Nothing Compared to Christ

(The Humility of John the Baptist)

John 1:19-34

5-19-2024

Introduction: (vv.19-22)

Compared to the Lord of the Universe, we, like John the Baptist, are Nothing!

How did John the Baptist view himself?

I. ***John the Baptist viewed himself as:*** **<u>A Humble VOICE for Christ</u>**
(v.23) *(John was a Voice, but Jesus is the WORD – 1:1)*

II. ***John the Baptist viewed himself as:*** **<u>Less than a Humble SLAVE for Christ</u>**
(v.24-29) *(John was unworthy to untie the Sandal of Christ – v.27)*

III. ***John the Baptist viewed himself as:*** **<u>A Humble BAPTIZER for Christ</u>**
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How prone we are to boasting and egotistical pride, to self-absorption and self-promotion. Humans tend to take pride in their knowledge, appearance, notoriety, wealth, success, fame, power, achievements, etc…

"Many years ago John Newton, the converted slave trader who became a preacher and a Christian poet, lay upon his deathbed. A young clergyman came to see him and expressed deep regret at the prospect of losing so eminent a laborer in the Lord's vineyard.

"The venerable servant of God replied, 'True, I'm going on before you, but you'll soon come after me. When you arrive, our friendship will not doubt cause you to inquire for me. But I can tell you already where you'll most likely find me—I'll be sitting at the feet of the thief whom Jesus saved in His dying moments on the cross!'

"Although a distinguished man, Newton felt with Paul that he could only class himself among the chief of sinners who have been saved through marvelous grace." (Tan, #2308, p. 571)

In **vv. 19-34** John the Baptist repeatedly points the attention away from himself and on to Jesus Christ.

In John 1:19-34, John the Apostle paints for us a <u>contrast</u> between John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Basically, the Baptist says, "I am nothing; Jesus Christ is everything. I'm a mortal; He is immortal. I am finite; He is infinite."

A key phrase occurs three times in chapter one, showing Christ's preeminence over John the Baptist. John repeats: Jesus **"is preferred before me"** (**v. 15, 27, 30**).

v. 19
"Priests and Levites" – The religious leaders of Israel.

Priests – were responsible for Temple services and sacrifices
Levites – assistants to the priests

v. 20
John, unlike many who falsely claim to be the Christ (Messiah; cp. Mt. 24:15), emphatically denied being the Christ.

v. 21
Based on Malachi 4:5, Elijah was supposed to return to earth prior to God's wrath being poured out in the Day of the Lord.

Although John the Baptist was not Elijah, he like Elijah was a Nazarite, and he like Elijah will be was a forerunner for Christ (Mt. 11:14).

Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ's first coming (Luke 1:17), Elijah will prepare the way for Christ'' second coming (according to Malachi 4:5).

"That prophet" – A reference to the prophesied prophet "like unto" Moses, which is actually a reference to Christ (not a separate person like the Pharisees thought – v. 25).

God had foretold in Deut. 18:15 – "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; "

John 5:46 - For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.

"Moses was a type of Christ in his service (Heb. 3:2) and in his office as a prophet (cp. Deut. 34:10 with Luke 24:19)." (Ryrie Study Bible note, p. 301)

v. 22
"Who art thou?" – If someone asked you that question, what answer would you give? John's answer really shows the view he had of himself. Because he had an accurate, exalted view of Christ, he had an accurate, humble view of himself.

When a man is humbled, he will say with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing" (Dan. 4:35).

At best, Isaiah described the human race as follows: Isaiah 40:22 – "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers"

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John's answer succinctly summarizes his view of himself and his mission. He viewed himself as nothing more than a <u>voice</u>, a herald who announced the coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

John quotes Isaiah 40:3, a passage which has ultimate fulfillment prior to the future kingdom.

“Make straight the way” –
“The imagery was taken from the days when there were no paved roads, only tracks across the fields. If a king were to travel, the road must be built and smoothed out, that the royal chariot might not find the traveling unduly rough, nor be swamped in the mire” (Merrill Tenney, cited by Swindoll, p. 19).
“Just as a special road had to be leveled when a king desired to cross a desert, so a path was to be paved by John for the Messiah” (Swindoll, p. 19).

