

Series: John the Baptist #1697

Title: John 1; Matthew 3.1-2

The Truth About Jesus and Us

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Last time I reminded you that if you need prayer for anything or would like to reach out just to tell me what's happening with you, I am here and ready to receive your email or letter. Did you want to do that but forgot? Or you are a little shy? Don't be. And don't forget! I would like to hear from you today. So give yourself a little reminder, and write. If you ask me to pray for you, *I will*. If you want to talk, *I will listen*. I am a pastor you can trust. These addresses will be repeated at the end, but here they are now: mark@godisministry.org and God Is, PO Box 802 Winchester Massachusetts 01890.

We are looking into at least eight elements in the godly and mature character of John the Baptist and thus far we have learned: first, John's full name distinguishes his ministry. His name is John *the Baptist*. Second, John was "sent from God." Third, John was a prophet. Fourth, John the Baptist was the greatest man who ever lived until Jesus Christ. And fifth, he exalts Jesus by humbling Himself. We had one example of this. John chapter 1 and verse 15. The Bible says, "**John testified about [Jesus] and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'**"

Jesus has a higher rank than John. Jesus existed before John (in the eternal sense of the word existence). Even though John the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus, was older than Jesus in human age, we must remember what John teaches here. The Lord has always existed. He is God, as we saw from John 1, verses 1-3. So that even though John is about six months older than Jesus, because Jesus is the eternal God, the Baptist can say with authority, "He existed before me."

Let's see some other biblical examples of how Jesus is exalted when John is de-exalted. John the Baptist provides the exaltation of Christ! And this same proclamation is repeated in John 1, verse 30. In John 1.30 the Baptist says, "**After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.**"

Another example of this is in John chapter 1 and verse 20. In this passage some priests and Levites are really grilling John on who he is and John the Baptist clearly states, "**I am not the Christ.**" Only a very humble man would deny that he was the Messiah of the Jewish people. John has a chance to claim himself to be the very Messiah the Jews have anxiously been waiting for, and instead he boldly and clearly denies it: "**I am not the Christ.**" Wow. That's a powerful, powerful denial. But it is also true. John 1, verse 20.

Now drop down to John chapter 1 and verse 27. John says, "**It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.**" He's speaking of Jesus again ("He who comes after me") and John says he's not even worthy to untie the thong of Jesus' sandal. In that culture it was the task of the lowest slave to remove his master's shoes. But John is saying that with Jesus I do not even have the lowly status of a slave to untie the thong of His sandal! In other words, when it comes to Jesus I, John, am not even worthy to be Christ's slave! Again, humility. John the Baptist exalts Christ by humbling himself.

But perhaps all of this humility of John for the exaltation of Christ is best summarized in this classic sentence in John chapter 3 and verse 30. Here, John the Baptist says, "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**" In context "He" is Jesus Christ. "**He must increase, but I must decrease.**"

This is plain and simple for us to understand. John is laid low while Jesus rises high. John is humbled while Jesus is exalted. John 3.30. Do not forget it. In my Bible this is marked with clarity as a reminder to me too: Jesus must increase and Mark must decrease. I must be humbled while Jesus must be greatly exalted! All sincere Christians must really believe this in our heart and soul. Jesus must reign and rule, master and dominate, all our lives. And we have to act on it.

Do you live your life conscious of the need for you to decrease so that Christ will increase? If you are like me and you fight your fleshly desires each day, then you know how hard this is. We are sinners and one of our foundational sins is pride. We are prideful people. And it takes a lot to knock this out of us. Isn't it true that we are always, often subtly, looking for ways to increase?

We want to be higher profile, to stand out more in our community, to be lauded and praised, to be successful by the worlds standards, to be self-made. We want our social media followers to grow and like us more. This carries right into the church and synagogue. Faithful Christians and Jews compete with one another all the time for the increase of oneself. But who we *really* compete against when we live like this is...*Jesus*. We should not be fighting among ourselves for more attention. We should follow the example of John the Baptist and intentionally work at humbling ourselves so Christ can be exalted. I hope you will be as convicted about this as I am. And that you will find in John a model for how to live.

My fifth element that is true of the character of John the Baptist: he exalts Jesus by humbling Himself. And these are four examples of John doing just that within the Gospel of John alone. I can give other examples, but it is time to move on. And so here is my sixth element of character that I see in the life of John the Baptist: he tells the *truth* about Jesus and about other people. John the Baptist tells the *truth* about Jesus and he tells the *truth* about other people.

Now we are about to read about the truth of Jesus that John proclaims in the days ahead so I will not say more about that here. But for today let me just take us over to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 3. Listen to verses 1 and 2. This is Matthew chapter 3 and verses 1-2, "**Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'**" This is the message we hear again and again from the Baptist and this is *before* Jesus begins His public ministry. To everyone he encounters and deals with John has one message: repent. By that he means: stop sinning; he commands people to make a hard, demanding, ruthless, and radical turn away from their sin!

I'll say much more about this as we move along, but I invite you to circle Matthew chapter 3 and verses 1-2 when you can get to your Bible. The word "repent" there is essential to learn, and not merely learn its meaning in some sort of academic or theological sense (although of course we have to do that), but to be repentant ourselves! This message of John the Baptist, summarized in the invitation to repent, is also a word to us. We want to be a people who repent of our sin.

Theologian Erich Sauer, in his 1951 book *The Triumph of the Crucified* says repentance "is a three- fold action. In the understanding it means knowledge of sin; in the feelings it means pain and grief; and in the will it means change of mind (67)." That is a very good definition, one of the best I have ever read. When we repent we acknowledge our sin with our minds. We feel with our emotions the agony our sin has caused ourselves, others, *God*. And with our will we purposefully change our minds about sin and we take drastic action to not sin again.

True repentance always manifests itself in a changed life. To repent is to stop sinning. Now someone says, "But we will always be sinners until we get to heaven. We can never stop sinning completely." Right. I agree. As long as we live in this mortal flesh we sin. I do not believe the Bible teaches sinless perfection in this life. Sincere Christian believers will only be perfect in the life to come, eternal life in heaven. However, we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, we can, we must repent – that is to sin less and less over the course of our discipleship by Christ. The overall trajectory of our lives shows that we are committed to overcome sin.

This is John the Baptist's message. He tells the *truth* about Jesus and he tells the *truth* about other people. He tells the truth about *us*. Let's also receive the command to stop sinning. In our lives we will make the hard, demanding, ruthless, and radical turn away from sin! Jesus gives us hope to do this. More next time because God Is.

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