

# The Gospel of John: *Know Jesus and Live*

## Part 2

### Introduction

Today's text has us discussing a person who R.C. Sproul calls "one of the most neglected personages in all of sacred Scripture."<sup>1</sup> That person is, of course, John the Baptist. In order to ensure that R.C. Sproul and I will remain close personal friends, I will list several reasons why John the Baptist should never be neglected.

### I. The significance of John the Baptist

- 1. John the Baptist is significant because secular historians write more about him than they do Jesus**
  - "amazingly, the secular historians of the first century gave more information regarding John the Baptist than Jesus."<sup>2</sup>
- 2. John the Baptist is significant because his coming meant the end of God's silence**
  - At the time John arrived on the scene, the Lord had not spoken to his people through a prophet since Malachi over 400 years earlier.
- 3. John is significant because an Angel of the Lord said he was**
  - ♣ Luke 1:13-15--*But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great before the Lord.*
- 4. John the Baptist is significant because he came in the "spirit and power of Elijah"**
  - ♣ Luke 1:16-17--*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*
    - This is a fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6...
      - ♣ Malachi 4:5-6--*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.*
- 5. John the Baptist is significant because his ministry had such an effect on people that Jewish leaders sent a team of investigators to determine whether or not he was the Messiah**
  - ♣ John 1:19-22--*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?*
- 6. John the Baptist is significant because he was the prophet whom God used to prepare people's hearts to receive Jesus**
  - ♣ Luke 1:17--*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.*

### II. Who John the Baptist was not

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul. *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary: John*. Reformation Trust Publishing. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid



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- ❖ John 1:19-21--*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.*
  - Some allege that John (the apostle) is anti-semitic because he says “the Jews” in verse 19. This is silly for 2 reasons. (1) John is Jewish and he worship a Jewish man (Jesus of Nazareth) as God. (2) We must remember that John in this instance is simply providing historical information to his Gentile readers.
- 1. John the Baptist was not the Christ**
  - Here we have John the Baptist confirming for us what John (the author and apostle) has already told us...
    - ❖ John 1:8--*He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*
- 2. John the Baptist was not Elijah**
  - Why would they ask this? Since Elijah had been carried away on a chariot of fire long before this moment, this question might seem kinda like asking someone “are you Jimmy Hoffa?” It isn’t quite like that though. In fact the Jewish leaders had some really good reasons for asking him whether he was Elijah...
    - (1) Elijah’s return was spoken of in the O.T.
      - ❖ Malachi 4:5--*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.*
    - (2) John the Baptist was dressed like Elijah
      - ❖ Mark 1:6--*Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist*
      - ❖ 2 Kings 1:6--*He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.*
    - (3) “John the Baptist preached repentance and reformation, as Elijah had done.”<sup>3</sup>
      - ❖ 1 Kings 18:21--*How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.*
      - ❖ Matthew 3:1--*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*
  - John the Baptist’s response is somewhat problematic for us. Why? Because Jesus said that he was Elijah.
    - ❖ Matthew 11:12--*For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.*
    - ❖ Matthew 17:12-13--*But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*
  - How do we reconcile this? I like the way R.C. Sproul puts it when he says,

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary

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*“John was Elijah in a sense. That is, his ministry was the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy, even though John the Baptist personally was not Elijah. This is borne out by what the angel told John’s father; he said John would “go before [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1: 17). So while John was not Elijah reincarnated, his ministry was marked by a similar spirit and power. John was not lying when he said he was not Elijah.<sup>4</sup>”*

### 3. John the Baptist was not the prophet

- John was certainly a prophet, but these men weren’t asking him if he was a prophet. They were asking him if he was *the* prophet. Who is this “prophet?”
- ❖ Deuteronomy 18:15-18--*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— 16 just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die. 17 And the Lord said to me, They are right in what they have spoken. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*
  - Here, Moses teaches us that God will raise up a prophet like himself (18:15). Moses “was not just a prophet, he was the mediator of the Old Testament. So a prophet like Moses would be a prophet who would mediate; He would be the mediator of the New Testament, the Messiah.<sup>5</sup>” Thus the prophet spoken of here is Jesus Christ.

## III. Who John the Baptist was

- ❖ John 1:22-23--*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.*
- Here, John is quoting Isaiah 40:3. To really understand what John is doing here with Isaiah 40:3, it is helpful to look at what Jesus did with Isaiah 61...
  - ❖ Luke 4:18-21--*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

*20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*
  - In this passage, Jesus declares himself to be the fulfillment of this O.T. prophecy (Isaiah 61:1-2). He, is the one whom the Spirit of the Lord is upon. He is anointed to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, etc. John the Baptist is doing the exact same thing. He boldly

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<sup>4</sup> R. C. Sproul. *St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary: John*. Reformation Trust Publishing. Kindle Edition

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declares to the priests and Levites, that he is the voice who heralds the coming of the Lord and the time to prepare for his coming is NOW!