Just as a forerunner would prepare the road for the arrival of a dignitary, so John prepared men’s hearts for the arrival of King Jesus.

John preached in a secluded area (**“the wilderness”)** where people would have to leave the hustle and bustle of city life and go out to a remote, hot, dry desert area where there would be less worldly distractions (Note: Such a ministry does support the modern-day camp ministry, where children, teens, and adults can go to a place where they can focus on what God is trying to say to them with less distraction).

> Question: Whose way did John prepare?
> Answer: The way for Jesus the Lord.
>
> Important note on Christ's deity. The word "Lord" is a quote of Is. 40:3, which is the Hebrew word "Jehovah." Jesus is Jehovah!

John (like all preachers, teachers, evangelists, etc.) was merely a <u>voice</u>, but Jesus was the <u>Word</u> (vv. 1-2).

“It is not humility to underrate yourself. Humility is to think of yourself as God thinks of you. It is to feel that if we have talents, God has given them to us. And let it be seen that, like freight in a vessel, they tend to sink us low. The more we have, the lower we ought to lie” (Spurgeon)

II. ***John the Baptist viewed himself as:*** **<u>Less than a Humble SLAVE for Christ</u>**
(v.24-29) *(John was unworthy to untie the Sandal of Christ – v.27)*

v. 25
The Pharisees, who were aware of the multitudes of people who became followers of John and submitted to his baptism (Luke 3:7ff), in effect question where John got his <u>authority</u> to baptize.

"Who are you and where did you get such authority?" they wondered.

"their interest is in what authorizes John's baptismal practices. It is not that baptism was unknown. Some Jewish group practiced 'proselyte baptism,' i.e. proselytes were baptized in the process of converting to Judaism" (Carson, p. 145).

John's baptism was designed to prepare the people for Him (the Messiah).

John's authority to baptize came not from men, but from God (Mt. 21:23-32).

v. 26
"I baptize with water" – lit. "I baptize in water" (Note: the translation "with" reflects the old KJV Anglican bias toward sprinkling as the mode of baptism)

They knew John (because they could see his public ministry of baptizing converts), but they did not know the One who had quietly stepped on the stage of human history. They did not know the awesome personage who was standing in their midst.

"One Solitary Life"
He was born in an obscure village.
He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.
He then became an itinerant preacher.
He never held an office.
He never had a family
Or owned a house.
He didn't go to college.
He had no credentials but Himself...

Nineteen centuries have come and gone,
And today He is the central figure
Of the human race.
All the armies that ever marched,
And all the navies that ever sailed,
All the parliaments that ever sat,
And all the kings that ever reigned
Have not affected the life of man
On this earth as much as that...
ONE SOLITARY LIFE

v. 27
John was well aware of his authority given him by God. He knew of God's promise to his father Zacharias: Luke 1:15-17

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. [16] And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. [17] And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Yet despite his lofty position and privileges, John viewed himself as nothing compared to Christ.

Jesus considered John to be the greatest "born of women" (Mt. 11:11), and yet John did not view himself as anything great.

Jesus came after John both in birth order (six month's difference) and in public ministry order.

However, John the Baptist recognized that Jesus was **"preferred before"** him.

"The loosing and carrying of sandals was the duty of a slave (or servant)" (Rienecker, The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, p. 220).

For John the Baptist to say that he was unworthy to do this task would be the same as saying that Jesus Christ is so great (so much higher) than John was, that he was not even worthy to be a slave for Him.

What a feeling of unworthiness John must have had!

Every servant of God who realizes the exalted privilege of being used by God will feel unworthy to serve Him. It is a "big thing" to serve God.

No one is worthy of God's call; no one is worthy to minister to Christ. The fact that God allows any kind of relationship with Himself is beyond comprehension.

The centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof" (Mt. 8:8).

Paul said, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry."(I Tim. 1:12)

(Cp. Eph. 3:8)

Such an attitude is a prerequisite to anyone serving Christ.

