

John, Part 2: "That He Might Be Revealed" (Part One)

John 1:6 ESV There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. **8** He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

John 1:19 ESV And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" **20** He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." **21** And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." **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?" **23** He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." **24** (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) **25** They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" **26** John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, **27** even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." **28** These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

- I. The timing of Christ's entrance into the world is important to understand; it was not random! The Jews to which he came had been subjects of the Romans for some 60 plus years. Before the Romans, it was the Greeks. Before the Greeks, it was the Persians. Before the Persians, it was the Babylonians. The Jewish nation had been under someone else's thumb for about 600 years by the time of Christ!
 - A. The "glory days" and splendor that had accompanied the rules of kings like David and Solomon were distant, hazy national memories. The "king" now reigning over them was a hedonistic, self-absorbed puppet of the Romans named Herod the Great.
 1. In order to gain the favor of the people, Herod undertook a major renovation project on the Temple in Jerusalem, which had fallen into dilapidation.
 - a) This was a major undertaking! According to John 2:20, the entire process took at least 46 years, funded by exorbitant taxation.
 - b) Herod's concern in building the temple, however, had less to do with worship and more to do with his own legacy of the magnificence of his own kingdom.
 2. Additionally, Herod's jealousy and cruelty were on a scale that is unimaginable. It was this Herod who ordered the murder of all the Jewish males two years old and under in an effort to exterminate the Christ, whom he saw as a threat to his throne (Matthew 2:16-18).
 - B. But the most troubling aspect of Jewish life in the first century was that God, who had spoken to his people Israel through the prophets since Moses, had been silent for some time! Fans of the Chicago Cubs waited 108 years for good news, but God's people hadn't heard from him through the prophets for over 400 years!
 1. But the last words spoken by the prophet Malachi before the beginning of these four centuries of silence were as follows: **Malachi 4:5 ESV** "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.””

2. He is stating that someone that will return to be a prophetic voice for Israel, and that his commission would be very specific; he would be a forerunner before “the great and awesome day of the Lord”, and the turning (or repentance) he inspires will actually deter the wrath of God. This “day of the Lord” is the day when God would give justice, mercy and righteousness to his people through his anointed one, the Messiah.
 3. This coming day had been prophesied in one way or another in almost every book of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi.
- C. So with all that in mind, in the first chapter of Luke’s gospel we read about how God sends an angel to an old priest named Zechariah to tell him that his barren wife is about to become pregnant with a son. The son’s name is to be John.
1. Now listen to what the angel says concerning John’s future ministry: **Luke 1:16 ESV** And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, **17** and 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.”
 2. Doesn’t that sound like a direct reference to what Malachi said? Don’t you think that Zechariah, as a priest of Israel, and his wife Elizabeth would have caught the significance of that?
 3. After Christ’s transfiguration, where he stood on a mountain and spoke with Moses and the actual Elijah before Peter, James and John, these disciples ask him a question. **Mark 9:11 ESV** And they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” **12** And he said to them, “Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? **13** But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.”
 4. Jesus was of course speaking of John the Baptist. Jesus fully understood John’s prophetic connection to Elijah.
- D. In the Old Testament, Elijah was sent to prophesy to the Northern, wicked kingdom of Israel, after the kingdom was divided. During his ministry he spent long periods of time in isolation (mostly hiding) in the wilderness. When God told him to confront the wicked King of Israel named Ahab, he did so fearlessly.
1. According to Luke chapter one, John the Baptist also was hidden away in the wilderness for much of his life.
 2. Similar to Elijah’s boldness, John the Baptist confronted King Herod openly and sternly when Herod took his own brother’s wife for his very own. And there are other, more important similarities that we’ll discuss later.
- E. This idea of the coming of Elijah before the Messiah was so important to Jewish belief (and still is) that it was the primary point of interrogation by the Jews when John the Baptist began his ministry.
1. **John 1:19 ESV** And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” **20** He confessed,

and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." **21** And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

