

# JOHN THE BAPTIST: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME

## JOHN 1:1:5-34

### THE FOCUS OF JOHN: THE PREEMINENCE OF JESUS CHRIST (1:15-18)

In the previous verses (1:1-14) the Apostle John gave a discourse on Introduction of Deity (*The Logos*), who was Jesus Christ. Now he turns to the witness of John the Baptist as the one who made a public announcement of introducing Christ to men. He begins by describing the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

*Christ Was Preeminent to John the Baptist (15)*

**John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.** John the Baptist was on the earth before Jesus, he was born six months before Him (Lk. 1:26). It was in this sense that Jesus came after John. But the reality is that Jesus existed throughout eternity so He was before John. When He came to earth, he was **preferred before** (had a greater mission than) John.

*Christ's Grace and Truth Were Preeminent (16-17)*

**And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.** There is some debate as to whether verses 16-18 were the words of John the Baptist or an interjection of the thoughts of John the Apostle. Whatever the case, the words were penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Believers receive Christ's **fulness** which is the fullness of every blessing He has to offer. These blessings include **grace for grace** (Greek *charin anti charitos*). This is literally grace against grace, the idea being that God out does Himself in giving us grace. He gives us grace and overpowers that grace with more grace.

The law which came through Moses pointed to Christ, it could not save anyone. But grace (God's goodness in saving sinners) and truth (God's plan for redemption) came through Jesus Christ.

*Christ Is Preeminent in Presenting the Father (18)*

**No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.** The essence of God is spirit and by nature a spirit is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). It is in this sense that **no man hath seen God at any time**. When the Old Testament gives record of someone seeing God, Isaiah 6:5 for example, this is what is called a Theophany which is God taking on a physical appearance.

Jesus is the **only begotten Son** which is translated "the only begotten God" in the New American Standard Bible. This only begotten God **is in the bosom of the Father**, this is a reference to closeness of the Father and Son and is an illusion the "face to face" relationship described in verse 1 of this chapter. Jesus has **declared** (*exegesato*, "to exegeted") the Father. Jesus, who is all the Father is, came in His place to present Him to man. This is why Jesus told Philip, "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). Paul said that Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Anyone who has ever questioned what God is like only need to look at Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the only one who can exegete God—that is interpret Him to man.

## THE WITNESS OF JOHN TO THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS (19-27)

The Jews sent priest and Levites from Jerusalem to question John. The practice of sending a party to investigate a prophet's ministry seems to be a standard practice in the Old Testament (see 2 Kings 19:2; 22:15; Isa. 37:2). During their investigation, John gives them a powerful four-fold witness.

### *He Was not the Christ (19-20)*

**And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.** The delegation from Jerusalem was assigned the task to ask John the Baptist, **“Who art thou?”** John was popular and had a great following (Matt. 21:24-26), this is most likely what prompted their visit. Because of the powerful ministry John had, people could have easily assumed he was the promised Messiah. But he immediately dispels this notion by stating, **“I am not the Christ.”**

### *He Was not Elijah or the Prophet (21)*

**And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.** In the Old Testament book of Malachi, it was prophesied that Elijah would come again (Mal. 4:5). Since John had a ministry similar to that of Elijah, the way he dressed (Cp: Mark 1:6 with 2 Kings 1:8) and his message (Cp. Matt. 3:2-12 with 1 Kings 18:18, 21; 21:17-24), many thought he was Elijah. Then they ask him if he was **that prophet**. This is a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses said, **“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”** John's answer to both questions was, **No.**

### *He Was a Voice Crying in the Wilderness (22-23)*

The delegation continued to press John about his identity when they plainly asked, **Who art thou?** John gave them a threefold reply. First, he was the voice (Greek phone) crying in the wilderness (the Judean desert). Second, his message was **Make straight the way of the Lord**, making the way straight was the practice of removing impediments out of the way for a coming king. John was making the way smooth or straight for the Lord by calling people to repentance (Matt. 3:1-10), raising the anticipation of the coming Messiah (Matt. 3:11-12) and baptizing Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17). Third, he was doing this as the prophet Isaiah prophesied (Isa. 40:3).

### *There Was One Coming after Him, Who Was Greater than Him (24-27)*

**And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.** The delegation then asks John a blunt question, **Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?** Basically, they were saying to him, **“Why in the world are you baptizing, since you were not spoken of in the Old Testament?”** John's response was, **I baptize with water.** In the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist records a fuller response, **“I, indeed, baptize you with water unto repentance”** (Matt. 3:11). In essence, John's response was his baptism was one of repentance, to get people to

acknowledge their sins and prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah. John says of this Messiah that he was not worthy to unlatch his shoes. This was a statement of ultimate humility because this duty was performed by the lowest of the low slave. In reference to Jesus, John felt he was not even able to execute a task done by a lowly slave to serve another person.

## JOHN INTRODUCES JESUS

In the following verses John introduces Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God and the Son of God.

### *The Place of the Introduction (28)*

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

Some translations replace the word **Bethabara** for the town of Bethany. This is not the same Bethany located near Jerusalem because it was **beyond the Jordan**.

### *John Introduces Jesus as the Lamb of God (29-31)*

**The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.** John's introduction of Jesus as the Lamb of God was a reference to Isaiah 53. The Jewish people were looking for a military Messiah, but John introduces Jesus as a suffering servant who would die to **take away** (Greek *airon*, lift up and carry away) **the sins of the world**. This is a picture of the scapegoat in the Old Testament. The priest would lay the sins of the people on the goat and release him into the wilderness (Lev. 16:7-10).

When John says, **And I knew him not** he is not saying that he did not know Jesus because they were cousins. What he means to convey is that even though they were cousins, he didn't know He was the Messiah until Jesus went public with His ministry.

### *John Introduces Jesus as the Son of God (32-34)*

**And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.** In Matthew 4, we read about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. After he baptized Him the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:13-17). When John baptized Jesus, He saw the **Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him**. Before this, John did not know Jesus was the Messiah, **And I knew him not**. After the Baptism, God revealed this to John when He said, **Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost**. After seeing these things, John bore witness to the fact that Jesus is **the Son of God**.