
000227PM Mark-5

TAPE # 5

WALKING WITH JESUS SERIES JOHN THE BAPTIST "HE MUST INCREASE"

Tonight may I introduce you to the greatest saint who ever lived? Jesus called him that. Great saints are like giant markers that point the world to God.

- ✓ Abel pointed to God from the altar outside Eden, and is one of the great saints by faith, but not the greatest.
- ✓ Enoch pointed to God while he walked through a world so demonized and so wicked, that God had to exterminate them all.
- ✓ Noah stood for 120 years pointing at God as he obediently built the ark.
- ✓ Abraham pointed to God while he walked away from home and out into an unknown future God had promised.
- ✓ Joseph always pointed to God from pit to prison cell, from the greatest office of Egypt, until he went to his grave, Joseph points to the Lord.
- ✓ Moses pointed three million people to God and his faced glowed as he did so.
- ✓ David pointed at God from the quiet flocks on the hillsides, to lonely caves where he hid for his life, to the royal courts of the greatest kingdom on earth.
- ✓ Elijah pointed to God while the religious establishment danced to the devil.
- ✓ Daniel and his friends pointed at God while their world went up in flames around them, and his life was thrown to the lions.

But no saint more fully or greatly pointed to God then when a simple man dressed like a peasant, after a lifetime of discipline and self denial thundered from the wilderness, "Its time to look at Jesus!"

The greatest saint greater than Abel, Noah and Job was John the Baptizer. The greatest prophet greater than Enoch, Moses, Samuel, Elijah or Jeremiah was John the Baptizer.

John was greater than Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph; greater than David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, Ezra or Nehemiah.

John the Baptizer was greater than any of the pagan kings, mighty emperors, renowned philosophers, or feared military leaders of every nation in history up to 27 AD. But what makes a person great?

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In the world's eyes, such things as being born into a famous, wealthy, or influential family bring a certain measure of greatness simply by heritage. Earning a great deal of money is another mark of the world's greatness, as are academic degrees, expertise in some field, outstanding athletic ability, artistic talent, high political or military office, and other such things. By those criteria, however, even Jesus Christ was not great. Though He manifested surpassing wisdom and power. He was born into a quite ordinary family, His father being a simple carpenter. Even after He was grown, Jesus did not own a business, a herd of cattle or sheep, a house, or even a tent. He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20). He had little, if any, formal education, no political office, no artistic accomplishments-in short, almost no marks of what the world considers greatness¹.

So it would be fitting that Christ's forerunner John the Baptist² had even fewer of the world's marks of greatness than did Jesus. Yet Jesus called John the greatest man who had ever lived until that time: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). Like his cousin Jesus, he was born into a simple, obscure family. His father was one of many thousands of priests. Zacharias took turns ministering in the Temple when his course, or division, was scheduled to serve. John the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly tribe of Levi and a descendant of the first high priest, Aaron (Luke 1:5). That was John's family heritage.

Although there were many such descendants³, most had no place of special dignity, or recognition. When he was grown, probably starting in his teen years, John the Baptist went to live in the wilderness of Judea, existing much like a hermit and forsaking even what little social and economic status he had. Yet Luke recorded of him, "for he will be great in the sight of the Lord" (1:15). John had lived east of Jerusalem in the Judean Wilderness wandering by the places where-

- ✓ Lot had compromised his life and family in that wicked city of Sodom,
- ✓ Abraham had knelt to intercede for his wayward nephew Lot,
- ✓ God had rained down fire and brimstone to destroy the evil cries of Sodom and Gomorrah.

He has been prepared by God as a man alone, a man apart, a great man, greater than had not been born from among women Jesus said. Why? What had

¹ MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

² Adapted from MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

³ Adapted from Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

refined and shaped this man to such a point as that? Listen to the testimony of John and we will hear his secret.

Please turn with me to John 3:30 and follow along as I read from v. 30 to v. 22 backwards!

So that is the man we see in the Gospel by Mark this evening. A man God saw as greatly useful. A man of humility. Now please open to our text this evening. Mark 1:1-3 and stand with me and listen to the voice of God.

