

- Rev. Grant Mangold, [www.RiversideChurchIowa.com](http://www.RiversideChurchIowa.com)

## HEROIC WITNESS ??

He's one of the most colorful characters of the New Testament: John the Baptist. That unofficial title is not his denomination, it's what he did. He was a baptizer. You probably remember how he wore camel skin and ate locusts and honey in the desert and proclaimed the coming Christ. The Gospel writer introduces him in John 1:19-34, and you'll notice how he makes an abrupt change from the lofty theological tone of the prologue, as he continues the eyewitness account.

Maybe you're thinking John the Baptist fits right in with the Duck Dynasty clan or mountain man backwoods culture today. Not so much Main street or Wall street. He didn't quite fit back in Jesus' day either. The common people responded to his message, flocking to repent of their sins and prepare for the coming King. But religious leaders at headquarters in Jerusalem? Not so much. They came to see Him for a different reason. They weren't sure they liked the man, his methods, or his message.

"**Who are you?**" they asked. The Jewish authorities took note of his popularity. He preached "**Repent, and be baptized - for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Make straight the way of the Lord!**" These were words right out of the Old Testament. And people were expectantly awaiting the promises of the Christ. But God had not spoken through a prophet to His people for four hundred years.

All of a sudden John bursts on the scene. Authorities noticed, because it wasn't all that easy being a religious minority in the Roman Empire. The emperor actually gave the Jews much more lee-way than usual, even allowing them to continue their unique worship of only the One True God, instead of the pantheon of gods. The Jewish leaders didn't want public unrest to escalate into greater persecution.

The response of John the Baptist reveals three truths about his role as the messenger of the Christ. **1 - First, the honesty of the man.** John the Baptist got right to the point. "**I am not the Christ,**" he said. Experts in Jewish Law were questioning him. Like a good courtroom witness, John answers, telling just what he knew. You see, In Deuteronomy 18 Moses had promised "a prophet like me" would come one day. *Not me*, says John. In 2 Kings 2 the prophet Elijah was taken up alive in a "swing low sweet chariot" to heaven. Malachi said he would return before the Christ would come. *Not me*, says John.

**2 - Second, the humility in his methods.** Great promises were made about John the Baptist at his birth, recorded in Luke 1. He's called by God, but he doesn't overstate who he is and why he's come. He's simply an obedient servant, doing and saying what God commands. "**I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness - make straight the way of the Lord.**" He's a messenger, a VOICE - echoing Isaiah and Malachi, calling people to repent, to prepare for the One who is coming - Christ and His kingdom. Yes, Scripture commands God's people to be "clothed" with humility. But this doesn't mean so much thinking less of yourself but rather thinking of yourself less, and others more - specifically, the One whom you serve. John the Baptist is a great example. He says, "**I am not even worthy to untie the sandals of the One coming after me.**" This was the job reserved for the lowest of the low of the slaves.

**3 - Third, John was heroic in his message.** The leaders demand, "*if you're not an important prophetic figure, then by what authority are you baptizing?*" John is unswayed by criticism and continues to obey God rather than men. He deflects criticism of the religious leaders by rightly drawing attention away from himself, proclaiming God's truth, pointing them to the coming Christ. Eventually he loses his life.

Why baptize? Baptism was a ritual washing for Gentile converts to Judaism. Some Jews might baptize themselves, but it was unusual to baptize other Jews. John the Baptist says, **I baptize with water, but the One coming after me will baptize with the Holy Spirit of God, because He is the Son of God.** In verse 29 he says it's because Jesus is the "**Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**" And John 1:12 and 3:3 declares *all who believe in Jesus Christ, receiving Him as Lord and Savior, become children of God, by being born again from above by the Holy Spirit.* 1 Corinthians 12:13 says the Holy Spirit *baptizes all believers into the Body of Christ.* By grace through faith, the blood of Christ washes away your sins, and the Holy Spirit empowers you to live out His new resurrection life.

And if you're a believer in Christ, in Acts 1:8 Jesus says the Holy Spirit gives you power to "**be My witnesses.**" Honest, humble, heroic - just like John the Baptist. Because Jesus is Savior and Jesus is Lord. We are His messengers, pointing people to Jesus in our words and our deeds. *Be His witness!*