

Jesus, Humility, and the Greatest Man who Ever Lived—John the Baptist

Mark 1:1-8; Matthew 11:11

This morning I invited you to consider Jesus, humility—and the greatest man who ever lived up until Christ.

The supreme lesson of John the Baptist's life is humility. And there can be no more vital message that we all need to hear than that God HATES pride. God uses John because he was willing to obey the Lord and by the power of the Holy Spirit in his life cultivate humility.

PRIDE IS AN EPIDEMIC

James Bjoanstad writes:

At one time, most Christians believed that to have a close relationship with God, a person should magnify God, deny himself and the pleasures of this world, repent and confess his sins, and live a holy and separated life. Their heroes were missionaries who gave up everything to serve God and martyrs who suffered because of their faith.

Today, it's becoming a different story. Many Christians believe that to have a close relationship with God, a person should realize the importance of himself as God intended, pursue his dreams and aspirations, and become affluent and successful. Their heroes are those celebrities and self-made individuals who happened to be Christians.

Behind this new gospel stands a variety of distinguished teachers, preachers, and evangelists proclaiming a variety of ways to attain prosperity and success. But examining their theological models and points of emphasis reveals one common element--they are simply not biblical.¹

Why not do a spelling lesson with me?

¹ Moody Monthly, 11/86, p. 19-20.

Let's notice together that **I** is right in the middle of some very big things in life.

First spell "sin" with me: s-**I**-n.

Now spell "pride" with me: pr-**I**-de.

Now how about "anxiety": anx-**I**-ety.

Here is the best one, spell Satan's original name with me, it was "Lucifer", spell that with me: luc-**I**-fer.

So that **I** is in the middle of all my sins, all my pride, all my anxieties, and all the time doing the will of the Devil!

No matter what else you do in your life, if humility is not yours then God will resist everything else you and I do. God is moment-by-moment in a personal warfare against pride in the life of believers. It is the sin He hates most, sees first, and wants us to likewise hate.

No saint more fully or greatly pointed to God than when a simple man dressed like a peasant, after a lifetime of discipline and self denial thundered from the wilderness, "Its time to look at Jesus!"

By using John, God Demonstrates the essence of true humility in John the Baptist-- because the key to God's blessing is humility

He has been prepared by God as a man alone, a man apart, a great man, greater than had not been born from among women Jesus said. Why? What had refined and shaped this man to such a point as that? Listen to the testimony of John and we will hear his secret.

He Must Increase

Please turn with me to John 1 and trace again those events God's Word records that reveal John's character as he sought to serve the Lord as His humble servant.

The key to being constantly showered with grace is humility. Christ must increase and I must decrease. That is the essence of humility.

Humility produces spiritual blessing. Just as every sin starts in pride, every virtue begins in humility. Humility allows us to see ourselves as we are, because it shows us before God as He is.

The life of John the Baptist gives seven principles we may apply in determining humility.²

² These ideas are from Thomas Watson as quoted by MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Matthew 5, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983

First, John the Baptist was humble because he used his life as a ministry to others.

John 1:22-27 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."

GOD SAW TRUE SERVANTHOOD IN JOHN THE BAPTIST

God is looking for servants. II Chronicles 16:9 says that tonight God's eyes are running up and down the world looking for those whose whole heart seeks Him. They will be willing to be voices. God needs voices and John the Baptist was willing to be one for God.

Note how Mark 1:2-3 quotes from both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 in those opening verses. The words *messenger* and *voice* refer to John the Baptist, the prophet God sent to prepare the way for His Son (Matt. 3; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:19-34).

In ancient times, before a king visited any part of his realm, a messenger was sent before him to prepare the way. This included both repairing the roads and preparing the people. By calling the nation to repentance, John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah and Malachi join voices in declaring that Jesus Christ is the Lord, Jehovah God.

Second, John the Baptist was humble because he closed his mouth to complaining.

*John 3:22-27a After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. 24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" 27 **John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.***

Without realizing it, John's disciples were putting him into a situation of competing against the Lord Jesus! "All men come to Him!" (John 3:26) sounds like a wail of despair.

It is interesting to note that four of the greatest men in the Bible faced this problem of comparison and competition:

- Moses (Num. 11:26–30),
- John the Baptist (John 3:26–30),
- Jesus (Luke 9:46–50), and
- Paul (Phil. 1:15–18).

