

## **John on Jesus - John the Baptizer**

**Sign Title: John the Baptizer**

**April 22, 2012**

Good morning Faith family. I would also like to welcome those who are connecting through the Internet. Each week I hear of more people who connect to Faith Church live through the Internet. That is exciting! While there is no substitute for gathering with God's people to be part of a local church, it is good, when you are away, to stay connected to your church family.

This morning, we are back in the Gospel of John. We have a lot of ground to cover. Two weeks ago we didn't finish studying the introduction of John. I want to begin by finishing that, then we will study through John 1:34 to study John the Baptist. Get out your outlines. We are getting right to business.

### **When you see Jesus, you see God.**

**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (ESV)**

Two weeks ago, when we studied this book, we learned John was talking about Jesus in these first verses using verbal camouflage. He kept using the term "Word" and describing Jesus' relationship to God. That was a term both the Hebrews and the Greeks respected. In verse 14, he begins to pull off the camouflage and tell us who the Word is. It is Jesus.

As we look at this, there is some fun here. Notice it says the Word became flesh. The one who created the universe, created life and created purpose didn't just look human. He pressed all of himself into a human body. This summer, when you buy a steak for the grill, understand that the creator of time, space, life and purpose pressed all of himself into a piece of meat, a human

body. He completely identified with us. He understands what it means to be weak, to be sick, to be tired, to have a rash. Many people in that day thought Jesus just looked human but he was actually a hologram. John says that isn't true. God actually became a piece of meat. He didn't just look like one. He completely identified with us.

Interestingly, the word "became" in the phrase "became flesh" is in the aorist tense in the Greek. All that means is it is a completed action *that cannot be undone*. The second person of the Trinity, who made everything, humbled himself to become a piece of meat *forever!*

When Jesus rose from the grave and received his glorified body, it was a glorified body but it was a real piece of meat. It was a real body. It could be touched. Jesus ate food with that body. You could run your fingers through God's hair. Jesus has a real body right now in heaven, and he will have one forever. That is how much Jesus identified with us.

John also says we have seen his glory. In other words, John is an eyewitness to Jesus. This isn't secondhand information. It is straight from the source.

Let's skip verse 15, because we will cover it later this morning.

**Jesus is the giver of every good thing.**

**For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. John 1:16 (ESV)**

Last week, we were reading this part of the Bible as a family. I asked the kids who gave them dinner. Of course, they said God gave it to them. I told them their answer was wrong. That grabbed their attention. I asked them who

gave them their health, their toys and who provided our home. I asked them who gave them every good thing and, of course, they said, "God." To further freak them out, I told them they were wrong. Technically, the one who gives us every good thing is Jesus. He is the source of every good thing. The way the text reads, we are standing in an ocean where the waves come crashing over us. One wave washes over us and just when that one finishes, its twin is right behind dousing us again. Life is waves of grace. That is what Jesus Christ is to us. He is the one who gives us wave upon wave of grace in our life. Any good thing we have is directly from Jesus. Life, health, a car, a family, a home --- it is all Jesus' grace.

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17 (ESV)

Now he connects with the Jews. They had great respect for God's law because it came from God. According to the book of Hebrews, the Jews believed the law was given to Moses through angels who mediated it from the hand of God to Moses. John is helping the Jews get it straight in their heads that while the law is to be highly regarded and respected, it is nothing compared to what they have in Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. The law shows us how messed up we are; Jesus shows us how loved we are. Jesus is the grace the law tells us we need.

I love the way John puts it all together.

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. John 1:18 (ESV)

If you want to see God, look at Jesus. That is how completely Jesus is identified with God. Yet, he also completely identified with us. He is a real piece of meat. If you want to see what God would do, look at Jesus. Jesus is God humbling himself to put himself into a form we can understand and a way he can communicate his love for us by dying on the cross. It is all about Jesus.

### **John the Baptizer**

Now John makes a hard shift. He moves from teaching the big picture about Jesus and theology. He now anchors the story of Jesus in history. For the rest of this morning, we are in this section. John the Apostle begins by telling us about John the Baptist. Just so you know, technically his name is John the Baptizer. He was a baptizer. He was not a Southern Baptist. Before we get into the text, let me give you his background. This is a summary of his life and ministry from all four gospels.

#### **His parents**

John's dad, Zechariah, was a small town priest. His father was the rough equivalent of a small church pastor. John grew up as a pastor's kid. John's mom was a woman named Elizabeth. His mom and dad were good solid righteous folks with no skeletons in their closets. They were simple, honest people serving in small church ministry. The problem was, they had no kids. They prayed and hoped for kids their all their lives, but God never answered their prayers. I am sure they were frustrated because it felt like God wasn't listening. They were past child-bearing age and were now just about ready for the retirement home.

