

Woodland Baptist Church  
 April 27, 2013 - Morning Worship  
 John 1:19-28 - The Voice

1) READ JOHN 1:19-28

- a) 19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 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?" 23 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." 24 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

2) Verses 19-20 John's primary PURPOSE was to WITNESS about Christ

- i) **Luke 3:7-14** - He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." 10 And the **crowds** asked him, "What then shall we do?" 11 And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." 12 **Tax collectors** also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." 14 **Soldiers** also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

b) **19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."**

- i) **Testimony - [martyria]** - to witness to the facts in the legal sense.
- ii) **Jews sent priests and Levites [Truth Squad]<sup>1</sup>** - these were leaders in Judaism who were experts at ritual purification, which is what John was doing by baptizing those that came into the countryside to hear him preach.
- iii) **Who are you?** - The Baptist is doing something quite unusual in Israel: preaching alarming sermons, addressing especially the people of God, telling them to make a major change in their life because of some imminent event, and then obliging all who sincerely believe his message and who will promise to change their lives to undergo the rather drastic public actions of confession of sins and full immersion in water in expectation of a kind of cleansing before what and who is to come. What right did the Baptist have to make these ultimate claims and to require these public actions? Who said Israel needed national repentance? What is wrong with Israel that the official leadership cannot address and redress? Who does John the Baptist think he is?<sup>2</sup> This is a legitimate question by the Jews; as we would ask if we saw someone preaching in this fashion and saw hordes of people going out to a man being baptized - we would want to know who this guy is and what he is doing that is causing such a stir among the people - and our motivations would be various - some would be envious, others truly curious to know - is this of God...or is this not of God?

- (1) Roman Involvement - The Jews also realized that some controversial movement that stirred a large following could provoke Roman intervention, which was to be avoided if possible, unless it served their purposes.
- (2) Religious politics - This interrogation also lays the groundwork of a showing of religious power and a signal that the authorities will not tolerate in the long run a ministry that runs counter to their own purposes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruner

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Kostenberger, 59

iv) **He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed - "I am not the Christ"**

- (1) This is vocabulary reflective of a legal proceeding; it is as though John is carrying on his ministry and these Levites and priests come up and lay into him with questions...it is as though John is being cross examined by a prosecutor under interrogative pressure, publicly in the middle of his ministry.
- (2) Under this pressure he confesses...he does not deny...but confesses - "I am not the Christ - John is VERY CLEAR - what you are seeing here is not about ME, it is about someone else, one that I am bearing witness for, that is coming..."I am not the Christ."

v) As the Apostle John had stated very clearly in the prologue - **6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.**

c) What we are seeing hidden beneath the inquiry of the Priests and the Levites is the Jewish "Messianic hope." Within the OT there are prophecies that speak of a coming one that would be the savior of the Jewish people and during a time of Roman occupation...their hopes were very high that the promised Messiah would come very soon....could this movement of John the Baptist - from the Levitical line - the miracle pregnancy of Zechariah and Elizabeth - could he be this Messiah??

i) John...confesses...and did not deny...but confesses - "I am not the Christ."

d) John was not the Christ and guess what...neither are we...we are the hands and feet of Christ for a lost world, but we are not Jesus and we need to remember that and maintain the same humility that John the Baptist did.

3) **Verse 21-22 John was not the incarnate WORD, he was a VOICE**

i) In the next few verses we begin to really understand the mindset of the 1st century Jew...the questions people ask will tell you something about what they are thinking...

b) 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 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?" 23 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."

i) Are you Elijah? Why would they ask about Elijah?

(1) **Malachi 4:5-6** "Behold, I will **send you Elijah the prophet** before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 6 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."

(2) Not only was John's demeanor and dress similar to Elijah, but also his rugged lifestyle and powerful message of God's judgment.

(a) John lived in the wilderness and lived off locusts and wild honey and was hated by Herod and his wicked wife...Elijah was pursued by Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel and was brought food by the ravens at the Cherith brook. There were definitely similarities between their ministries which is why they asked about him first.

(3) There are always questions about contradictions here concerning John denying he was Elijah and Jesus' claim that "Elijah has already come" (Matt 17:12) in John the Baptist.

(a) It is decisively cleared up by quoting **Luke 1:17** -And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him *in the spirit and power of Elijah*, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

ii) **The Prophet** - Who do they mean?