- a) The priests and levites sent from Jerusalem wanted to know if he himself was the Messiah ("Messiah" in Hebrew, and "Christ" in Greek, mean the same thing -God's anointed one.). John denied it.
 - b) They asked him next if he was Elijah. Again he says no.
 - (1) Does this contradict who Jesus said John was? No, because the point was never that Elijah was literally returning, but that, as the angel said to John's father, he would minister in the same **spirit** and **power** as Elijah did.
 - (2) The Jews were waiting for Elijah's actual, physical reappearance however. That is why Jesus said to the Jews in **Matthew 11:14 ESV** **"...if you are willing to accept it, he (John) is Elijah who is to come."**
 - c) When they ask if John is "the prophet", they are referring to a statement that Moses made to the children of Israel that God would raise up another prophet like himself for them (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). This was not someone different than the Christ, but just another expression of his ministry. However, John that this also is not who he is.
2. **John 1:22 ESV** 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?"
- a) The words of two Old Testament prophets have been fulfilled right before their eyes in the ministry of John the Baptist, and because of their hardened hearts, they are left scratching their heads! "Who are you?", they ask, "What do you say about yourself?"
 - b) One of the most important skills you can ever attain in life is the ability to know who you are. Conversely, you will never know who you really are until you understand who you really aren't.
 - c) A few years ago, country singer Brad Paisley had a hit song called "I'm So Much Cooler Online". Our culture is adept at crafting images of mystery and celebrity, wisdom, class and desirability with our pseudo-intellectual posts and heavy filtered and posed selfies.
3. Can we admit that we are positively terrified of exposure? Our greatest fear is that we'll be become known as someone who doesn't like the right things, know the right things, think the right things, say the right things, look the right way, or hang out with the right people at the right places.
- a) Sometimes we even post our church participation, noble deeds or charitable work online so that everyone will know just how selfless we are!
 - b) **Luke 16:15 ESV** And he (Jesus) said to them (Pharisees), "You are those who **justify yourselves** before men, but God knows your hearts. For **what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.**"
 - c) If some one were to ask you, "Who are you? What do you say about yourself?" (and they do everyday in one way or another!), what is your response?

- F. So how does John the Baptist finally identify himself to these interrogators?
John 1:23 ESV He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” Notice:
1. He is referring to a prophecy about himself from Isaiah 40:3.
 2. John said that, according to Isaiah, he was merely a voice. What does he mean? He was a sound that was formed, and a message that was communicated by another speaker. And that speaker was God!
 3. And his message also had nothing to do with his personal reputation or credit. Instead he was heralding the arrival of another. It was not, “I’m here!” but rather, “Get ready! Make a way for the Lord!”
 - a) This would have been a familiar idea in the ancient world, as kings and other dignitaries would have servants that would run ahead of their chariots to announce their imminent arrival!
 - b) By calling himself a mere “voice” and making an proclamation of the Lord’s coming, John is identifying himself as a lowly servant of an exalted master; saying literally, “I am a slave of the Lord.”
- II. In light of this humility, it is interesting that so often Christians are no better than those in the world when it comes to blowing our own horns.
- A. Churches spend kingdom dollars advertising to the disgruntled sheep, who may or may not be in other churches, telling how the church being advertised is better than their stuffy old church that isn’t scratching their itch anymore! How could they not be with their hip pastors, rockin’ bands and all!
 - B. Way too many christian leaders have a perverse view of how to define success.
 1. In their mind it is not by opening up new mission fields like missionaries in previous generations, like Hudson Taylor did with China in the 1800’s; or by going to the darkest regions where Christ has not been preached, like David Wilkerson did when he went to the gangs of Brooklyn in the late 1950’s.
 2. Many today view success only by making the New York Times Best Seller List, securing broadcast time, or filling state of the art, climate controlled religious super stadiums to entertain the sheep.
 - C. But how different was John the Baptist, “I am but a voice! I am but a slave!”
 1. In fact, John’s words indicate that he didn’t even bother trying to define himself at all! He surrendered the right of defining who he was to God’s word! **“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”**
 - a) How many times do we get really worked up when people disrespect us or fail to acknowledge our significance? This because we are way too prone to allow other people to define us, or else we are desperate to define ourselves, promoting and exaggerating our best qualities!
 - b) But shouldn’t we know (and care more about) how we are defined by the word of God? His definition of us beats any PR work we can do on our own! Because, as believers, you are now literally in Christ, therefore...
 - (1) “you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14)
 - (2) “you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:30)
 - (3) “you are God’s temple, God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9)
 - (4) “you are the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

