Blessed** is the man who fills his quiver with them!*

In that culture you were happy, **Blessed**, to have a child. The more children, the more God obviously loved you. So, big families were the norm. And, the more children a woman could have, the more blessed she felt by God.

Elizabeth has a godly husband who loves the Lord, she loves the Lord, but she's never had a baby. Until one amazing day!

*Luke 1:8-9 8Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.*

Zachariah is offering incenses to the Lord in the Holy Place, he's all by himself, all the other priests are outside praying. Something amazing happens. An angel of the Lord shows up to have a little conversation with Zachariah. He tells Zachariah, "don't worry!" That is the standard angelic greeting, a necessary bit of encouragement, because just about every time angels showed up in the Bible people got worried. He says, "God is going to answer your prayers. You are going to have a little boy. You're going to name him John."

*Luke 1:14-17 14And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15for he will be great before the Lord....he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."*

We don't know what happened to Zachariah, but Zachariah for some reason doubted. Almost like Abraham and Sarah. At that very moment he was in a place where he just can't believe that God would give him a child.

So, because of his doubt, the angel then let's Zachariah know which angel is talking to him! (Luke 1:19) He's talking to the angel Gabriel, who is the Peyton Manning or Michael Jordan of angels. This is a RADICAL moment for Zacharias. He is totally overcome and undone by it!

And, Zachariah is just overcome. The angel then tells him, "Here's the deal... since you didn't believe this was possible, you are not going to be able to speak for the duration of your wife's pregnancy. You shouldn't have uttered words in unbelief, now you won't utter any words at all." (Luke 1:20) And that's exactly what happened – for the duration of his wife's pregnancy, he couldn't utter a word.

So Zachariah goes back and Elizabeth gets pregnant. Imagine her joy! She's thanking God for two things –

Thank you Lord for both wonderful gifts. My husband is quiet and I have a baby who's healthy. That's all I ever wanted.

Then something even more amazing happens. Elizabeth has a relative named Mary. A young teenage girl that lives in a dumpy rural town called Nazareth. Her teenage relative has become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. She had no sexual relations with man. It was a miracle of God fulfilling the prophecy of [Isaiah 7:14](#). The angel (same angel who appeared to Zachariah) also tells Mary that Elizabeth is going to have a child.

Mary travels to visit Elizabeth ([Luke 1:39](#)). As they come together, John the Baptizer is in Elizabeth's womb and Jesus is in Mary's womb. So in a way, that's the first time that these cousins come together. As they do, we read that John the Baptizer leaped in his mother's womb!

Luke goes on to tell us that John is born a few months before Jesus Christ. And, Zachariah the father, and Elizabeth the mother, do as God instructed. They take the boy out and they raise him in the exact way Gabriel told them, a way that he would come to know and love God and understand scriptures.

When we meet John as a grown man, he is a godly man, but he is also is pretty much a freak! If we had to place John in our day, he would be the *under the over pass prophet!* You know the kind of guy I'm talking about. You see him come out from under the over pass at Arden on Business 80. He's looking a pretty scary and smelling pretty bad!

That was John. Only John doesn't live under the over pass, he lives in the Judean Wilderness! We read in one of the Gospels ([Matthew 3:4-6](#)) that John has quite the taste in clothes, right out of Barney's of New York! He wears clothes made of camel's hair (which were a comfortable as you are thinking). Accessorized with a big leather belt. I have got this picture with John with this big insane afro a crazy, disheveled beard a bit of a wild look in his eyes. And oh, by the way, his diet consists of locust and honey. First of all locusts and honey don't go well with beards. And then bugs and sugar...so, he's amped.

And then all of the sudden, around the age of 30, John decides it's time to start preaching. So, John walks out of the woods, so-to-speak, itchy, bad wardrobe, bad hair, locust legs stuck in his beard. Kind of crazy looking and got a bad case of the shakes from all that honey. And what's he yelling at the top of his lungs? REPENT!!

**THINK ABOUT THIS**, every big undertaking has a front man, a face to link their market with their product. Nike had Michael Jordan! Depending on the market it might be a man in an Armani suit or it might be the 20-something guy in jeans (The "Hi - I'm a Mac" guy)

Good Lord!! This is the front man for God incarnate! The guy needs a round room. He's going to hurt himself. That's John. John is a bigger than life, complete freaky, that's John, the cousin of Jesus. He wants everyone to know that they are wicked and sinful and evil and an enemy of God, that God is upset, and that things need to simply change!