Since most nursing homes don't have childcare, we can safely assume they were convinced God blew off their request.

In that day, having children, especially for women, was important. The more children you had, the more a woman felt God's blessing on her life. The happy family didn't have 2.3 kids, instead, they drove 15 passenger vans. More kids equaled more blessings. Zechariah and Elizabeth felt they missed out.

As part of Zechariah's job, he occasionally served at the temple in Jerusalem. While there, he was chosen by lots to offer the once-a-year incense. This was literally a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I am sure old Zechariah was excited. This was like winning the lottery. He got to offer incense before God. While he was offering the incense, things didn't go as planned. An angel shows up. God has heard their prayers. They will have a son, and they are to call him John. He is going to be an amazing man. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will be a powerful preacher who will turn many people to the Lord. What more could the pastor of a small church ask for than to have a kid who not only follows in his steps but exceeds anything his father has accomplished?

There are a couple things we should notice. All those years Zechariah and Elizabeth were praying for a child, God wasn't blowing them off. He knew what he was doing. He knew he would answer their prayers in an amazing way by giving them an amazing son at an amazing time in their life. By not answering their prayers earlier in life, God was actually being good to them. He was planning on giving them more than they asked for!

All the times we pray to God asking him to be good and he doesn't answer our prayers in our time, we need to remember, that doesn't mean God isn't listening. It means we need a wide-angle lens. Many times, he doesn't answer our prayers in ways we expect because he is doing something better than we imagined.

Now, I don't know about Zechariah's state of mind at this point. I think most of us would listen to whatever an angel told us to do. That isn't Zechariah. He is old and stubborn. He doesn't believe his wife will conceive. As a result, the angel calls him on the carpet for his unbelief. First, he tells Zechariah his name, it is Gabriel. By the way, Gabriel is not just an ordinary angel. This is the Payton Manning of the angels. This is this is the all-star angel who does the important announcements. Because of his unbelief, Zechariah will not be able to speak or hear during the nine months of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

You have to laugh when you read the Bible. Zechariah comes out from offering the incense and he is all hand signals. You have to picture this. In the Greek, the word mute implies he didn't just lose the ability to speak, but he also lost the ability to hear. You can picture how strange he is acting.

Some of you think this isn't too bad because he could write. When he was with the other priests, I am sure he wrote things down. Imagine what it was like when he came home to Elizabeth. If she was like many women in that day, she wasn't educated. She couldn't read or write. Combine that with his inability to speak and hear and everything in the house is a game of charades for nine

months. You have to laugh when you picture this. I am sure the angel Gabriel was laughing so hard in heaven his side was hurting.

The text tells us John was filled with the Holy Spirit even while in his mother's womb. This is fun. The moment we are born again is the moment the Holy Spirit comes into our life. For many of us, that is a dramatic moment that happens later in life. Some of us grew up in Christian homes. The experience of trusting Christ was not as dramatic because we grew into faith. The fun part is John is actually born again *before he is born*. This is amazing. If you are wondering if a child is a human being before birth, this should answer your question.

The Bible tells us Elizabeth got together with Mary, Jesus' mother. While Elizabeth's pregnancy was miraculous because of her old age, Mary's pregnancy was miraculous because she was a virgin. That was a first. When they got together, John begins jumping for joy while still in his mother. This is an incredible picture of how God's Spirit can fill a life even before someone is born.

John was born a few months before Jesus, and his parents raised him to know and love God. I am sure Zechariah and Elizabeth did a good job teaching the Bible at home. They did a good job telling John that God loved him and promised to use him for his glory. They did a good job telling him how long they waited for him and that he was the answer to their prayer. They taught him plenty of the Bible because Gabriel told them John was going to be a preacher. That didn't mean John was a perfect kid. He had some really bizarre habits.

## John's ministry

John grows up with this great set of parents who love God and teach him the Bible, but he is a back-to-nature buff. When he gets on his own, he ends up living in the woods. He wears animal skins and eats bugs with honey, which is an interesting diet. I am sure rotten bugs give you a terrible case of halitosis, not to mention what all the sugar did to his teeth. He had all that without a dental plan! I picture John as this guy with a huge afro and this independent personality who refuses to be pressed into society's mold.