In our text we find that the Gospel is neither a discussion nor a debate," said Dr. Paul S. Rees. "It is an announcement!" For this reason Mark wasted no time giving that announcement, for it is found in the opening words of his book. The word *gospel* simply means "the good news." To the Romans, Mark's special target audience, *gospel* meant "joyful news about the emperor." Keep in mind that John did much more than preach against sin; he also proclaimed the Gospel. The word *preached* in Luke 3:18 gives us the English word *evangelize* ("to preach the Good News"). John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and told people to trust in Him. John was only the best man at the wedding: Jesus was the Bridegroom (John 3:25–30). John rejoiced at the opportunity of introducing people to the Saviour, and then getting out of the way. So John the voice for God, proclaimed to all who would listen,

- ✓ the "Gospel of Jesus Christ" is the Good News that God's Son has come into the world and died for our sins.
- ✓ the "Gospel of Jesus Christ" is the Good News that our sins can be forgiven, that we can belong to the family of God and one day go to live with God in heaven.
- ✓ the "Gospel of Jesus Christ" is the announcement of victory over sin, death, and hell (1 Cor. 15:1–8, 51–52; Gal. 1:1–9).

Remember that Mark's gospel is the apostle Peter recounting the greatest story ever told. If you will let him, Mark will let you see, feel and experience what it was like to have God in a body, right here on earth.

Remember also that Mark's gospel is a dramatic, vivid, full of color action packed video that takes us on an eyewitnesses journey with none other than the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ. In a gospel written from Peter's words to the fast paced Roman Empire, Jesus is constantly in action! Mark, perhaps the first gospel account written, opens with: The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." God Himself ratifies the declaration in 1:11: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." If you listen closely, Peter will let you see, feel and experience what it was like to have God in a body, right here on earth.

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Mark's gospel is a dramatic, vivid, full of color action packed video that takes us on an eyewitnesses journey with none other than the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ. The fact that Mark wrote with the Romans in mind helps us understand his style and approach. The emphasis in this Gospel is on *activity*. Mark does not record many of our Lord's sermons because his emphasis is on what Jesus did rather than what Jesus said. He reveals Jesus as God's Servant, sent to minister to suffering people and to die for the sins of the world. Mark gives us no account of our Lord's birth, nor does he record a genealogy, unnecessary in regard to a servant.

Remember that the Spirit of God orchestrated each Gospel writer for His special purposes. Matthew, who wrote primarily for the Jews, focused mainly on Jesus the Perfect Jew and opened his book with a Christ's genealogy the perfect pedigree. After all, he had to prove to his readers that Jesus Christ is indeed the rightful Heir to David's throne.

Since Luke focused mainly on Jesus the Perfect Man it emphasizes the sympathetic ministry of the Son of man, he devoted the early chapters of his book to a record of the Saviour's birth. Luke emphasized Christ's humanity, for he knew that his Greek readers would identify with the perfect Babe who grew up to be the perfect Man.

John's Gospel focused mainly on Jesus the Perfect God in Human Flesh, begins with a statement about eternity! Why? Because John wrote to prove to the whole world that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the Son of God (John 20:31). The *subject* of John's Gospel is the deity of Christ, but the *object* of his Gospel is to encourage his readers to believe on this Saviour and receive the gift of eternal life.

So what was it about John the Baptist that made him so special to God?

FIRST OF ALL, GOD SAW IN JOHN THE BAPTIST TRULY USEFUL SERVANT

God is looking for servants. II Chronicles 16:9 says that tonight God's eyes are running up and down the world looking for those whose whole heart seeks Him. They will be willing to be voices. God needs voices and John the Baptist was willing to be one for God. Note how Mark cites two quotations from the Old Testament prophets, Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 in those opening verses. The words *messenger* and *voice* refer to John the Baptist, the prophet God sent to prepare the way for His Son (Matt. 3; Luke 3:1–18; John 1:19–34). In ancient

times, before a king visited any part of his realm, a messenger was sent before him to prepare the way. This included both repairing the roads and preparing the people. By calling the nation to repentance, John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah and Malachi join voices in declaring that Jesus Christ is the Lord, Jehovah God.