How did John the Baptist handle this controversy? He didn't complain. He wasn't proud so he didn't grasp on to ministry. He knew that he was just a voice and what ever God wanted to do with that voice was great with him. But as we see below, this controversy revealed a deeper level of humility in John's life.

Third, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his will to God's.

*John 3:27b John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing **unless it has been given to him from heaven.**"*

John saw that his duty in life was to obey God.

Whatever the cost or discomfort, it did not matter. All he wanted was to be a voice for God, a tool in His Hand and allow what God would give him from Heaven to be his sacred duty. And that simple, child-like faith, and humble service are what Christ's words about John being great are reflecting.

John the Baptist had a deeply held conviction a conviction: all ministry and blessing come from God, so there can be no competition (John 3:27). Paul would have agreed with this (1 Cor. 3:1–9; 4:1–7). Since all our gifts and opportunities come from the Lord, then whatever He does with those gifts through us is totally His will—but the end result must always be that He alone must get the glory.

Fourth, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his eyes to Christ,

John 3:30a "He must increase..."

John the Baptist had a longer for Christ to be magnified. He wanted to get all of the attention onto Christ and off of himself. That is the heart's desire of the humble. Proud people want recognition, the humble want all the glory and honor and recognition to go the Lord.

In the process, as Paul says, "with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord...being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

The supreme desire of those who minister humbly in the power of the Holy Spirit, staying close to the Cross, and remembering to stay crucified to self is to become more and more like Jesus. He increases, we see Him more and more clearly.

1 John 3:2-3 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Fifth, John the Baptist was humble because he closed his heart to self-seeking.

John 3:30b "...but I must decrease."

Humility destroys self-absorption, self-preoccupation, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance. My desire become nothing compared to Christ's which become everything.

This humility is nowhere more beautifully expressed than when Paul confessed:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Sixth, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his heart to spend much time in prayer.

Luke 11:1 Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

GOD SAW TRUE PRAYERFULNESS IN JOHN THE BAPTIST

We usually think of John the Baptist as a prophet and martyr, and yet our Lord's disciples remembered him as a man of prayer. John was a "miracle baby," filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born, and yet he had to pray. He was privileged to introduce the Messiah to Israel, and yet he had to pray. Jesus said that John was the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28), and yet John had to depend on prayer. If prayer was that vital to a man who had these many advantages, how much more important it ought to be to us who do not have these advantages!

John's disciples had to pray and Jesus' disciples wanted to learn better how to pray. They did not ask the Master to teach them how to preach or do great signs; they asked Him to teach them to pray. We today sometimes think that we would be better

Christians if only we had been with Jesus when He was on earth, but this is not likely. The disciples were with Him and yet they failed many times! They could perform miracles, and yet they wanted to learn to pray.

But the greatest argument for the priority of prayer is the fact that our Lord was a Man of prayer. Luke shows more of Christ's prayers than any other of the Gospels. Luke records seven times Christ prays: He prayed at His baptism (Luke 3:21), before He chose the Twelve (Luke 6:12), when the crowds increased (Luke 5:16), before He asked the Twelve for their confession of faith (Luke 9:18), and at His Transfiguration (Luke 9:29), at Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46), and on the Cross (Luke 23:34).

If Jesus who was perfect, the very Son of God, needed so much prayer during "the days of His flesh" (Heb. 5:7), then how much more do we need to pray!

Seventh, John the Baptist was humble because he opened his mouth to praise.

Mark 1:7-8 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.8 "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Nothing is more powerful about humility than the increased freedom in worship. Remember how Paul described true believers as humble-worshipers? Those two, humility and worship seem to be tied.

Look at Philippians 3:3.

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

Worship flows from a humble heart. This is Paul enlarging upon this worship filled life of the humble. Paul is saying that worship flows from the life emptied of selfishness and pride. When we are liberated from the tyranny of our own self-driven agenda and onto Christ's we find worship rising from our lives.

Much worship these days is so self-generated, self-focused, and self-exalting. From musicians to performers there seems to be a drive to be recognized, seen, honored and sought after. But isn't all that what the Lord also desires? Isn't pride competing with God for the glory?

So Paul is here giving us a ...

Lesson in Godly Humility