



**John 1:19-28**  
***The Messenger of the Lord***

19 Now 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 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"

23 He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," ' as the prophet Isaiah said."

24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.

25 And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.

27 "It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."

28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

As we go over these verses, that focus on the ministry of John the Baptist as the Lord's Messenger, I'd like you to keep some questions in mind. ***What makes a man a good preacher? What does he do? How does he act? What is his message?***

John the Baptist was after all a great preacher, Christ himself praised him highly saying "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" so what were the qualities of this man and his ministry, and what was the organizing or driving principle?

Now John the Baptist was a very popular preacher in his day, we are told in Matthew 3:5 "***Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.***" It seemed like everybody, was going to hear him and be baptized, during the time of his ministry he was possibly the most popular preacher in the nation of Israel.

Speaking of the most popular preacher in the nation, I don't know if you happened to see 60 minutes last week, and I hope not because 60 minutes is on Sunday, but if you hear about it or saw it on the web later on, you'll know that they profiled the most popular preacher in America, the health and wealth preacher Joel Osteen. Now I knew Osteen was big, you see him on the covers of books all over Walmart and Target, and Magazine articles and so on, but I had no idea how big, his church is a converted 16,000 seat sports arena and every Sunday it is packed out. His TV show is watched by Ten

Million people every week, and along with his books he generates almost a hundred million dollars every year. If it was the popularity of John the Baptist, that all preachers should have, then Osteen has it.

Popularity is very important in our day and age, we publish lists of what's popular so we'll know which books to read, which shows to watch, which candidate to vote for. But it seems to me that John the Baptists popularity was not the quality that scripture highlights for us as making him great. This gospel doesn't even mention it. Rather it focuses on 1) His Message and 2) His demeanor.

Admittedly the crowds he was drawing were probably a major reason the Jews, and by that the Gospel means the leaders of the Jewish nation sent their own version of a 60 minutes team to do an investigative report on John the Baptist. Now they were probably partly scared he might be another rabble rouser a would-be messianic king who was going to cause trouble with the Romans, but also as Calvin reminds us they were the leaders of the church and had a responsibility to make sure that he wasn't teaching some heretical new doctrine. John was no ordinary rabbi, his ministry was very irregular, and had a prophetic quality to it. He was not just teaching, but *declaring*.

The investigating team of priests and Levites (who functioned as the temple police) start out with an interesting question. "**Who are you?**" Now they knew who he was in one sense, the knew he was John the Son of Zechariah one of the temple Priests. What they meant is *who do you say you are what is this ministry about?* John knows what they mean, which is why he doesn't say "John the Baptist"

Now here is the perfect opportunity for John to thrust himself forward, to talk about his ministry and the good things he is doing for people. But instead he gives an answer that puts him in the background, he doesn't even tell them who he is, he says who he is not: "I AM NOT THE CHRIST!"

Christ incidentally, is not Jesus' last name, it is a title. It is a Greek translation *Cristos* of a Hebrew word *mashiach* or Messiah meaning "anointed." In the Old Testament, leaders like Priests and Kings were ceremonially anointed to show they had been set apart by God for his special purposes. They had God's anointing upon them. The Messiah is not merely *an* anointed servant of God, He is **THE** ANOINTED one, the mighty deliverer, the redeemer, the consummation or fullness of what all those other anointings had been pointing towards. He was not just a king, a priest, a prophet, he was **THE** Prophet, Priest, and King of God's people.

So he is immediately saying, I'm not the Messiah. Ok, then they reply do you think you're Elijah, because they knew that according to Malachi 4:5 that was one of the signs of the coming of the Messiah: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." And also because this wild prophet dressed in a camel hair mantle living in the transjordanian wilderness and eating Locusts and Honey had a real Elijah air to him.

Again John says "no". Which creates a bit of a problem for us. John says he is not Elijah, but in Matt. 11:13-14 Jesus says "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come." So is he or isn't he? Well, In a sense he is, in a sense he is not. The Jews knew that Elijah had not died but been taken up into heaven, so most assumed that Mal. 4:5 meant Elijah himself would reappear. But what John was doing was fulfilling the ministry of preparation for the Messiah in the manner of Elijah. As the angel had told John The Baptist's father in Luke 1:17 "**He will also 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 a people**

*prepared for the Lord."* But was he *literally Elijah* like the Jews thought? No. Which is why he answered the way he did.

Finally they ask him if he is the prophet, and by that they are making reference to Moses' prophecy in Deut. 18:15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" But that prophecy of Moses, did not speak of the coming of John the Baptist, it spoke of the coming of Jesus, someone who like Moses would reveal the will of God to the people and make intercession for them only in a far greater sense than Moses, because all Moses could do was plead for them, because He is God, Jesus could do the work of reconciling himself. A fact Peter alludes to in his sermon in Acts 3:21.