Paul also expressed great humility when he said in 1 Cor. 15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am

Humility verses:

Proverbs 15:33
The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.

Proverbs 29:23
A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.

1 Peter 5:5-6
Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.
[6] Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Compare with:
James 4:6
But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Isaiah 57:15
For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Matthew 23:12
And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

James 4:10
Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Humility is simply having an accurate self-image, a truthful viewpoint about yourself.

Pride is having an over-estimation of one's self, to have an inflated ego, to think too much of yourself and not enough of Jesus Christ.

By comparison John was an ant under the foot of a giant.

John not only humbly admitted that he was unworthy to even stoop down and untie the thongs on Christ's sandals (Mk. 1:7; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:27), but in John 3:11 John also said regarding Christ's shoes: "I am not worthy to bear" (to lift up and carry; a slave's office in Judea, Greece, and Rome - Reinecker, p. 7-8).

The more one knows about the nature and character of Jesus Christ, the more aware they will be of how far short of His glory they are.

Example: Isaiah (Is. 6); Job (Job 42:6); Peter (Lk. 5:8); John (Rev. 1:17).

So much higher was the pre-eminence of Christ over John, that John didn't even deep himself worthy of untying Jesus sandals.

"I imagine there may be some of you ready to say, 'Sire, I am nothing.' Then I shall reply, 'You are a young Christian.' There will be others of you who will say, 'Sir, I am less than nothing.' And I shall say, 'You are an old Christian,' for the older Christians get, the less they become in their own esteem." (Spurgeon, cited by Tom Carter, p. 104).

"When you are half an inch above the ground, you are that half-inch too high. Your place is to be nothing." (Spurgeon).

"A business man once asked Lorne Sanny, president of the Navigators, how he could know when he had a servant attitude. The reply: 'By how you act when you are treated like one.'" (cited by Michael P. Green, Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, p. 200).

v. 29
"Behold" – "Look" "Open your eyes and see." John again points people away from himself and unto Christ.

"The Lamb of God" – Jesus is the ultimate "Passover Lamb" (Exod. 12:3; cp. I Cor. 5:7) and the suffering Messiah who paid for the sin of the world

Isaiah 53:5-7
But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. [7] He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

Jesus is the Lamb of Jeremiah 11:19 and Isaiah 53:7; He is the Lamb in the place of Isaac in Genesis 22:8.

"Taketh away" – to lift up and carry away.

Psalm 103:12
As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

"The sin" – sin as a whole; (not sins plural), as if Jesus suffered a certain amount for each sin the elect committed; but sin in its entirety was paid for by Him.

"Of the world" – Not just the sin of Israel (Is. 53:4-12), but the sin of the Jews and Gentiles all over the earth. 1 John 2:2
And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

III. ***John the Baptist viewed himself as:*** **<u>A Humble BAPTIZER for Christ</u>**
(v.30-34) *(John baptized in water, but Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit)*

v. 30
"For He was before me" – Jesus eternally pre-existed before coming into the world.

v. 31
John's ministry had one purpose, one goal, one objective, and that was to make Israel clearly see Jesus Christ.

His purpose was to make Christ known. This too should be our primary purpose. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ..." (2 Cor. 5:20).

v. 32
The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus Christ occurred at His baptism (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk. 3:22).

This was King Jesus' coronation day. An anointing which would come to Him in full measure (Jn. 3:34) and empower Him to do miracle after miracle under the Spirit's direction and power.

By having the Spirit upon Him, Jesus would be the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1, which said:
The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

Cp. Luke 4:18

v. 33
John merely baptized in water, but Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit (cp. Mt. 3:11). Spirit baptism is something only God can do.

CONCLUSION:

John gives us a timeless principle in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Some questions to ask ourselves:

- Do we desire to toot our horn . . . or trumpet the Lord's praise?
- Do we seek to exalt ourselves. . . or magnify Him?
- Do we glory in who we are and what we do for Him . . . or in who He is and what He has done for us?
- Do we invest our time, talent, and treasure for vain, selfish pursuits . . . or do we serve Him and give to Him our best?