When we read the Gospel accounts we find that John comes before the political leaders and says, "*You're in sin, knock it off.*" He goes to the religious leaders and says, "*You're all self-righteous hypocrites, you don't really love God, you're just a brood of vipers fleeing the wrath to come.*"\*\* He goes to the leaders in the Army and says, "*You know, you're extorting money from people. You all need to knock it off*" God's really angry and God's coming and you don't want to be an enemy of God. (Imagine how that would go over in the average big seeker church today!)

John's not afraid of anyone. He's not afraid of the politicians (Herod Antipas). He's not afraid of the Army. He's not afraid of the religious leaders. He can't be bought. He belongs to no one. He just serves God and does what God tells him to do. That's John.

He also calls the every day man and woman to own the darkness in their life. And, what does he do with those people? He baptizes them. He takes them down to the river and throws them under water.

This is **ABSOLUTELY AMAZING!** There had been 400 years of silence since the last of the Old Testament prophets had spoken (Malachi). There's this definite anticipation that something is coming. The fiercely monotheistic Jews are living under the rule of pagan, polytheistic, emperor worshipping Rome. The nation is waiting to see if the messiah was going to come and what in the world was going to happen when He does. John shows up and 100s of people come out to see him. And, if you can imagine, there's this long line of people coming down to John.

The scriptures don't tell us, but it seems to me that John says two things; *Do you want to see God? Then, tell me all your sins.*

*"Okay, I hit somebody, I stole some stuff..." John says, "Don't lie to me... give me the whole story!"*

John is just freaking people out and everybody else is in line laughing saying, *"Can you believe that guy did THAT! THAT is BAD stuff!"* You're laughing until you get up there and it's your turn to have a little chat with John. So you start to tell him that you told a few lies and John looks at you, *"You're a bigger sinner than that! Give me the rest, sexual, financial, thoughts, lies... EVERYTHING!"*

Think about it. No doubt the majority of the common people line up wanting to get right before God. *"I get to own my sin."* *"I get to be brought into a moment of cleansing by a prophet of God."*

It's also not hard to imagine that there were some people who really didn't like John's methodology. No doubt, there were those who thought he was a little rough. *"I've got a therapist and he listens to me. John... he needs to work on his listening skills. He's not very good at that. I tried to talk about my feelings and the next thing I know, he was spitting on me. I mean, the bugs and the breath and the body odor, aside, he's not a very understanding guy."*

So that's the background on John the Baptizer, the rather strange cousin of Jesus. *\*\*It is so encouraging to see the vessel hand picked by God, promised hundreds of years earlier, miraculously brought into the world, to prepare the hearts of the people to meet Jesus!*

I'm not trying to encourage anyone to go live under an overpass, grow a beard and eat locusts and honey. **BUT HERE'S REALITY**, stand up in a college class room and say that you believe that the Bible is the inspired infallible inerrant Word of God, that there really is a heaven and a hell, that Jesus really was born of a virgin, really died on a cross for the sins of the world, really did rise from the grave 3 days later, really ascended into heaven and is coming back, and they will look at you as if you are an under the over pass prophet!

I am saying that here was ONE MAN, without the media, without the radio or internet, without seminary education, totally outside of the mainstream establishment, but He is GOD'S MAN, and He shakes the whole nation.

Shouldn't we want to be God's man or God's woman? I want to be GOD'S MAN!

*7He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

Here we see the true nature of ministry (we are ALL in ministry). We are witnesses. We, in word and in our lives, bear witness to the great truth that Jesus is the only Savior and light of the world. This was Peter's ministry on the day of Pentecost. *"With many other words he bore witness."* (Acts 2:40.) This was the whole tenor of Paul's ministry. *\*\*He testified both to the Jews and Greeks repentance towards God, and faith*

towards our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21.) \*

By the way, let’s not forget that John is a miracle. Mom and dad were incapable of conceiving! God intervenes and gives life where life was impossible. God intervened in the lives of Zachariah and Elizabeth. They miraculously gave birth to John. The purpose of John’s miraculous birth was so that John would bear witness about Jesus!

