

Title:       **THREE QUESTIONS THAT IDENTIFY  
A TRUE PROPHET**

Text:       John 1:19-29

Subject:    *The Record of John the Baptist*

Date:       Sunday Morning — February 24, 2008

Tape:       John #8

Reading:    *Psalm 130*

Introduction:

Turn with me to the first chapter of John's gospel. I want to show you **THREE QUESTIONS THAT IDENTIFY A TRUE PROPHET**. No one can question the fact that John the Baptist was a true prophet. The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, declared that he was the greatest prophet to be born of a woman. That is some commendation!

- He was the first Baptist to walk upon the earth, the very first Baptist preacher in the world.
- He was the first immerser of men in the name of Christ. That is what his title, "*the Baptist*," means, the Immerser.
- Both Isaiah and Malachi foretold his coming and described the ministry he would have. — He was sent in the spirit and with the power of Elijah, "*to prepare the way of the Lord*."
- He was filled with the Holy Spirit while he was still in his mother's womb.
- When he was born, God sent an angel to speak of his birth.

In our text (John 1:19-29) the Holy Spirit holds John the Baptist before us. He tells us that John was specifically asked three questions. John's answers to those questions identify him as a true prophet and identify every preacher who follows as either true or false.

1. "*Who art thou?*" (v. 19)
2. "*What sayest thou of thyself?*" (v. 22)
3. "*Why baptizest thou?*" (v. 25)

Let's read this passage together. Then we will look at these three questions and John's answer to them.

(John 1:19-29) "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? (20) And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. (21) And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he

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saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. (22) Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? (23) He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. (24) And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. (25) And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? (26) John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; (27) He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. (28) These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. (29) The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

**“WHO ART THOU?”**

Just as Isaiah had prophesied, John appeared in the wilderness, preaching Christ, calling sinners to repentance because the Messiah, the Christ had come, and the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Multitudes heard him and were moved to repentance by the Spirit of God, and being converted by the grace of God, John baptized them in the Jordan River. All of this caused no small stir among the people and no small disturbance among the religious elite in Jerusalem. So the priests and Levites were sent out from Jerusalem to ask John who he was. Look at it...

(John 1:19-21) “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? (20) And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. (21) And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.”

The Messiah's forerunner stood before them, one who was clearly identified as the forerunner of the Christ. That fact was obvious to everyone, everyone except the spiritually ignorant leaders of the people, the priests and Levites!

When these men asked John, “*Who art thou?*” before they could utter another word, John cut them off and said, “*I am not the Christ!*” Because

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the people honored him, their religious leaders were ready to elevate John highly. — Self-serving preachers will do anything to promote themselves, even promote one whose message they despise, if in doing so they can promote and advance themselves!.

Remember, these men were **the great Sanhedrim**, the spiritual rulers of the Jews. They were the most influential, the most revered and the most highly educated big wheels in the Jewish church. But they did not have a clue what was going on in the kingdom of God.

**They professed** to be waiting for the appearance of the Messiah. They took great pride in being the descendants of Abraham and in their knowledge of the Scriptures. They lived by the law of Moses, and rested in their imagined obedience to it. They professed to know God's will and believe his promises. They were confident that they understood the prophets. They were confident leaders of the people. Yet, they were totally ignorant of all things spiritual! They stand before us as sad, glaring examples of the fact that unregenerate souls, no matter how well taught, no matter how well learned, no matter how devotedly religious, are utterly without knowledge spiritually. Spiritual knowledge comes only by divine revelation, only by the teaching of God the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

(1 Corinthians 2:14-16) “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. (15) But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. (16) For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

Here is the proof of Paul's doctrine in 1 Corinthians 2. — The Christ of God, the Messiah, was standing in their midst, as John declares in verse 26; yet they did not recognize him.

- They saw him, but never saw him.
- They knew much about him, but did not know him.
- They lived in his company, but knew him not!

