



The Good News

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How was John the Baptizer “greater”?

By Michael McCleary

When we consider the man known as “John the baptizer”, we often remember the events that took place in his life, such as baptizing Jesus or being beheaded by Herod. We remember how his birth was arranged by God much like Jesus’. We find that John fulfilled the prophecies of **Isa. 40:3** and **Mal. 3:1** as the messenger that was to come in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord. We read in **Matt. 11:11** that Jesus says, “*Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist...*” Why does Jesus say this? We read in **Lk. 1:15-17** that God foreknew John would be “*great in the sight of the Lord*”. In what ways was John “greater” than others? Let us consider the following aspects of John’s “greatness”:

John’s greatness was in the purpose that God had given him to fulfill – We read in **Lk. 1:15**, “*He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.*” We read in **Lk. 1:80** that John grew in the spirit and remained in the deserts until it was time for him to begin teaching concerning repentance toward God. Finally, “*...the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins...*” (**Lk. 3:2-3**). John’s willingness to perform this purpose, just as determined and faithful as Jesus was in His purpose, made John great in the sight of the Lord.

Connected to his purpose, John’s greatness also lies in the subject that he was inspired to teach: repentance – As John preached to the people around Jordan, multitudes came to hear him and to be baptized of him unto repentance. These people had received the teaching that John preached: people must change their hearts and actions if they ever hope to receive forgiveness. In doing this, John “prepared the way” for Jesus to come and teach concerning

forgiveness and the character of one who wishes to receive it.

John’s greatness was in the character he manifested – John was very humble, calling attention at one point to the fact that the Messiah “*must increase, and I must decrease.*” (**Jn. 3:30**). He also was very zealous, going so far as to call attention to the hypocrisy of the multitudes, calling them a “*brood of vipers*” (**Lk. 3:7**). There is no recording of an instance where John committed any sin. And although we can be sure he was not perfect, he conducted himself in such a way as to not bring reproach upon the name of God or the teaching. Finally, we see how faithful John was in the teaching of the Law when he pointed out Herod’s sin in having his brother’s wife. This ultimately led to John’s beheading.

In all these ways, we see John’s greatness. Yet, Jesus says something else at the end of **Matt. 11:11**, “*...notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*” How can this be so? Jesus knew that John would never live to see the end of Jesus’ own life or the establishment of the church. John the baptizer would never be a member of the kingdom but would die obediently under the Old Law. In saying this, Jesus points out just how “great” it is to be baptized for the remission of sins and to be added into the church and “conveyed” into the kingdom of God. Are you a member of the kingdom today? If so, are you living as John lived, in complete service to the Lord? Let us use John’s example to make us stronger!