All of a sudden, around age 30, John gets the call of God. Instead of escaping like a hermit from society, he begins to preach and confront society, sin and all the trash in people's lives. John comes out of the woods with his big afro, bugs in his teeth, wearing animal skin clothing, licking the honey off his lips, and he starts this confrontational preaching ministry in local campgrounds. He calls everybody to repent of their sins. He doesn't pretend some are good and others are bad. According to John, everybody is messed up. We all need to confess our sin and seek God's mercy. After people confess their sins, he baptizes them. Confess your sins and under the water you go to get wet with John.

Picture this guy. He looks like an act from the circus because he makes his own clothing from roadkill. He has hygiene issues. He yells at everyone about their sins, commanding them to repent. Given John's personality, I don't picture him using a soft psycho-babble style. He is a man filled with courage and honesty. He wants people to confess the truth about their lives and seek God's mercy. Tell the truth about the money you took; confess your lustful thoughts.



Admit what you said to your wife last night was sin. Confess it publicly, seek God's mercy, then under the water you go seeking God's mercy and to be washed clean.

As we know, John, the back-to-nature, bugs and sugar guy with clothes made from roadkill, becomes an incredible preacher, just like Gabriel promised. He becomes insanely popular, a complete hip cultural sensation.

Some people love him because it feels good to finally confess sin and seek God's forgiveness for it. Many people have sins they carry for years as dark secrets that fill them with shame. It is good to confess sin and seek God's mercy.

Others are not so happy about John's in-your-face style. John is like an umpire; he calls it like he sees it. It doesn't matter who is swinging at the plate.

One of the guys he calls on the carpet for sin is Herod. Herod is the ruler of Judea. The guy with clothes made from roadkill who eats bugs takes on the high class ruler of his day. Herod is part of the Roman mafia. Dirty politics was the family business for generations.

Herod had a brother with an extremely beautiful wife. Like most dirty politicians, he wasn't in the habit of denying himself what he wanted. While on vacation at his brother's house, he became interested in her. He focused his energies on seducing her. Seeing more money and power, she agreed that if Herod divorced his current wife, she would divorce Herod's brother to marry him. It sounds like the headline of a tabloid magazine, but that is what happened.

John, the guy with absolutely no fear, called Herod to repent of sleeping with his brother's wife.

The Bible tells us Herod didn't like hearing he needed to repent. Thankfully though, he was also captivated by John's preaching. Plus he was afraid of the large group of people that loved John, so he just put up with hearing the rebukes he deserved. Herod's new wife, Herodias, was not as patient. She didn't like being called an adulterous, sexual deviant in public. Since her new husband wouldn't do something about John, she figured out a way to manipulate him.

She waited until Herod was throwing a great party and was drunk. Herodias sent in her daughter to do a little dance before Herod and the guests. We need to do a little mental investigation here. History tells us Herodias was insanely beautiful, and she knew how to use it. I am willing to bet her daughter also had looks that could kill, except she was a younger and more attractive. I am guessing mom also taught her how to use those good looks to make men melt, especially with her little almost-naked dance.

Herodias knows her husband is controlled by his lusts and he will do anything for a beautiful girl who has almost nothing on, especially when he is drinking. That is exactly what happens. Salome, Herodias' daughter, does her half-naked dance, and Herod goes bananas. In a moment of complete lust, he offers to give her anything she wants, up to half his kingdom. By the nature of that offer, you know he is a man who is drunk and has a lust issue. Mother and daughter consult and the request comes back. Salome wants John the Baptist's

head on a platter. Herod is caught by his scheming wife. He can't embarrass himself in front of his guests. He commands it to be done. In comes the silver platter looking like it should contain a thanksgiving turkey. It is the main dish people are looking forward to like Thanksgiving. When they take off the cover, it is John's warm bloody head rolling around under the cover. Everyone covers their mouth and runs to the bathroom to upchuck. The only one smiling is one sick, demented, manipulative, adulterous woman.

That is the end of John the Baptist. That is the end of the one son of promise. That is the end of the guy who was a great preacher and turned the heart of a nation in repentance to God. He barely got a year in and he is dead because he wasn't afraid to tell some sick demented people to repent. When you die like that in the public eye, it tends to immortalize you in people's minds. People remember you. They look up to you. In this day, *everybody* remembers John as a hero.

I tell you this background because you need to know it to understand our text. John's ministry didn't last long but it changed society while it lasted. He was considered a prophet like nothing seen in the last 400 years of history. Everybody knew him and loved him because he died as a hero.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke write their Gospels. They tell the story of John the Baptist at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. When the apostle John writes the Gospel of John, he doesn't rehash the information from the other Gospels because everybody knows it. What John the Apostle talks about is how John the Baptist, someone everyone knew, loved and respected, responded to Jesus. If

you want to start talking about Jesus, start with John the Baptist because everyone loves him.