- (5) “you are all sons of God” (Galatians 3:9)
 - (6) “you are one in Christ” (Galatians 3:8)
 - (7) “you are the offspring of Abraham” (Galatians 3:9)
 - (8) “you are no longer a slave, but a Son” (Galatians 4:7)
 - (9) “you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19)
 - (10) “you are light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8)
 - (11) “you are not in darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:4)
 - (12) “you are all children of light” (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
 - (13) “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9)
 - (14) “you are strong” (1 John 2:14)
 - (15) “you are from God” (1 John 4:4)
2. How much different would your life look if you were only concerned with God’s definition of you as revealed in his word, as opposed to the definition of others? How much less would you find yourself depressed, fighting feelings of rejection, isolation and abandonment? In Romans, Paul says, “Let God be true and every man found to be a liar.”
- a) **Galatians 1:10 ESV** For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.
 - b) Our role as servants of Christ is not contingent upon the words that we speak about ourselves, but rather the one we are actually trying to please.
3. Are you trying to please others? Are you trying to please yourself? Or are you determined, that no matter what, you will seek to please the Lord?
- D. But if John is merely “a voice”, and not a big shot, how can his ministry be important or effective? This is the next point of contention with the Pharisees. They had disdain for what was not significant by their lofty religious standard. John’s ministry was growing by leaps and bounds and these guys thought that if he couldn’t flash impressive credentials, then his work was invalid.
- 1. **John 1:25 ESV** They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” **26** John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, **27** even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”
 - a) John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. Listen to the severity of his words from Matthew’s account of his ministry:
 - b) **Matthew 3:7 ESV** But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9** And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. **10** Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
 - 2. Unlike the waters of Christian believer’s baptism, which symbolically represents a grave; showing that we have died to our old lives and are now

resurrected to walk in a new, spirit-empowered life, John's baptism was more representative of a bath.

- a) People were commanded to clean up their act because God was coming to make everything right. This repentance was the "turning" that Malachi talked about, and the angel that visited Zechariah reiterated.
 - b) When he told the Pharisees to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance, he was stating that the coming of the Messiah required a repentance that went beyond words or religious ceremony, but rather was evidenced by a transformed life.
- E. But notice something even more significant than that in his words. He was saying that his baptism was not final, but that it was a precursor to the coming of the one who was infinitely greater than the baptizer.
1. John is reminding us that no one should be overwhelmed or impressed by the herald, but they should very carefully pay attention to the herald's message.
 2. On this day, John made clear that all that he had proclaimed, and all that his baptism pointed to was about to be revealed. "...among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."
 - a) John is not only saying that the time has arrived ("one stands among you" in other words, "He's here!"), but that he who has arrived is infinitely greater than John, or anyone else.
 - b) He is the one upon whom history hinges, the savior of Israel and the hope of the Gentiles; worthy of all glory, honor, majesty, and praise.
- III. We are going to re-visit John's life next week, but what is it we can learn from what we discovered in the story of his life this morning?
- A. I think it boils down to one important question. Are you trying to be God's mouth, or are you happy to be God's voice? Are you fighting to be rightly defined by others, or do you step back when slandered and misunderstood, fully content to be defined by God. Is your goal to be recognized by others, or pleasing to God?
- B. When God chose to speak to Moses in the wilderness, he used a bush. It was on fire, but it wasn't burned up. It was a marvelous sight to behold, and without a doubt, it got Moses' attention.
1. But have you ever thought about what happened to that bush after God used it? When the fire subsided, and God's purposes were fulfilled in it, it simply faded into the landscape of the desert.
 2. Had Moses gone back to try and find it and erect a historical marker by it, to commemorate what had happened there, he wouldn't have been able to.
 3. Why? Because without the fire, it just looked like a million other bushes in the wilderness. No one would ever go to honor it, saying, "What an amazing bush!", but generations who have read the story have said, "What an amazing God!"
- C. It is unwise for us as believers to obsess over building a lasting legacy. Trust me. There is nothing in me that deserves a memorial when I'm gone!
1. But I hope that I have been a willing vessel. I hope that I have not been too much of a distraction, and thereby hurt the cause of the one who is greater than I; the one whose sandal straps I am unworthy to loose.

2. May all of our cry to God be that we could simply be a voice; that we could be a dry, dusty sagebrush in the desert that would have the joy of blazing with God's glory, even for a single lifetime, and then fade away so much to the end that he, and only he, would be celebrated!
- D. In the first half of the eighteenth century, there was an Austrian man named Count Nikolaus Von Zinzendorf. He was was part of an intense missionary movement known as the Moravians.
1. In one quote, he summed up the heart of John the Baptist, and what I am trying to say today.
 2. "Preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten." -Count von Zinzendorf
- E. May God grant us the courage to make this our credo.