Well now they are frustrated, what are they going to tell the leadership in their report? "Ok, *this is who we found out he isn't.*" So they give him a chance to define himself, again John could have thrust himself forward and talked about him and his ministry, I'll be honest, I probably would have done just that. But he doesn't do that, instead he quotes Isaiah 40:3 to he says he is merely a voice preparing me to meet the Lord. As Leon Morris tells us - "***The point of the quotation is that it gives no prominence to the preacher whatever. He is not an important person, like a prophet or the Messiah. He is no more than a voice. He is a voice, moreover, with but one thing to say... John's real function was not to teach ethics, but to point men to Jesus.***"

That was John's message, and that brothers and sisters should be the true calling of every Preacher. To point men away from themselves and said them to Jesus Christ. But the Pharisees in the group are not content with John's answer. If you aren't those important people why are you baptizing? We'll talk more about John's baptism next week. But in essence they are asking, why are you applying this ritual of repentance and ceremonial cleansing that normally was applied to gentiles who converted to Jews? Where is your authority?

Again, he could have talked about himself and his being commissioned by God for this purpose, but again deflects it away from himself and utterly humble, points them again to Jesus. He says in essence, "don't you see, you poor blind fools? You're concerned with me, but the fact that I have been sent and I'm baptizing tells you that the Messiah is already living here amongst us, though you don't and sadly won't recognize Him." And then showing us what should be the true messenger of the Lord's estimation of himself in relation to Jesus he says, "Me, I'm not even worthy to take off the Messiah's sandals"

Now Loosing the sandal is a reference to the duty of the lowliest slave in the household to remove the sandals of the members of the household and wash their feet. In Judaism Rabbis had disciples whom they trained up to be the next generation of Rabbis and they did not receive payment from their disciples for teaching them the word of God. They didn't have the for profit kind of seminary education we have today, it was more of a master apprentice relationship where the disciples would act as servants for their masters and they could give them all sorts of jobs. But there is Rabbinic saying "Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandal-thong." John said, Jesus is so much greater than I'm not even worthy to do that: ***I'm a voice pointing men to Christ, HEAR HIM!***"

1) So let's answer those two questions, how does he act? The Good Messenger even if he is popular is humble, As Ryle said, "***The greatest saints of God in every age of the Church have always been men of John the Baptist's spirit. In gifts, and knowledge, and general character they have often differed***

*widely. But in one respect they have always been alike--they have been "clothed with humility." (1 Pet. 5:5.) They have not sought their own honor. They have thought little of themselves. They have been ever willing to decrease if Christ might only increase, to be nothing if Christ might be all."*

Well that was John the Baptist is it possible for other men, to have many hearers and be humble, well yes I'm reminded of the story of Daniel Rowlands, the great Welsh evangelist, a man who drew crowds of thousands when he preached the gospel and he preached it well and without compromising.

Selina's painter, pace about wouldn't sit down, "Why? I'm only a lump of Clay like you!" "Alas, alas drawing the portrait of an old sinner" I think of that when I see the portraits of preacher emblazoned on books and billboards, and lifesize cardboard cutouts. Rowland was a man who like John the Baptist wanted people to think not of him and his ministry, but only of Christ.

2) What is the message of a Good Preacher? Well according to John the Baptist it is to Point men to Christ, to tell them of His Greatness, and their own deficiency, their sin, their need, and to tell them to flee to Him, the Lamb of God, for salvation.

So is *this* the Gospel? "To become a better you, you must be positive towards yourself, develop better relationships, embrace the place where you are."

No but that is a verbatim quote of what America's most popular preacher Joel Osteen says *his message* is. You know the funny thing is, thousands who identify themselves as Christians are eating that up, but the non-Christian interviewer Byron Pitts saw through it: He said to Osteen your book reads more like self-help than religion. He read that quote and said "Not one mention of God in that. Not one mention of Jesus Christ in that" To which Osteen replied, "**these are principles that can help you. I mean, there's a lot better people qualified to say, 'Here's a book that going to explain the scriptures to you.' I don't think that's my gifting,**"

Now brothers and sisters, I hope you are as horrified as I am by that, here is a man who pastors the largest church in America, whose show is the most watched religious broadcast in the country, whose core message doesn't involve sin and salvation or even God and Jesus and who doesn't believe he is gifted or qualified to explain the scriptures.

Brothers and sisters, when you point that out some will say, "oh you're just jealous" – Jealous? The last man on earth I want to be is Joel Osteen. Let me tell you why in Ezekiel 36:6 we read of how the messengers of the Lord will be called to account for their ministry:

*Ezek 36:6 'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'*

*7 " So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.*

*8 "When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.*

Everytime I preach I wonder have I done what John the Baptist did, have I warned you of the danger of your sin, have I pointed you to Christ as the only one who forgive your sins, save you from damnation,

and present you to God? If I don't then I have your blood on my hands. Now brothers and sisters, Joel Osteen in one Sunday, preaches to more people than I will in my entire life, and I have never heard him preach the gospel that John the Baptist preached to a soul. I don't want to be him. I want to get really small, and I want Jesus to become all in all.

Brothers and Sisters a preacher has done well when at the end of his message you've forgotten him, and you have forgotten you, and you are filled only with thoughts of Jesus Christ, His greatness, His saving work and His mercy to sinners. I hope that is the case today.