### **What did John the Baptist have to say about Jesus?**

**And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" John 1:19 (ESV)**

Put yourself back in the ancient world. There is this guy who comes out of the woods and starts this amazing preaching ministry overnight. He has bug breath and lots of cavities. He needs help with his roadkill wardrobe, but people love him. When you hear his father was a pastor, what will you do? The local clergy will send a delegation to speak with him. That is exactly what happens. The priests and Levites send people to ask John who he is and about his ministry. This is understandable.

**He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." John 1:20 (ESV)**

At this time, there was great Messianic expectation. People were expecting God would send his Messiah. Many people expected the Christ would be someone to free them from the bondage of Rome. John had a great opportunity for power and influence. He had leverage. He had followers. Everybody listened to him. This was a chance for him to get it wrong. It was a chance to think his popularity was about him and because of him. I am sure somebody wanted to start selling a new John the Baptist chic clothing line and somebody else wanted to market a John the Baptist action figure doll. Verse 20 tells us the condition of his heart. He understood he wasn't the Christ. He wasn't

the one who could fix anyone or who could save anyone. All he could do was help people see their sins, then he had to point them to Christ.

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." John 1:21 (ESV)

Since they haven't been able to figure him out, they asked him if he was Elijah. If you remember from your Old Testament, Elijah was a prophet that didn't die but was taken directly home to be with God. Malachi 4:5 says that God would send Elijah before the Christ. John looked like Elijah with his back-to-nature clothing. Here was another opportunity for John the Baptist to identify himself as a somebody. A little name dropping would give him significance. He refused to do it.

They then asked him if he was "the Prophet." In Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Moses talks about a prophet that will come that the people should listen to. They are wondering if John is that guy. John has this incredible ministry. He is an amazing preacher. All he does is come out of the woods to preach and his thing takes off. He has chance after chance to identify himself as somebody who is important, but he keeps blowing it off and saying he is nobody important. It is a great chance for pride.

So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John 1:22 (ESV)

They are trying to force John to give them something. I don't blame this delegation. They are the investigative reporters. They have to come up with some conclusion for their bosses on who John the Baptist is, because everybody knows God is working in him and through him. Society is changing. Mobs of

people were repenting of sin and turning to God. It is just wild. The investigative reports can't go home and shrug their shoulders.

John gives them an answer for their bosses.

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." John 1:23 (ESV)

In that day, they didn't have paved superhighways with road crews wearing orange to work on their roads. When a king traveled, he sent a runner boy in advance to call out saying, "Prepare the way! The king is coming." The people would get excited. They cleaned things up like a woman cleans house before company comes over. They filled in the pot holes. They washed the sidewalks. They took the garbage out of the front yard. Then they stood by the side of the road in anticipation of the king like they were waiting for a fourth of July parade. That is who John identified himself as. He was just a runner boy. He was a nobody. He prepared the way for a somebody. All he was doing was helping people get ready for the main event. He was giving people the chance to prepare for somebody who was important.

(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. John 1:24–28 (ESV)

The investigative group can't figure this out. One group of them was sent from the Pharisees. These guys were the hard-core conservatives of the bunch. If you look at the Pharisees, these were the ones who took the Bible literally. They took the Bible more seriously than most others in their day. These were like

AWANA leaders. In one sense, they were the good guys. In another sense, they turned into bad guys. They got so bound up in literalness and figuring everything out that they started making rules, limitations and regulations. They became control freaks. They told John the Baptist that if he didn't have the proper credentials, if he was not Elijah come back from the dead or the prophet or the Christ and he was not certified by their group, he was conducting an illegal baptismal ministry. These guys thought they had God all figured out. That is scary. Any time we think we have God figured out, we better smell the coffee.

Why were these guys freaking out? There is a deeper level to the story. These guys were fine with the Gentiles, the heathens of the world, needing to repent and get baptized. The problem is, John didn't stop there. He said *everybody* needed to repent and seek God's forgiveness. Even the ultra-religious tight-wad Pharisees who spent the last 50 years in the synagogue needed to repent of their sins and get dunked. The Pharisaical types didn't like being told to repent. It hurt their pride. It made them look bad. As we learned, John was like an umpire. He called it like he saw it. He didn't care who he offended.

