

Teaching Points

This next section depicts the ministry of John the Baptist. (Not to be confused with the apostle John who wrote this gospel record.) Here are a few highlights about the significance of John the Baptist and his ministry:

- He was the cousin of Jesus. The angel Gabriel announced his birth to Zechariah around the same time that Christ's birth was announced to Mary. (You can read about both in Luke 1.)

- He was an important witness to Jesus and His ministry. This is what we read back in 1:6-8, ***“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”***

- His ministry is the fulfillment of the following Old Testament prophecies:

Malachi 3:1, ***“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.***

Malachi 4:5, ***“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”***

Isaiah 40:3, ***“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”***

Discussion Question: How did John prepare the way for Jesus?

Thoughts: *He preached a message of repentance. He called everyone who heard him to forsake their sins and to put their trust in God. You can see a sample of his preaching in Luke 3:7-20. Think about the importance of repentance. In order to draw near to God, we must forsake sin and exercise faith in His promises.*

- The greatest aspect of John's ministry is the clarity with which he was able to point people to Jesus. The Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming Savior in somewhat “shadowy” terms. They were also separated from the earthly life of Christ by hundreds of years or more. John, on the other hand, lived at the same time as Jesus and was able to literally point his finger at Him and say, ***“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29).

Discussion Question: Why does John call Jesus “The Lamb of God”?

Thoughts: *This is a reference to the sacrifices of the Old Testament - especially the Passover Lamb. John understood that Jesus would save His people by offering Himself as a sacrifice for their sins. Christ is the Lamb of God who ACTUALLY accomplishes what all the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament could only symbolize.*

Look at all the ways that John says Jesus is better than himself:

1. v. 27, ***“It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”***

John doesn’t consider himself worthy to even touch Jesus or be in His presence. This is an expression of his own inferiority as a sinful human compared to the worthiness and glory of Jesus as the sinless Son of God.

2. v. 30, ***“This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’”***

John understands that Jesus existed, as God, before He was born into this world. John was a simple man who began to exist when he was conceived in his mother’s womb (just like the rest of us). Jesus, on the other hand, has no beginning. He is God from everlasting to everlasting.

3. vs. 27, 33, ***“I baptize with water...this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”***

John had a ministry of baptism. He preached repentance and baptized people in the waters of the Jordan River. He knew that Jesus had a greater ministry since He came to baptize His people with the Holy Spirit. John’s ministry was only a precursor to the greater work that Jesus would accomplish.

Discussion Question: What lessons can we learn from John’s life and ministry?

Thoughts: *He spoke plainly and clearly about who Jesus is. He had a simple message: Jesus is the Son of God who has come to take away our sins. Repent and receive Him. John was also humble and honest about his own unworthiness and the greatness of Jesus. He was glad for Jesus’ ministry to increase even though that meant the end of his own ministry.*

(Feel free to bring up other lessons from John’s life based on what we read about him in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.)

Optional Discussion Question: How can John say that Jesus came to take away the sin of the world? Does that mean that everyone's sins are taken away? Why do people still perish eternally if Jesus has taken away the sin of the world?

Thoughts: *When the Bible talks about "the sin of the world" it's referring to the global aspect of Christ's work. He didn't die for Jews only. He gave Himself as a sacrifice to save sinners from all over the world, all throughout time. To be specific, Scripture teaches that Jesus died to save SOME sinners from ALL KINDS of people - some Jews, some Gentiles, some men, some women, some kings, some servants, some rich, some poor, etc. The saving message of Jesus is to go out to all the world because Christ died to save sinners from all over the world.*

Prayer Focus

Praise God for the sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God. His blood that was shed on the cross is the payment for our sin debt. May this always amaze us!

Pray that our testimony will be clear and simple like John's. May we also be able to speak the truth about Christ to others with courage and conviction like John.