

“TO LIVE AS CHRIST”

John 1:19-28

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INTRODUCTION

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” What a powerful truth! The Christian faith is built upon an AWESOME Person—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God become flesh, the God-Man.

After he became man, He lived among “us”. His disciples “beheld His glory” and testified as to His true identity as God in flesh. They pointed out that He was the “unique” (one-of-a-kind) Son of God--the Son who from all eternity and even into the present, maintains the most intimate relationship with His Father (“in the bosom of the Father”), the Son who has for the first time fully explained God the Father through His person, His deeds, and His teaching.

Today, we can truly know God—but only through Jesus Christ. Jesus makes life meaningful—He is life’s purpose and gives those who know Him a true future. What or who are you living for?

MONEY, JOB, HOUSE, POSSESSIONS, SPOUSE, CHILDREN, FAME OR SUCCESS, ACHIEVEMENTS?

If any of these were suddenly removed from you, what would your life be? Would your life still be meaningful and worth living. I repeat, **WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR?**

In today’s passage we find a servant of God who found the true secret of life in Christ. John the Baptist (baptizer) discovered that his whole purpose and value in life was in relationship to the one he would introduce—Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, the Savior of the World. He refused to find his value or meaning in himself or in His achievements.

We can learn an important lesson from John who early on discovered the lesson that Paul later adopted—“**FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST.**”

I. POSITION IN LIFE (19-23)

John had been sent to announce the coming of Christ. Note in verse 19 “*the witness of John.*” He had a unique and very important responsibility. No one had ever been given such a great opportunity and privilege. Jesus Himself said of John that he was the greatest ever of those born of a woman!

But HE was not personally important; his importance was found only in the Person he came to introduce. John got it right—do we?

A. Who he was *not*

1. The Messiah

“The Jews”—John mostly uses this term of the “Christ-rejecting members of the nation—especially of the rulers of Judah; not really of the common people.

A delegation of priests and Levites (who were evidently sympathetic with the position of the Pharisees --v. 24) came to question John.

Why **priests**?—John’s father was a priest who served in the temple (Luke 1)

Why **Levites**?—they served as temple guards (security) and as musicians; in the OT they were also given the important responsibility of teaching the OT to the people. Surely, there would be interest in what John was teaching.

Why **Pharisees**?—They were the popular and conservative party within Judaism. They would be more concerned about teachings being in conformity with their standards. They would also have a keen interest in any Messianic connections of John the Baptist—was he the Messiah or at least one of the great Jewish representatives of Messiah?

The **Sadducees** (who are not mentioned by John) who dominated the Jewish high court known as the Sanhedrin would not have had as much concern about John’s identity; their concern would have been political stability and submission to Roman authority so as to maintain their positions of leadership. They being “from Jerusalem” must have at least known about this group sent to John.

The intent of the questioning does not seem to be *overtly malicious*. But, there must have been some concern from these leaders about John’s growing popularity! If he is not Messiah, will he take away from their importance and their influence with the people?

SOME HAVE CALLED THIS INCIDENT JOHN’S TEMPTATION—comparable to Christ’s temptation. How would John fare?

THEIR QUESTION IS: “**Who are you?**” John knew the intent of their question, so he gave a pointed reply—“**I am not the Christ.**”

Note how strongly he affirms this fact: “He confessed, he did not deny, he confessed.” He shows a full and open statement from both positive and negative sides. He leaves no doubt as to his position.

[*Unlike many today—“Are you running for office...taking this new job...leaving this team...coming back to play quarterback?”* Their answers usually leave the door open; they don’t say what they mean and end up doing the thing they apparently denied originally!]

2. Elijah (v. 21)—cf . Mal. 4:5. Elijah was to come before Messiah’s appearance
Note, that Jesus said in Mt. 11:14 that John was Elijah! Here John says:
“I am not.” Note how each answer gets shorter—more terse. **He does not want to talk about himself. He wants to talk about Jesus!**

How do we explain the apparent conflict between Jesus’ statement and John’s? The answer can be found in Luke 1:17—he came in the “spirit

and power of Elijah”; he was not Elijah personally. That is what the Jewish teachers expected, and that is what John denies. Moreover, John in his **humility**, minimized his importance, or he may not even have *fully understood* his position.