When God intervenes to give or preserve life, it is not for that life to be spent on self! Bottom line, if you are a Christian you are a miracle. You have been miraculously born again into the family of God. You were dead in sin and God made you alive in Christ. Not so you can live for yourself and go to heaven! God has done this so that you might bear witness to the glory of Jesus. **2 Cor. 5:15** and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

*John 1:19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”*

There would be a sense in which the religious leaders could be commended for sending this fact-finding team. John is talking about the fulfillment of long awaited messianic promises. The religious leaders should have been careful to make sure he wasn’t a false prophet. Or think of it in this light, if some freaky guy showed up in Sacramento and started screaming his lungs out and thousands of people showed up and he was throwing them into the American River, somebody ought to go check him out. But the problem is that this is not really an honest fact finding team.

John’s got a big crowd.

QUOTE: R.C.H. Lenski

*The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel says that in a period of just over one year John baptized between 200,000 and 500,000 people.*

John’s gone from being the under the overpass prophet with bugs in his beard and sugar in his veins to being a player at the most crucial time in human history. God has become man and is ready to reveal Himself to the world. The political leaders (Herod Antipas) are listening to him. The religious leaders are listening to him. The common people are definitely listening to him. The military leaders are listening to him. He has everyone’s ear. He is thundering as the prophetic conscious of an entire nation. The religious establishment could no longer ignore him. He was a threat to them, as any such individual is always a threat to the establishment anywhere.

So, they come to John and the first thing they want to know is *19 who are you?* It might read in our vernacular, *“Who do you think you are? If we didn’t send you, you are a nobody!”* And by the way, John’s answer suggests that the question intimated the possibility of John being the long awaited Messiah.

This is a very slippery moment for John! Multitudes have come out to hear him and be baptized by him. Thousand were no doubt surrounding him at that moment. He’s finally got some leverage. He finally has some prominence. He finally has some legitimacy. He could have said, *“I might not be trained in the rabbinical schools, I might look weird, but i really am somebody! I speak for God. I serve God, so pay attention.”*

Try to imagine the incredible silence that would have come over the multitude in expectation of his answer. But the response of John not only shows us his heart, but in it we also see the trademark of real greatness.

*20He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”*

Without a moments hesitation John says, *“I’m not Him. I’m not the messiah. I can’t save people. I can’t fix*

people. I am not the answer. If you are waiting for that coming of God promised through the entire Old Testament, who would forgive our sins and change the world; that's not me. I'm not him."

#### HUGE POINT:

I can't save you or fix you, Metro can't save you or fix you. You can't save or fix anyone. ONLY JESUS SAVES!

*21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?"*

Elijah was a prophet of the Old Testament that didn't taste death, he was taken up into heaven. This anticipation of the coming of Elijah is based upon the very last verse of the very last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, in which we have the very last prophetic utterance to be heard in Israel some 400 years before the coming of John.

*Malachi 4:5-6 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.*

Can you imagine how tempting that would've been, how easy it would have been for John to say, "Yeah, that's it, I'm Elijah, that's who I am!" The entire nation of Israel would've flocked to him. John had this wonderful opportunity to gratify his pride. Again, think of the silence of the people to see how he would answer this question. Again, John said, "I am not."

Then a third question,

*21 Are you the prophet?*

Notice the definite article. Back in Deuteronomy 18:15 "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers...it is to him you shall listen"

They were wondering, Moses led our people out from under bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt. Now we're under Roman oppression in our own land, maybe this is the prophet that will be raised up like Moses and will liberate and deliver us. Are you THAT prophet? Are you here to free us from Rome? And he answered, "No."

Each response must have been followed by sighs and the murmuring voices discussing each answer. No doubt the zealous followers of John would have felt disappointment. It seemed as if John was deliberately blowing off the admiration of the nation and was missing the greatest opportunity of his ministry career.

Notice the increasing bluntness of his answers.

- "Are you the Messiah?" – "No, I am not."
- "Are you Elijah?" – "I am not."
- "Are you the prophet?" – "No."

Now the fact finding team is desperate.

*22 So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"*

In other words, throw us a bone here! We can't go back with nothing on you! Don't miss this, there final, desperate question speaks volumes! John has nothing to say about himself because he understood that he was sent to talk about Jesus! John has never exulted himself. John has never elevated himself. John isn't

really worried about John.

HERE IS TRUE GREATNESS!

Jesus said of John *Matt. 11:11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.*

We can process the greatness of John on several levels. But surely, by way of God Incarnate's own definition, John's greatness is found in his humility.

