

## “John the Baptist”

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by Bill Crews

John the Baptist did well the work God assigned him. Not one stain upon his character or his work is recorded in the Scriptures. He offered no little testimony as to the greatness of the Messiah, whose harbinger he was. Said John, *“He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear,”* (Matthew 3:11), and *“Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world,”* (John 1 :29), and *“After me cometh a man who is become before me; for he was before me,”* and *“This is the Son of God”* (John 1 :34). One of the reasons John came baptizing was that Jesus the Christ might be made manifest to Israel because he was thus manifested to John (John 1:31; see Matthew 3: 13-17).

To those who became his disciples John successfully bore witness of and identified Jesus as the Christ.

For a time the ministries of the two overlapped. The work of Christ began to overshadow that of John.

Word began to spread that Jesus was making and baptizing (NOTE: Jesus preached the same message that John did – Matthew 3:2; 4:17, to the same Jews that John did, and baptized them for the same reason that John did) more disciples than John (John 4:1-2). When this was pointed out to John, the faithful prophet of God said, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (John 3:30).

John’s faith knew no wavering, and his courage no fear. In the course of his preaching career he had occasion to oppose the monarch, Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea. Herod, with her consent, had taken Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, to be his own wife. Each had divorced a previous spouse. John said, *“It is not lawful for thee to have her.”* This opposition to evil in high places led to John’s being imprisoned and then beheaded (Matthew 14:1-12). The martyrdom of John touched Jesus in no small way.

The greatness and excellence of John is shown by Jesus in Matthew 11 :7-11. John was not a reed shaken in the wind. He was not a man in soft raiment. He was a prophet and more than a prophet. Jesus said, *“Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”* Can you fathom this statement? Many great men, all born of women, had arisen, and none was greater than John. None excelled his greatness. But that one who is *little* (KJV – *least*) in the kingdom is greater than John. How can this be? Very simple. John was not in the kingdom; this was an honor he could not enjoy. The kingdom had not yet come. It was simply *“at hand.”* And John died before it came.

Baptist preachers (and this had nothing to do with *“John the Baptist”*; he was called *“the Baptist”* because he baptized people; he was never called *“a Baptist,”* nor were his disciples) tell their people that John founded the church, the Lord’s church, or, at least, that the Lord’s church had its beginning in the ministry of John. Such is simply not true. The kingdom and the church are identical in the Scriptures, and the church did not exist in John’s day. John was not in it. He identified himself as the friend of the bridegroom and Christ as the bridegroom (John 3:29). Christ, the bridegroom, had the bride, not John, and that bride did not exist while John lived. Some time after the death of John (see Matthew 14) Jesus declared, *“I will build my church”* (Matthew 16: 18). It was in the future then, and did not become a reality until the Pentecost after the Lord’s death (Acts 2).

Had the church been established during the life of John, it would have been a church without a redeeming sacrifice (Ephesians 1:7), without the Holy Spirit to give it life (Acts 2:1-4), without the blood with which it was purchased (Acts 20:28), without a head (Ephesians 1 :20-23), and without the new testament, the gospel, God’s power to save (Hebrews 9:16-17; Romans 1:16).

Surely those who now enjoy the blessings of citizenship in the kingdom of Christ, the church of our Lord should think often of the debt of gratitude they owe to John, the man whom God chose to prepare the way for Christ and His everlasting kingdom. He was a man of conviction, determination, trust in God, courage and purpose.

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