And that which was true of these men is true of men today. Some of you are exactly as they were. The Lord Jesus Christ is set forth crucified among you, but you do not see him, hear his voice or know him. The person sitting

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beside you does, but you do not? Why? You are not yet born of God. O Spirit of God, have mercy! Reveal the Savior to poor, blind, needy sinners! Let this be the day of their visitation (Luke 19:44), and cause them, cause us to know it (Job 10:12; Isaiah 12:1-6; 25:9)

(Job 10:12) “Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.”

(Isaiah 12) “And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. (2) Behold, God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my strength and *my* song; he also is become my salvation. (3) Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. (4) And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. (5) Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this *is* known in all the earth. (6) Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great *is* the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.”

(Isaiah 25:9) “And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

**Now, look at John the Baptist.** When these men asked John, “*Who art thou?*” before they could utter another word, John cut them off and said, “*I am not the Christ!*” They were willing to receive him as a reincarnation of Elijah, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, or even as the Messiah (that Prophet of whom Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 18:15-18), if he would simply accept their praise and be identified with them.

But **John was a true prophet.** He refused their honor and refused to take any honor to himself. Instead, he immediately turned attention away from himself to Christ. Nineteen times, he used a double affirmation to turn attention away from himself, to make certain that he was not misunderstood.

- God’s servants will not align themselves with God’s enemies.
- They cannot be bribed with money, power, or recognition.
- And they do not seek the praise, or even the approval of men.

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- God’s servants desire no honor but the honor of Christ.
- They studiously turn the light away from themselves to him.

**“WHAT SAYEST THOU OF THYSELF?”**

Look at the next question. When they could get no satisfaction, they pressed on.

(John 1:22) “Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?”

John might have answered, “I am the son of Zachariah the priest. I am filled with the Spirit from my mother’s womb. I am a remarkable man raised up by God and sent to prepare the way before the Christ in the spirit and power of Elijah, as Malachi prophesied.” But instead...

(John 1:23) “He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.”

Those men who are sent of God seek no glory or acclaim for themselves. They look upon themselves, at best, as nothing but unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). When John referred to himself as “*the voice*,” he used the very term the Holy Spirit used of him 700 years earlier in Isaiah 40:3. John’s mission was to bear witness of Christ, not himself. A voice is heard and not seen. The Lord Jesus endures long after “*the voice*” is silent.

Notice this, too. — “*The voice*” cried in the wilderness, not in the temple or in the streets of Jerusalem. Why? Because the Lord was no longer in the temple. Judaism was nothing but an empty shell. The Jews were a nation of legalists, steeped in self-righteous formalism, ceremonies and rituals. There was no place for John in the religion of his day; and he did not want a place in it.

He was a true prophet. He had nothing to say for himself, or about himself. He refused to promote himself, or even to defend himself. He had no cause, but Christ. He knew why God had raised him up and sent him, and he would not be turned aside from it (Isaiah 40:1-11).

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(Isaiah 40:1-11) “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. (2) Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. (3) The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (4) Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: (5) And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*. (6) The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh *is* grass, and all the goodness thereof *is* as the flower of the field: (7) The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* grass. (8) The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. (9) O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift *it* up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! (10) Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him. (11) He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young.”

Now, watch this. — Verse 24 — John knew exactly who he was dealing with. — “*And they which were sent were of the Pharisees!*” They were thoroughly orthodox heretics, self-serving religious politicians, pretentious hypocrites, cruel and persecuting self-righteous legalists, blind leaders of blind people!

**“WHY BAPTIZEST THOU?”**

These proud Pharisees kept pressing. Because God’s faithful servant, this true prophet, refused to accept their honor, and refused to take any honor to himself, because he made no pretentious claim of earthly religious authority, they challenged his right to perform any religious ordinance, let alone a new ordinance.

- He had not been to seminary.
- He had not been ordained by any earthly religious body.

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- He had not come up through their ranks.

John did not fit any mold. He could not be put in any religious box. He was not Liberal Sadducee, or a Reformed Pharisee, or a Heretical Herodian. So these good preservers of the religious status quo said, “*Why baptizest thou?*”

(John 1:25) “And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?”

