

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

John the Baptist

INTRODUCTION

John 1:19-34

A remarkable religious phenomenon broke out in the United States in the year 1948. It started in a tent near the Hollywood area of Los Angeles, under the preaching of a young evangelist by the name of Billy Graham. The crowds were a little sparse in that tent at first, but as the preaching went on they began to grow. Finally certain rather prominent Hollywood celebrities came to the meetings and were converted. At first, as often happens with gatherings of that sort, the press totally ignored them. But when some of the well-known names of Hollywood became involved, the media began to take an interest in what was happening. Eventually reporters were sent to investigate and to interview this rather strange young preacher, who dressed in pistachio-colored suits, wore flaming red ties, spoke with a pronounced Southern accent, and yet had incredible appeal to the masses. It was evident that God was doing something there. That was the beginning of Billy Graham's career. As news of those meetings spread across the country, other cities invited him to come and preach. He went on to Boston, where all of New England seemed to turn out to hear him. Thus began the great Crusades that swept across America in the latter part of the '40's and '50's under Billy Graham's ministry.

As it was with Billy the Baptist in 1948, so it was with John the Baptist in the late '20's of the first century. He, too, was a young man, in his early '30's, six months older than Jesus. He, too, dressed rather strangely, even for that day. He did not wear green suits; he wore animal skins and ate a strange diet of grasshoppers and wild honey. This young man had a very powerful message, which seemed to have great attraction to people. At first they came out by dozens, then by scores, and finally, hundreds and thousands forsook the cities of Judah and Galilee to hear this remarkable preacher out in desert places. Finally, the response was so tremendous, and this man became so popular, that even the religious establishment of Jerusalem had to take note. They sent a delegation to investigate this remarkable preacher.¹

OPEN IT

1. Describe the most incredible thing you have ever witnessed first-hand.

¹ <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/john/call-the-first-witness>

READ IT

John 1:19-34

EXPLORE IT

2. Who did the Jews send to investigate John the Baptist?
3. What was their first question to John?
4. In his answer what prophet did John quote?
5. What was John doing that confused those who were questioning him?
6. What was the reason John gave to the Jews for his baptizing?
7. John baptized with water, but what did He say Jesus would baptize with?

APPLY IT

8. In the ESV this section is entitled “The Testimony of John the Baptist” - taken from verse 19. Have you ever written out your testimony? If you have never written out your testimony of how God saved you, (if you are a Christian), commit to doing it this week. Have you had the chance to share your testimony with people?

At this point, we leave the prologue and begin a long section (1:19-12:54) that amasses testimony for Jesus as the Son of God, the one in whom all should believe. The rest of chapter 1 presents the witness of the forerunner, John the Baptist, to Jesus. Andreas Kostenberger (*John* [Baker], p. 53) points out two purposes for this section: “(1) to show John’s witness to Jesus at the inception of [Jesus’] ministry; and (2) to clarify John’s relationship to Jesus as one of witness rather than rivalry or antagonism.”²

When we read that this delegation’s question to John the Baptist was, “Who are you?” we are quite justified in reading it as though they were saying, “Who do you think you are, anyway?” There is a sneer in these words. It is clear they had asked him about the popular rumor that perhaps he was the Messiah himself. John’s reply, which John the Apostle puts very dramatically, was, “He confessed, he did not deny, but he confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah,’” That is clearly emphasizing the fact that John wanted -- to quote a famous American -- “one thing to be perfectly clear” -- that he was not the Messiah.³

John knew who he was, and he knew who he was not.

9. How important is it for us to know our position within the body of Christ? Are there parts of the body that receive more accolades? Should that be the case? What are some overlooked parts of the body of Christ that we should be talking about more and highlighting in our churches?

² <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-6-who-are-you-john-119-28>

³ <https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/john/call-the-first-witness>

10. John the Baptist was the first itinerant evangelist for Jesus Christ. In Romans 10, the Apostle Paul says that the feet of those who preach the gospel are beautiful. How important is evangelism at your church? Do we highlight it as much as we should or do we focus on it too much?

11. Part of John's calling was to "make straight the way of the Lord." What obstacles (1:23) keep people from coming to the Lord? How can we help remove them to "make straight" His way?

12. Do you think religious sinners are the more difficult to reach with the gospel? How can we try to break through their pride?

John the Baptist would declare that the Kingdom of God had come. He preached repentance and that the Messiah - the Lamb of God, was Jesus of Nazareth. In the end he would lose his life, literally he would lose his head as he proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. He knew his mission, and he said so in verse 31 of our passage.

13. What do you think is your mission in life? What's your purpose - your reason for being? How would you explain it to someone who does not understand?

John was delivering a message that the people and the religious leaders of the day did not understand. Even though the teaching of the Jews did look for a Messiah to come, they were influenced by the culture of their day. They were looking for a Savior but it was to be delivered from the Romans. A kid from Nazareth was hardly the Messiah they were expecting.

14. John was pretty blunt in his witness, as was Jesus (Matt. 3:7; 23:1-36). Is there a place for us to be so blunt? Consider Col. 4:5-6 & 2 Tim. 2:24-26.

15. What is the best way for you to share your faith? Relational - confrontational - historical? What seems to work the best for you and why?

16. What forms of evangelism are you most comfortable with and what ways have borne the most fruit?