(1) **Deuteronomy 18:15-18** -15 "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...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. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

- (2) The “prophet” was a third end time figure - so they asked about the Messiah...John said NO...they asked about Elijah...John said...NO...they asked about the “prophet,” John said, NO.
- c) At this point, the delegation of Levites and priests would be very frustrated. John is preaching repentance of sins, he is baptizing by immersion, no doubt pulling some people from temple worship into the countryside...he is preaching about Abraham...about the end time judgment...**Who are you? We need to give an answer to those that sent us. What do you say about yourself?**
- i) John answers with Scripture, quoting **Isaiah 40:3 - I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.**
- (1) John represents himself as the “herald of the new exodus, announcing that God is about to redeem his people from captivity, as he had in the days of Moses.” This also explains why the Baptist had chosen the Judean wilderness as the location for his ministry as the desert had been place of God’s gathering and deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. Many leaders, also, were equipped for their divinely appointed task in the wilderness - John’s ministry was preparatory, yet in kept with OT prophecy.<sup>4</sup>
- (2) “Make the Lord’s path straight” - conveys the message of “preparing a roadway by clearing away the obstacles.” Very similar to how witnessing/evangelism and discipleship happens today - we help others under conviction to clear away obstacles that may keep people from coming to Jesus, the most glaring being their sin and need of repentance.<sup>5</sup>
- (3) The original context refers figuratively, to preparing the roads to allow for a return from the Babylonian exile to Jerusalem. Later on Isaiah also speaks of the coming “Servant,” who will provide an even greater deliverance, which is consummated in the new heaven and new earth. Thus, the Baptist remains faithful to this context by calling the people to repentance in preparation for the coming Servant [Jesus Christ].<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kostenberger

<sup>5</sup> Kostenberger

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

#### 4) Verse 24-28 John preached in preparation for Christ

a) 24 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

i) **Pharisees** - the Pharisees were Christ's primary antagonists/persecutors and here they are the Baptist's primary antagonists/persecutors, until Herod strikes later. The four sects of Judaism developed during the 400 year span between the testaments, during the rise of the Greek empire. There were four sects: Sadducees's, Pharisees, Essenes and Zealots. The Pharisees dominated in number.

ii) 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

- (1) It was completely within their right to ask this question, as John was preaching serious doctrine...they were concerned about the connection proposed by the Baptist between baptism, repentance and the final judgment.
- (2) Baptism was not uncommon and involved pre-dominantly a Gentile's entrance into the Jewish religion - they were baptized because they were considered "unclean." However, John was baptizing Jews as well as Gentiles which was confusing to some. For John to propose that everyone, including Israelites, must be baptized was offensive to the Jewish mind as it ignored their special standing as God's people.<sup>7</sup>
- (3) Their curiosity was heightened in light of several passages that speak of a major transition within the covenant people of God, indicated by baptism.

(a) **Ezekiel 36:25** - 25 I will *sprinkle clean water on you*, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

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<sup>7</sup> Kostengerger

- (b) **Isaiah 52:15** -As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—15 *so shall he sprinkle many nations*; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.
- (c) **Zech 13:1** - “On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.
- (d) **Hebrews 10:22** - 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with *our hearts sprinkled clean* from an evil conscience and *our bodies washed with pure water*.

**iii) 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.**

- (1) **Matthew 3:11** - “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
  - (a) The same holds true today, we baptize each other in water, but only Jesus can baptize you in the Holy Spirit.
- (2) **among you stand one you do not know even he who comes after me** - meaning Jesus is now here among us - it could mean that Jesus was in their midst in the crowd as they were talking or it could have meant that he was now among the Jewish people, waiting for the right time to show himself.
- (3) **the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie** - meaning he is so great, that I am not worthy to do the most meaningless task for him; I am below a slave compared to him.

**b) These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.**

- i) This is not the same Bethany where Lazarus, Mary and Martha lived, they were on the opposite side of the Jordan, we are not certain of the location of this Bethany. The earliest historians were unsure of its location and it has only become more obscure with time.

## 5) CLOSE

- a) Can you list three things that you are not and three things that you are as Christian disciples?
- b) It is those overwhelmed with Christ who are undergirded by him; those who sense their unworthiness are exactly those credited with his worthiness - with the reckoned righteousness of God before the righteous God who gives this gift.<sup>8</sup>
- c) **Matthew 16:13-19** - 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell[c] shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

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<sup>8</sup> Bruner