### IV. The ministry of John the Baptist

- ❖ John 1:24-37--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.

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel. 32 And John bore witness: I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

35 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold, the Lamb of God! 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

- What we see in this passage is John the Baptist being who he said he was. He stated that his very identity is wrapped up in heralding the coming of the Lord. Here, he demonstrates that to be true in a number of ways...

#### 1. John the Baptist doesn't defend himself, he announces the coming of the Lord (v.24-28)

- Did you happen to notice that John didn't really answer their question? When they asked him, "what gives you the right to baptize?" his reply was not "I am a prophet of God" or "God told me I could" or anything like that at all. Rather he redirected them to what was really important, the coming of the Lord. It was like he was saying to them, "You guys are missing the point! You want to know about my authority but I am simply baptizing in preparation for the coming of the one who has ALL authority!"

#### 2. John the Baptist doesn't glorify himself, he glorifies Jesus (v.29-34)

- John was incredibly well known. People were coming from all over the place to be baptized by him. However, John the Baptist doesn't use his influence to glorify himself, he uses his platform to glorify Jesus.

(1) He declares Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

- Some choose to get all spun up about the fact that the phrase "Lamb of God" doesn't have a clear O.T. origin. It can't really be the passover lamb (Exodus 12) or the Lamb spoken of in Genesis 22 because these lambs didn't take away sin. It can't really be the sin offering of Leviticus 4 because, the animals used were bulls and goats, not a lambs. So where does John get this idea from? From the Lord. Just as Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be the suffering servant, John the Baptist is prophesying that Jesus will be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We see the fulfillment of this prophecy in verses like...

- ❖ Revelation 5:12--*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*

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❖ 1 Peter 1:19--*but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

(2) He declares Jesus to be greater than him and before him (v.30)

- Here, John the Baptist is simply pointing out that Jesus is greater than he is because he is eternal.

(3) He declares Jesus to be the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (v.33)

- What exactly does this mean? Is this speaking in tongues? Is this being born again? What are we talking about? Baptism of the Holy Spirit is simply the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. When a person is converted, the Holy Spirit indwells them and imparts to them spiritual gifts which they will cultivate and use in the work of the ministry.

- This is promised in...

❖ John 14:16-17--*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

❖ Acts 2:38-39--*And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*

- Paul demonstrates the importance of it

❖ Acts 19:1-7--*he found some disciples. 2 And he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. 3 And he said, Into what then were you baptized? They said, Into John's baptism. 4 And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus. 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. 7 There were about twelve men in all.*

(4) He declares Jesus to be the Son of God

- We need to understand that Jesus is not the son because he was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Jesus is eternally the Son of God. One Bible dictionary helpfully describes it this way...

*"He does not bear this title in consequence of his miraculous birth, nor of his incarnation, his resurrection, and exaltation to the Father's right hand. This is a title of nature and not of office. The sonship of Christ denotes his equality with the Father. To call Christ the Son of God is to assert his true and proper divinity. The second Person of the Trinity, because of his eternal relation to the first Person, is the Son of God."<sup>6</sup>*

**3. John the Baptist doesn't gather followers for himself, he points people to Jesus (v.35-37)**

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<sup>6</sup> Easton Dictionary of the Bible



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- John wasn't jealous. He didn't try to keep disciples for himself. In fact, he pointed his disciple to Jesus. What he did was sort of like saying "why are you still watching the trailer? The movie is in theaters now!"

## V. Applications

- The observations of John the Baptist's ministry should be applications for us. Just as John the Baptist was, we are to be people who
  - 1. Don't defend ourselves, but proclaim Jesus**
    - When we are attacked by this world and called bigotts, intolerant, haters, etc. What will our first response be? To lash out? To fight back? To defend our right to teach and believe what we want to? Though there is certainly nothing wrong with defending your right to believe what you want to believe, we must be a people who are first and foremost about proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
    - This was demonstrated recently by the Pastor of 1st Baptist Dallas. The news media convinced Tim Tebow that he shouldn't accept the offered speaking engagement at 1st Baptist Dallas because Pastor Jeffress was anti-gay, anti-semitic, and hateful. What was Jeffress response? He used all the publicity to invite all people whether gay or straight, jew or gentile, to repent of their sin, trust in Jesus, and be saved.
  - 2. Don't glorify ourselves, but glorify Jesus**
    - As believers, we ought to be people who use whatever platform we have to glorify Jesus. So when you get a huge promotion at work, will you be one who says "I got this because I am more awesome than the rest of you losers?" Or will you glorify Jesus by humbly giving thanks?
    - We ought to join Paul in his confession of...
      - ❖ Galatians 6:14--*far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
  - 3. Don't gather followers for ourselves, but point people to Jesus**