

John 1:19-51

Preparing the Way of the Lord

What do we know about John the Baptist? (use parallel texts)

- He wore camel's hair garments and a leather belt (Matthew 3:4).
- His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:6).
- He drank no wine or other fermented drink (Luke 1:15).
- He was filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb (Luke 1:15).
- He was humble. "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).
- He didn't water down the message to make it more palatable. He was unafraid, bold (Luke 3:7-14).
- He was physically related to Jesus (Luke 1:36-41).

John was very different/weird. Everyone who wanted to hear him had to come to the wilderness. But John was exceedingly popular and drew large crowds. Why do you think he was so successful? He carried a message that the people's hearts had been prepared to hear. They had been waiting hundreds of years for the Messiah. They had been waiting 400 years for a word from God.

Verses 20-21 Who did John say he wasn't? He was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-22).

Note: Malachi prophesied that before the arrival of the Messiah, God would send Elijah back to earth (Malachi 4:5). Remember Elijah didn't die, but was taken up to heaven. The Jews thought John might be Elijah, which would mean the arrival of the Messiah was imminent. His dress, diet, lifestyle, and ministry were very similar to Elijah's. He ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). John both *is* and *is not* Elijah. He *is* Elijah in spirit; he *is not* literally Elijah in the flesh.

Verse 23 How did John describe himself? The voice... (Reference Isaiah 40:3-5).

What was John's purpose/assignment/mission? To bear witness to the "light" (verse 7). To prepare hearts of people to receive Jesus. Herald the arrival of the Messiah. John spoke the same general message as other prophets—repent, turn back to God, the promised Messiah is coming. John had no ambition other than to exalt the Messiah, and to urge men to prepare for His coming. He pointed men and women to Christ, rather than to himself. He knew clearly what his purpose was.

Note: John the Baptist never performed a miracle or a sign; he only preached and baptized. He called people to repentance and told them about Jesus. He had a singular focus.

Application: Do you ever think about what your purpose might be and how can you pursue it on a daily, practical basis? How does your purpose compare to John's? In a general sense, every Christian's purpose is the same as John's. Be a witness for Jesus. Draw attention to Jesus. Proclaim Him as Savior.

Verses 24-28 Why were the Jews so concerned about John? His ministry was so influential that the Jewish religious authorities investigated him, basically saying, "You are not officially sanctioned (no credentials), so why are you baptizing?"

Note: Baptism was not a new or novel ritual to the Israelites. Baptism was one of the rituals by which Gentiles were brought into Judaism as proselytes. John's baptism was an outward sign of cleansing reflecting an inward repentance from sins. This was distressing in the light of the meaning and use of baptism in Judaism. These were not Gentiles who were being baptized, but Jews. These were not Gentiles who were being indicted for their sin and warned of God's coming wrath, but Jews. John was treating Jews as though they were lost sinners, in need of salvation. Most distressing of all, many Jews were believing John and coming to him for baptism. Jewish religious leaders had convinced their Jewish followers that simply being Jewish and keeping the law (as they interpreted it) was sufficient to save them. John's ministry and message said otherwise. The Jewish religious system was under siege, and it looked at the moment as though John was prevailing.

What did John testify about Jesus in verses 29-34?

- He is the Lamb of God
- He takes away sin of world
- He has surpassed me because He was before me
- John saw the Spirit descend and stay upon Him
- He is the Son of God

Verse 29 Why did John use the term Lamb of God? Jesus was like the sacrificial animal of the Jewish Passover. That lamb had to be perfect, without blemish. It was killed as a substitute and its blood shed so that the people's sins would be forgiven. The Jews

received deliverance through the blood of the lamb. This imagery would be very familiar to them: a lamb dying for their sins. One of the reasons God instituted the sacrificial system was so that the Jews would come to understand the principle of substitution.

God requires the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). Why is that? It reveals His perspective on the seriousness of sin. He wants us to know that sin is a big deal. It requires that a life be given in exchange for forgiveness.

How is the sacrifice of Jesus superior to that of an animal? Animal sacrifice cannot remove the guilt of the sin—just roll it forward. But Jesus took away all of our sin. The scope of its efficacy is forever and for all people, not just Jews.

Verse 30 How was Jesus both before and after John? He existed before John (verse 1 – from the beginning) but was physically born after him.

Verses 32-34 How did John know who Jesus was? The Holy Spirit revealed it to him by descending on Jesus like a dove and staying on Him.

Verses 35-42 Perhaps the greatest reflection on John’s character is the way in which he encouraged his disciples to cease following him and begin following Jesus as the Messiah. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he identified Him to his disciples as the “Lamb of God.” The two disciples with John at that time left him and set out after Jesus. This is precisely what John had been called to do—prepare men to follow the Messiah.

How did each of these men come to Jesus?

Andrew – by the word of John the Baptist

Simon – brought by his brother, Andrew

Philip – called by Jesus

Nathanael – invited by Philip

Application: There is no singular way that people are called to Jesus. Every Christian is to introduce others to the Savior.

Nathanael was prejudiced against Nazareth. How did Jesus deal with this? Jesus gently got his attention by commenting on his honest character. Jesus was not condescending or judgmental.

On what basis did Jesus select the twelve Apostles? God’s choice of the twelve was His sovereign choice, as He has always chosen those to enter into fellowship with Himself. It was not because of what they could do for His kingdom—not because of some untapped potential. He chose the ordinary so that it would be very clear that He was the source of their later success and power. Acts 4:13 says “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that *these men had been with Jesus.*” He works through the weak so He gets the glory. There is no room for boasting.

Verse 43 What did Jesus require of these men? What did He tell them to do? Follow. He took them just the way they were and made them into the men He desired. They were called to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, to follow Him, and to be with Him. Eventually, some of them would do great things for Him, but there were no prerequisites.

Application: How is our purpose/mission like the disciples? What does Jesus want us to do? Jesus calls us to believe in Him as the Son of God, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. But He also calls us to follow Him, to be with Him, to have fellowship and communion with Him, and to be available so He can work through us.

Verse 51 What does Jesus mean by “the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man?” This probably refers to the dream in Genesis 28:12, where Jacob saw a ladder from earth to heaven, and the angels ascending and descending upon it. Jesus is saying that *He* is the ladder, the link between heaven and earth. He is the way.

“Son of Man” is a reference to Daniel 7:13-14, where the King of Glory coming to judge the world is called the Son of Man. Jesus used this title often because in His day it was a Messianic title free from political and nationalistic sentiment. When a Jewish person of that time heard “King” or “Christ” they often thought of a political or military savior. Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man over eighty times in the Gospels.

MEMORIZE: John 1:34