



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 136 - Christ's Humble Messenger (John 1:19-51)

John the Baptist

The high priest and other religious authorities in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to question John. What authority does he have to baptize and teach? It is a question Jesus will later revisit when they challenge His authority to cleanse the temple (see Matthew 21:24-25). John shows great humility answering their questions. In his responses he clearly confesses he is *not* the Christ or Messiah.

- It seems the Jewish leaders would have submitted to the authority of the Christ. But what would it take to convince them that someone was the Christ?
- What is ironic about their later refusal to recognize and submit to Jesus' authority as the Christ?
- What does it take to convince you to follow someone's advice for your life?

When asked if he was Elijah, John said "I am not." Elijah was one of two men in the Old Testament who were taken alive to heaven without experiencing death (Genesis 5:21-24 and 2 Kings 2:11). But what made the Jewish leaders expect Elijah to come back? The prophet Malachi prophesied, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction" (Malachi 4:5-6).

After His transfiguration Jesus' disciples asked, "'Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?' He answered, 'Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that He was speaking to them of John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:10-13).

This prophecy makes another interesting appearance at Jesus' crucifixion. When He says, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" ("My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me") the Jews mistakenly think He is calling Elijah to come down and fulfill Malachi's prophecy by saving Him (see Matthew 27:45-49).

- If John realized the Malachi passage was referring to himself, what reason might he have for saying he wasn't Elijah?

Next the Jewish leaders ask John if he is the prophet. Moses had predicted the coming of this great prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15-19; "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to Him you shall listen—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb (Mt. Sinai) on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And whoever will not listen to My words that He shall speak in My Name, I Myself will require it of him.'"

Again John denies being the prophet. As we will see in later chapters in John this prophecy is pointing to Jesus who will speak not His own words, but His Father's words.

The Jewish leaders now question why John is baptizing if he is neither the Christ, nor Elijah nor the prophet. John refers to a prophecy from Isaiah 40:3. Just like the rest of John the Baptist's ministry, which focused on the Christ and not on himself, this prophecy focuses on the coming Christ. In comparison with Him, John is just an unidentified voice.

- Why should this have been enough authority to convince the Jewish leaders John was a valid prophet doing God's will—and that they should submit to God's will by being baptized by him, just as Jesus did?
- What else does John say in the following verse to magnify the Christ and humble himself?
- What excitement should the Jewish leaders have felt to learn the Christ was at hand, and the time of His revealing was drawing near?

- Why does *our* hearing of God's Word often match the Jewish leaders' lukewarm reception of John's words?

Behold the Lamb of God!

The Jewish leaders didn't listen to John the Baptist, but perhaps his own disciples would. Seeing Jesus approach the next day, he points Him out to his disciples, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." His disciples would think of the sacrificial lambs offered on the altar at the temple and the scapegoat of Leviticus 16:21-22. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area."

- How do we see this annual sacrifice being fulfilled as Jesus carries His cross outside of Jerusalem to the place of crucifixion?

The Place God Touches His World

John the Baptist built Jesus up as someone great. Nathanael begins to see this when Jesus mentions having seen him under the fig tree. In response, Jesus promises to show him much greater things: angels ascending and descending on Him and God touching His world and His people through Jesus.

- Discuss the various ways Nathanael and the other disciples saw God touching and changing people's lives through Jesus' words and actions, as they followed Him through His public ministry.
- What are some times He touched their lives personally?
- How does God touch your life personally in worship?
- How have you seen God touch your life outside of worship?