As I looked at that, I thought to myself, “That’s a question every preacher ought to be required to answer.” And I am sure you can determine whether he is God’s servant or the servant of man by his answer. In just a few minutes, I will baptize Frank and Stacy Hall, just as I have many of you. The question I am answering is “Why?” not “How?” There can be no question about how baptism is performed. Baptism is immersion. Anything else (sprinkling, pouring, etc.) is not baptism. — “*Why baptizest thou?*” John answered...

(John 1:26) “John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.”

The word “*with*” in our King James version is a very, very poor translation. The Greek word “*en*” is a preposition indicating position. John did not say, “I baptize with water.” He said, “I baptize in water.” There is a huge difference. Before I show you the answers given in the New Testament to this third question, “*Why baptizest thou?*” let’s look at verses 26-28. Again, John focuses our attention, not on the ordinance, but upon the Savior, because the ordinance is meaningless apart from the Savior. “*Christ is all,*” not baptism, not the church, not you, and not me. In all things, he must have the preeminence!

(John 1:26-28) “John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; (27) He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose. (28) These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.”

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John stood his ground; but he wanted all to know his true mission, which was to point men to Christ. These men were raising questions about church authority and baptism, just as multitudes do today, while they were utter strangers to Christ himself. Multitudes debate and argue about side issues and leave that which is vital undecided. — “*What think ye of Christ?*” That is the matter that is vital (1 Corinthians 1:17.)

(1 Corinthians 1:17) “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”

“*There standeth one among you, whom ye know not*” (John 1:10-11). Standing in their midst was the Seed of woman, Abraham’s Seed, David’s Son, the fulfillment of all promises, prophecies and pictures of the Messiah given by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures; yet, they knew him not!

Then the Baptist said, “*He it is, who is coming after me (coming to be revealed after me) is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose!*” John could not find words strong enough to express his insignificance or his Savior’s majesty, supremacy and glory. In verse 20, he says, “Christ is preferred before me because *he was before me!*” He came to this earth at God’s appointed time, but he is the eternal God and the eternal Savior (John 8:58; Proverbs 8:24-30).

(John 8:58) “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.”

(Proverbs 8:24-30) “When *there were* no depths, I was brought forth; when *there were* no fountains abounding with water. (25) Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: (26) While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. (27) When he prepared the heavens, I *was* there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: (28) When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: (29) When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: (30) Then I was by him, *as one brought up with him:* and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him;”



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But why did John baptize people? Why do we baptize people? The Word of God gives three very specific answers to that question.

1. **By baptism we show how all righteousness was fulfilled for us by the obedience of Christ, our Substitute, unto death** (Matthew 3:15).

(Matthew 3:13-17) “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. (14) But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? (15) And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. (16) And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: (17) And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

2. **In believer’s baptism, the child of God shows, by vivid symbolism, how his sins were washed away by the sin-atonement death of Christ, that we might receive the Spirit of life** (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:13-14).

(Acts 2:38) “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

(Galatians 3:13-14) “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: (14) That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

3. **By baptism the believer publicly identifies himself with Christ, his people and his gospel, and publicly avows his commitment to his Lord** (Romans 6:1-7).

(Romans 6:1-7) “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (2) God forbid. How shall we, that are dead

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to sin, live any longer therein? (3) Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? (4) Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (7) For he that is dead is freed from sin.”

**CHRIST THE LAMB**

Let’s go back to our text — John 1:29. Like the first Baptist, this preacher would have you see and know, worship and adore, trust and rejoice in Christ alone, the Lamb of God.

(John 1:29) “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

May God the Holy Spirit enable you to now behold and never cease to behold the Lamb of God. In this magnificent sentence, John tells us four things about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

1. He is the Object of all true faith — “*Behold!*” — “*Look unto me and be ye saved!*”
2. Christ was ordained, given and sent by God. He is “*the Lamb of God.*”
3. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one Sacrifice for sin. — “*The Lamb!*” — “*God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering*” (Genesis 22:8).
4. This blessed Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the only Remover of sin. “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*”

Amen.