

John The Baptist

What We Can Learn From His Life And His Message

There is no getting round it, John the Baptist was unique.

John wore odd clothes, ate strange food and preached an unusual message to the Judeans who went into the wastelands to see him.

John knew he had a specific role to play in the world, announcing the coming of the Saviour of this world.

John put all his energies into this task, it took over his whole life.

This task was foretold in prophecy.

Malachi 4:5-6 [NIV] *“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”*

Elijah was one of the greatest prophets who ever lived, with Malachi's death the voice of God's prophets would be silent for 400 years. Then a prophet would come, like Elijah, to herald Christ's coming.

This prophet was John the Baptist.

Zechariah, John's father, was given John's task before he was born.

Luke 1:8-17 [NIV] *“Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and **you are to give him the name John.** He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and **he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.** Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, **in the spirit and power of Elijah,** to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, **to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**”*

Zechariah was told before anyone else that God was setting in motion His own visit to earth.

Luke 1:6-7 [NIV] *“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well on in years.”*

Both Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were well suited to do a special work for God.

This devout couple did not stop with the letter of the law, their obedience was from the heart, and that is why they were called *“upright in the Sight of God”*.

For God works at our hearts not our outward show of righteousness.

The name John means “*the Lord is gracious*”, this was a name given by God not chosen by human parents.

Jesus means “*Jehovah is salvation*”.

Throughout the gospels, God acts graciously and saves His people.

John’s job was to graciously introduce to the people the Only One who could save them.

By taking the Nazarite vow John was consecrated for God’s use.

In preparing people for the Messiah’s [Hebrew “*māshîyach*” – anointed one] arrival John would seek to cause “*heart transplants*” in people.

Ezekiel 36:26-29 [NIV] “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the corn and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you.*”

A promise of a New Covenant that God would make with all humanity.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 [NIV] “*The time is coming,*” declares the LORD, “*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,*” declares the LORD. “*This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,*” declares the LORD. “***I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,***” declares the LORD. “*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*”

John was preparing people to accept this New Covenant which was to be preached by Jesus Christ and ratified by His spilt blood.

Accepting this New Covenant starts with confession and repentance of sins and baptism as an outward symbol of the death of the old life and the resurrection to a new life with Christ.

Romans 6:1-14 [NIV] “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*”

John prepared the way for this message of salvation to be preached and fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:57-80 [NIV] *“When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, but his mother spoke up and said, “No! **He is to be called John.**” They said to her, “There is no-one among your relatives who has that name.” Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. The neighbours were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him. **His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:** “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. **And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God,** by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace. And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.”*

This prophetic message, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was God’s promise to Abraham, to bless all people through him.

This promise would be fulfilled by Jesus Christ [the Messiah] who was Abraham’s descendent.

Zechariah recalls hundreds of years of God’s Sovereign work in history, beginning with Abraham and going on into eternity.

God who has unlimited power chooses to work through frail humans who begin as helpless babies.

Never minimise what God can do through those who yield faithfully to Him.

Why did John live out in the desert?

Prophets used to isolate themselves to enhance their spiritual growth by concentrating on their message from God.

This isolation also separated them from economic and political powers so that their message could be aimed against such corruption, even the religious leader of their day.

Luke 3:2-3 [NIV] *“during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of God came to John** son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**”*

The Holy Spirit sought John where he was seeking God and sent him to the people with His message.

Luke 3:4-6 [NIV] *“As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the desert, **‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.** Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And **all mankind will see God’s salvation.**””*

Salvation offered to all humanity **not** just the Israelites.

Luke 3:7-8 [NIV] *“**John said** to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.** And do*

not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."

Often God expresses His Grace by what is called "tough love".

Hebrews 12:7-12 [NIV] *"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees!"*

This is what John was doing.

Showing God's Love as a father who disciplines his children for their ultimate good.

Luke 3:15-16 [NIV] *"The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, "I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. **He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**"*

John's baptism was symbolic of repentance tied in with his message.

Christ's baptism with fire includes the power needed to fulfil God's Will in our lives.

This baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire was fulfilled at Pentecost.

Acts 2:1-4 [NIV] *"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be **tongues of fire** that separated and came to rest on each of them. **All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."*

When the Holy Spirit came upon them He showed His presence with tongues of fire, empowering the disciples to proclaim the Good News in many languages.

This baptism of **fire is also symbolic of the Work of the Holy Spirit as He brings God's Judgement on all who refuse to repent.**

Luke 3:17-18 [NIV] *"His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but **he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**" And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them."*

The winnowing fork tossed the wheat into the air to separate the kernels of wheat from the outer blades, the chaff.

Matthew 25:31-46 [NIV] *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd **separates the sheep from the goats.** He will put the **sheep on his right** and the **goats on his left.** "Then the King will say to **those on his right,** 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; **take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.** For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When*

did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

It is those whose hearts of stone have been changed to flesh that are practising God’s love and compassion in their daily lives who will enter into God’s Kingdom.

Such people are the kernels of wheat who are of value to God and **not** the chaff who are burnt up in unquenchable fire.

We choose between two fires in our lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 [NIV] *“Do not put out **the Spirit’s fire**; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.”*

The Holy Spirit in our lives who prompts us to be on fire for God’s Work.

Revelation 20:14-15 [NIV] *“Then death and Hades were thrown into **the lake of fire**. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

The unquenchable fire of the second and final death.

Luke 3:9-10 [NIV] *“The axe is already at the root of the trees, and **every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.**” “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.”*

What is the “good fruit” we are to produce?

Galatians 5:22-25 [NIV] *“But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*

Such fruits can only be produced by the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

These fruits, that are very **characteristics of the Creator God**, rub off on us as a result of an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the **Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you **know him, for he lives with you and will be in you**. I will not leave you as orphans; **I will come to you.**”*

This is how Christ lives His life on earth again at this time. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us.

John 17:3 [NIV] *“Now this is eternal life: that they may **know** you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

This word “know” Greek “*ginōskō*” [ghin-occe-ko] is a very intimate relationship.

The same word is used for the union between a man and a woman.

Matthew 1:25 [King James] “*And **knew** her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.*”

Luke 1:34 [King James] “*Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I **know** not a man?*”

Matthew 7:18-23 [NIV] “*A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by **their fruit you will recognise them**. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never **knew** you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

The same intimate knowing relationship.

John’s warning to those of his day is even more relevant for us today after Jesus Christ has come.

Through the scriptures and the person of the Holy Spirit we have all we need to know God and be among those who enter into the everlasting Kingdom of God.