He said, "If you think my little baptismal ministry is something to get worked up over, wait until you see the guy I am preparing the way for. I am not even worthy to untie his sandals.

In that day, transportation took place by animals. Animals have an exhaust pipe. They emit more than carbon-dioxide. The streets were filled with poop. When you walked the streets, what do you think your feet was covered in?

If you have stepped in a steaming hot dog pile, you know what people felt like every day.

The job of the lowest slave in a house was to wash the guests' feet and take off their sandals. John, the hip, cultural sensation that massive crowds followed, said he is not even worthy to take off the shoes of the guy he was preparing the way for. He was not worthy enough to empty his porta-potty.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29 (ESV)"

The next day, John was busy baptizing and calling people to repentance. He saw Jesus and made this announcement. Now for a Jew, this is an earth shattering statement. John grew up as a priest's son. He knew all about lambs. People sin. They confessed their sins, and a lamb is slaughtered. In the temple, there was literally a river of blood from slaughtered lambs that ran out the back into the Kidron Valley. This was a hot climate. There was no refrigeration. It smelled of rotten flesh and congealing blood. In the temple, the smell of death was everywhere. John said that Jesus was the lamb from God. Jesus was there to take away the sin of the world once and for all by his death. This was a huge statement!

John said, "All I was doing was helping you see your sin, but Jesus is the only one who can do something about your sin. He is the one whose death can actually forgive your sin. He is the one who takes away all the guilt, all the shame and all the despair. He is the once-for-all final lamb that will be slaughtered for all of the sins you will ever commit. He is a sufficient sacrifice for



all of the sins that will ever be committed.” That is why John said he was a nobody and Jesus was a somebody.

This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” John 1:30–34 (ESV)

John said, even though I grew up with him, I didn’t know he was God. I picture them growing up and John being a little older and bigger. He was able to steal toys from Jesus when the families got together over the holidays. Then John was a little freaked out because he realized he was stealing toys from God. In fact, John couldn’t get it into his head the identity of Jesus until God supernaturally visited him and told him he would see the spirit descend on somebody he baptized. That is the Christ. That was the guy he was preparing the way for. I bet John freaked out when it turned out to be his cousin!

So if you were a Jew or a Greek, you loved John the Baptist. Almost everybody knew John the Baptist because he was such a cultural hit. John the Apostle said, “You need to know what John the Baptist says about Jesus. John the Baptist was adamant that Jesus is the Son of God! Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

### **Why was nobody greater than John?**

There is a lot of application from this in your small group work sheet. As we wind up, I want us to apply just one part of John’s life from a phrase we find in Matthew 11:11.

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist... Matthew 11:11 (ESV)

Jesus said nobody was greater than John the Baptist. That is a strong statement. That would make him greater than Abraham, greater than Moses, greater than Elijah and greater than Samuel the prophet. That is some tough competition. What made John the Baptist so great?

Here are a few thoughts.

**Courage** - I don't think many people are as courageous as John the Baptist. He had no money, no sponsors and no help. He only had God's call upon his life, God's spirit in his heart and the Bible in his head. That was enough. He didn't care if people liked it or how much it cost him, he was willing to confront people about their sins. I know when I need to talk with people about an issue of sin in their life, it is hard. It is scary. It takes courage to do it. John the Baptist had a ton of courage. But I want you to notice how John confronted sin. He didn't put himself over people. He confronted them in love, not arrogance. He confronted because he cared about people. He knew that it is only when people admit sin that they can repent of it and turn to Jesus. His courage eventually cost him his life but everyone was thankful he had it. They were thankful he loved them enough to speak the truth.

**Humility** - I think it is hard to find somebody as humble as John. Here was a guy that everybody loves. They wanted him to be somebody great. Instead, he said he wasn't even worthy to scrape the poop off Jesus' feet. Compared to Jesus, John was a nobody. Jesus is the somebody. That is great humility.

This week, when we think about what greatness looks like in the eyes of God, remember that it has something to do with the combination of courage and humility we see in the life of John.

The best way to begin to seek greatness in God's eyes is to have the courage to admit our sins to God and the humility to admit you can't fix it. Only Jesus can forgive you and change you. That is courage and humility in action.

### Prayer

Jesus, thank you for the example of John the Baptist. Thank you for the chance to study his life and learn that no matter how popular, how admired or how sought after we become in this life, we are really nothing. Jesus, you are everything. Thank you for the example of how to follow Jesus we see in John the Baptist. Help us to be courageous in admitting our sins. Help us to be lovingly courageous when we talk to our friends about sin. Amen.



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