When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, no prophetic voice had been heard in Israel for 400 years. His coming was a part of God's perfect timing, for everything that relates to God's Son is always on schedule (Gal. 4:4; John 2:4; 13:1). The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar was A.D. 28/29.

In the parallel passage to this event, Luke named seven different men in Luke 3:1–2, including a Roman emperor, a governor, three tetrarchs (rulers over a fourth part of an area), and two Jewish high priests. But God's Word was not sent to any of them! Instead, the message of God came to John the Baptist. Why? He was useful because he was a humble Jewish prophet.

Resembling the Prophet Elijah in manner and dress (Luke 1:17; Matt. 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8), John came to the area near the Jordan River, preaching and baptizing. He announced the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 3:3) and urged the people to repent. Centuries before, Israel had crossed the Jordan (a national baptism) to claim their Promised Land. Now God summoned them to turn from sin and enter His spiritual kingdom. He rebuked their sins and announced God's salvation, for without conviction there can be no conversion.

But some of you may be asking, "How was John greater than all those people?" Look at Christ's words in Matthew 11:11. There *was not a greater born of women than John the Baptist*⁴. To answer that listen to the great 18th Century preacher, Matthew Henry:

Christ knew how to value persons according to the degrees of their worth, and he prefers John before all that went before him, before all that were born of women by ordinary generation. Of all that God had raised up and called to any service in his church, John is the most eminent, even beyond Moses himself; for he began to preach the gospel doctrine of remission of sins to those who are truly penitent; and he had more signal revelations from heaven than any of them had; for he saw heaven opened, and the Holy Ghost descend. He also had great success in his ministry; almost the whole nation flocked to him: none rose on so great a design, or came on so noble an errand, as John did, or had such claims to a welcome reception. Many had been born of women that made a great figure in the world, but Christ prefers John before them. Note, Greatness is not to be measured by appearances and outward splendor, but they are the

⁴ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997

greatest men who are the greatest saints, and the greatest blessings, who are, as John was, great in the sight of the Lord, Lu. 1:15.

Yet this high encomium of John has a surprising limitation, notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. In the kingdom of glory. John was a great and good man, but he was yet in a state of infirmity and imperfection, and therefore came short of glorified saints . . .

John preached Christ coming, but they preached Christ not only come, but crucified and glorified.

John came to the dawning of the gospel-day, and therein excelled the foregoing prophets, but he was taken off before the noon of that day, before the rending of the veil, before Christ's death and resurrection, and the pouring out of the Spirit; so that the least of the apostles and evangelists, having greater discoveries made to them, and being employed in a greater embassy, is greater than John.

John did no miracles; the apostles wrought many. . .

John was a maximum quod sic—the greatest of his order; he went to the utmost that the dispensation he was under would allow; but minimum maximi est majus maximo minimi—the least of the highest order is superior to the first of the lowest; a dwarf upon a mountain sees further than a giant in the valley.

Note, All the true greatness of men is derived from, and denominated by, the gracious manifestation of Christ to them. The best men are no better than he is pleased to make them. What reason have we to be thankful that our lot is cast in the days of the kingdom of heaven, under such advantages of light and love! And the greater the advantages, the greater will the account be, if we receive the grace of God in vain.

GOD SAW TRUE PRAYERFULNESS IN JOHN THE BAPTIST

We usually think of John the Baptist as a prophet and martyr, and yet our Lord's disciples remembered him as a man of prayer. John was a "miracle baby," filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born, and yet he had to pray. He was privileged to introduce the Messiah to Israel, and yet he had to pray. Jesus said that John was the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28), and yet John had to depend on prayer. If prayer was that vital to a man who had these many advantages, how much more important it ought to be to us who do not have these advantages!

John's disciples had to pray and Jesus' disciples wanted to learn better how to pray. They did not ask the Master to teach them how to preach or do great signs; they asked Him to teach them to pray. We today sometimes think that we would be better Christians if only we had been with Jesus when He was on earth, but this is not likely. The disciples were with Him and yet they failed many times! They could perform miracles, and yet they wanted to learn to pray.