Morris wisely states: “**Man is only what he is known to be by God. . . . No man is what he himself thinks he is. He is only what Jesus knows him to be**” (pp. 135-136).

Most of us think too highly of ourselves; we have an inflated sense of importance. JOHN ONLY SAW HIMSELF IN RELATION TO CHRIST!

3. “The Prophet”—i.e. of Deut. 18:15. The Jews generally interpreted this of some significant OT prophet who would return prior to Messiah—such as Jeremiah, Moses etc.—See Mt. 16:14; Mk. 6:15; Lk. 9:19). Jews did not generally interpret this of Messiah as did early Christians—see Acts 3:22. At any rate, John said simply, “**NO.**”

B. Who He Was (22-23)

The delegation is puzzled. “We need to give and answer to those who sent us. Who are you? What do you say about yourself?” (v. 22)

1. **A VOICE**—Not Messiah, not Elijah, not one of the returning prophets—just a voice! Jesus is the Word. God was the Speaker; John is merely his voice. See Is. 40:3—all the gospels use this passage to describe John’s ministry of preparation for the way of the Messianic King returning to His people (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4); here John uses the same passage of himself. He cries in the wilderness—both literally and figuratively of the moral and spiritual barrenness of Israel of that day.

His Job—**POINT MEN TO JESUS. No prominence for Himself!**
Christ is everything.

2. A Message—“Make Straight the way of the Lord.” (Cf. Hebrew—“Prepare”) John uses the word for its ethical and moral application—**THEY NEED TO STRAIGHTEN OUT THEIR LIVES!** They had a great many obstacles in the path of the coming King. Such sins and rebellion must be removed.

This shows John’s message of a “baptism of repentance.” “Get your hearts right with God.” Messiah is coming. Be ready for Him.

II. OFFICE IN LIFE (25-28)

The delegation’s question is: “Why then are you baptizing?” You said that you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet.

- A. Baptism—"I baptize in Water." (v. 26) (28—John was baptizing at Bethany)
[Some mss. have Bethabara or Betharabah; both sites seem to be at the same location—see Plummer. The site was evidently about 14 miles south of Sea of Galilee at a ford of the Jordan River.]

How did John's baptism differ from Jewish baptisms for new converts?

1. Both forms were by **immersion**.
Such is the meaning of the word; plus, John baptized in the river (or at least where there was "much water." Jewish proselyte baptisms used deep pools into which the person walked down steps. **(I have seen numerous examples in Israel. They weren't for sprinkling!)**
2. Jewish converts immersed themselves (going in one side and up the other).
John personally immersed the people.
3. Jewish immersion was for heathen converts; John baptized all Jewish people who came to him—even religious leaders!
4. John stressed "repentance"—here not mentioned specifically, yet implied in the exhortation to "make straight" the Lord's way.
5. Jewish convert baptism was only one of three initiatory rites—circumcision and a sacrifice were the other two.

John's statement that he only baptized in water implies what we read in the other Gospels, that Jesus has a far more important job—baptizing in the Holy Spirit.

- B. Pointing out His Successor (26)

1. He stands "among you." [John has already baptized him; He is about to return to begin His ministry after his 40 days of temptation in the wilderness.]
2. The Jewish leaders do not "know Him". (Compare 1:11)
3. He is much Greater. (27)
I am not worthy to perform for Him the most menial task of a slave—unfasten the thong of His sandal in order to wash his feet. A disciple did not perform such a menial task. **John did not consider himself worthy to do even that.**

CONCLUSION

John's position in life—in both his person and in his position or job—**I AM NO ONE SIGNIFICANT—THE ONE I INTRODUCE IS EVERYTHING!!** To John, "To live was Christ." *What about you?* **WHAT ARE YOU LIVING FOR? WHO ARE YOU LIVING FOR?**