QUOTE: F.B. Meyer

*The greatest man ever born knew that he was not the Light, but sent to bear witness of it; not the Sun, but the star that announces the dawn, and wanes in the growing light; not the Bridegroom, but the Bridegroom's friend; not the Shepherd, but the porter to open the door into the fold (Jn 3:27, 28, 29, 30; 10:3).*

It is not about you or me or Metro - ALL about Jesus!

So, they ask John, *"Who are you? Who do you see yourself to be?"*

You really want to know who I am - O.K

*23I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.*

"If you want to know who I am and how I see myself, read the prophet Isaiah. It's written there for you." He goes back and he quotes *Isaiah 40:3*. I love that.

"I am to be a highway builder. I am to prepare a highway in the desert for our God." Not for men to get to God, but for God to get to men.

Isaiah tells how those highways into our hearts are built:

*Isaiah 40:3-5 3 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

In Biblical times they didn't have Cal Trans or Federally funded Interstate Highways and annual maintenance programs. When a king or dignitary would go out to visit a town, they would send out a herald in advance to say, the king is coming, the king is coming, make straight, make ready the way of the one who rules and sits in authority. So, the people would fill in the potholes and they would clear the debris and the roads would be opened, making a way for the King to come to the people! Then the people from all the towns would come and they would stand along the road and they could see the king.

John says, *"you know what I am? I am the guy who is running down the potholed road, the crooked path, and I'm just saying, he's coming... he's coming... he's coming... get ready."*

John says, *"That's all I am, just a voice."*

Interesting, the only thing John said about himself was who or what he wasn't! I'll tell you who I'm not and what I'm not just so that I can tell you who Jesus is! I'm not here to talk about me, I've been sent to talk about Jesus.

QUOTE: F. B. Meyer

*"We are all so apt to use our relationship to Christ as a means of enhancing our own importance, and attracting attention. Though we formally ascribe the supremacy to our Lord, we are elated when our name is on every lip, and our work in every thought, even though we should never have been heard of had it not been for Him."*

TWO THINGS IN CLOSING:

First, The whole point of *Isaiah 40:3-5* is this, the King of glory wants to come to us! We can't save ourselves, but we can remove the things that prevent the Savior from coming to us.

Our lives are that spiritual wilderness; our hearts are those roads that prevent the coming of the King! We must repent! Repent of the moral pits you've dug for yourself. Repent of the mountain of pride and self-exaltation and self-confidence. Repent of the crooked dishonesty.

Second, how in the world did John know at this moment to quote *Isaiah 40:3-5*? Where did John learn this verse? Where did John learn so much of the scripture? How did he understand what a prophet was and what a prophet was supposed to do? How did John know that a prophet wasn't supposed to be governed by arrogance and pride? How did John know that a prophet was supposed to love God and speak the truth and confront sin and point people to God and not toward himself? He learned that from his mother and father. No doubt, Zachariah sat down day after day, night after night, after he'd seen the angel Gabriel and was told what his son was going to do and said, *"I'm going to teach you about God. I'm going to teach you about God. Memorize these verses, know these stories, know these things."*

Parents, that is your job. It is not the job of the elders of this church. It is not the job of a youth pastor to tell your kids about God. It is the responsibility of the parents, particularly the fathers. Gabriel looked Zachariah in the eye and said, *"Your boy is going to be a prophet, you don't let him drink any alcohol, you don't let him get out of control, you tell him about God, you make sure that he's ready."* Zachariah did his job. Zachariah loved God. Zachariah loved his son. Zachariah told his son about God. And, it's not just that you have to, it's that you get to. It's the parent's privilege and responsibility.

In contemporary church culture parents aren't doing their job, so what they want to do is employ lots of youth workers. Parents, you just can't pay people to come in and be surrogate parent to your kid and hundreds of others! Zachariah didn't live in that world. Elizabeth didn't live in that world. They didn't consider their son a burden that was taking up their free time. They considered their son a blessing from God. They waited their whole life for him. *"We got a son, let's pray with him. Let's teach him some Bible. Let's make sure that he loves God. Let's invest in this guy. We don't know what God will do for him."* As a result, John goes on to be this man of tremendous humility, servitude, sacrifice, and simplicity.

Lastly, in what or where do you find your self-identity? Is it found in your relationship to Jesus? I pray that we can say with John, *"My self identity? I'm just a voice... don't pay any attention to me. Just listen to what I have to say about Jesus, because Jesus wants to come into your life."*