But the greatest argument for the priority of prayer is the fact that our Lord was a Man of prayer. Thus far we have seen that He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21), before He chose the Twelve (Luke 6:12), when the crowds increased (Luke 5:16), before He asked the Twelve for their confession of faith (Luke 9:18), and at His Transfiguration (Luke 9:29). The disciples knew that He often prayed alone (Mark 1:35), and they wanted to learn from Him this secret of spiritual power and wisdom.

If Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, had to depend on prayer during "the days of His flesh" (Heb. 5:7), then how much more do you and I need to pray! Effective prayer is the provision for every need and the solution for every problem. 5

FINALLY GOD SAW TRUE HUMILITY IN JOHN THE BAPTIST

The life of John the Baptist gives seven principles we may apply in determining humility.

First, John the Baptist was humble because he closed his heart to self-seeking. We will be able to say with David, "My soul is like a weaned child within me" (Ps. 131:2). One who is poor in spirit loses his self-preoccupation. Self is nothing, and Christ is everything. Paul's humility is nowhere more beautifully expressed than in his saying, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). To the Philippian believers he wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Second, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his eyes to Christ, "with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, ... being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). Our satisfaction will be in the prospect of one day being fully in the likeness of our Lord. Remember what John said in 1 John 3:2-3 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know

5 Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3
Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Third, John the Baptist was humble because he closed his mouth to complaining. Because we know we deserve worse than anything we can experience in this life, we will consider no circumstance to be unfair. When tragedy comes we will not say, “Why me, Lord?” When our suffering is for Christ’s sake we not only will not complain or feel ashamed but will glorify God for it (1 Pet. 4:16), knowing that we will “also be glorified with Him” and realizing “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:17-18).

Fourth, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his life as a ministry to others. With “humility of mind” we will “regard one another as more important than [ourselves]” (Phil. 2:3) and will “give preference to one another in honor” (Rom. 12:10). God called John to confront Herod Antipater. Instead of listening to God’s servant and obeying God’s Word, Herod arrested John and imprisoned him. John was put in the fortress of Machaerus, located about four miles east of the Dead Sea. It stood 3,500 feet above sea level on a rocky ridge that was accessible from only one side. It was Herodias, Herod’s wife, who held the grudge against John (see Mark 6:19, NASB); and she influenced her husband. She plotted to have her teenage daughter perform a lascivious dance at Herod’s birthday feast. Herodias knew that her husband would succumb to her daughter’s charms and make some rash promise to her. She also knew that Herod would want to “save face” before his friends and officials. The plot worked, and John the Baptist was slain⁶. But even that was part of God’s plan which he humbly accepted.

Fifth, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his heart to spend much time in prayer. Just as the physical beggar begs for physical sustenance, the spiritual beggar begs for spiritual. We will knock often at heavens gate because we are always in need. Like Jacob wrestling with the angel, we will not let go until we are blessed.

Sixth, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his will to God’s. We will not try to have Christ while keeping our pride, our pleasures, our covetousness, or our immorality. We will not modify His standards by ecclesiastical traditions or by our own inclinations or persuasions. His Word alone will be our standard. Watson said, “A castle that has long been besieged and is ready to be taken will deliver up on any terms to save their lives. He whose heart has been a garrison for the devil, and has held out long in opposition against Christ, when once God

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

has brought him to poverty of spirit and he sees himself damned without Christ, let God propound what articles he will, he will readily subscribe to them. Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (p. 47).

Seventh, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his mouth to praise. Nothing more characterizes the humble believer than abounding gratitude to his Lord and Savior. He knows that he has no blessings and no happiness but that which the Father gives in love and grace. He knows that God's grace is "more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:14).

So:

Are we humble like John the Baptist? He was humble because he closed his heart to self-seeking.

Are we humble like John the Baptist? He was humble because he opened his eyes to Christ,

Are we humble like John the Baptist? He was humble because he closed his mouth to complaining.

Are we humble like John the Baptist? He was humble because he opened his life as a ministry to others.

Are we humble like John the Baptist? He was humble because he opened his heart to spend much time in prayer.

Are we humble like John the Baptist? He was humble because he opened his will to God's.

Are we humble like John the Baptist? He was humble because he opened his mouth to praise.