

Guess Who?

John the Baptist

Part 1 – December 1, 2013

The point of this series, is to get into the heart of these characters, to get *them* into our heart. First and foremost, they're not 'lessons', they're *people*, and more than 'people', they're *family*. Where is the *beginning* of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Time to seek and find! Mark tells us where to find it ...

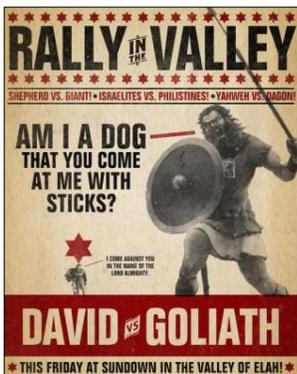
The beginning of the gospel [i.e. *good news*] about Jesus Christ, [*Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah**] the Son of God. [Why does Mark add this on? Because the Jews only thought of the Christ/Messiah as the Son of David, a righteous, anointed man who would set up an earthly throne] It is written in Isaiah the prophet: [Mark precedes it with a quote from Malachi (3:1) for context] "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" — [And then Mark quotes Isaiah 40:3, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus as the *Son of God* ...] "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" — Mark 1:1-3 NIV



The Isaiah Scroll, predating Jesus

This was fulfilled in John the Baptist. But, Mark only quotes one verse from a *huge prophecy*, regarding what's being prepared, for whom, and why. **If this is where the gospel of Jesus begins, how can you *not want to read the rest*?** Like, how is the way of the Lord prepared? Isaiah says that **the lowly must be raised up, and the lofty must be made low**. Jon called God's People to repent and he proclaimed the Servant of All: The Lamb of God.

"Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And **the glory of the Lord will be revealed** ..." — Isaiah 40:4-5a NIV

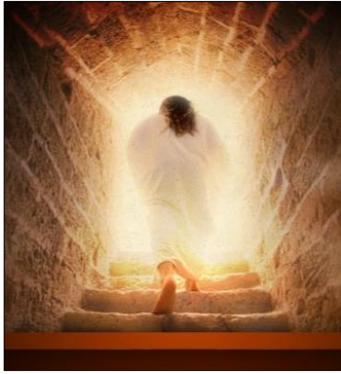


Oh-ho! And, ***there's why this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus as the Son of God***. Even His own family and followers *only thought* of the Messiah as the Son of David, an anointed man who would establish an *earthly kingdom*, by force.

That's why they denied, abandoned, and doubted Him. The problem is: **the fulfillment far exceeded their expectation**. Always does. **It's why we doubt and abandon and deny Him. We just *can't imagine***.

It's never that God is doing *too little*; it's always that He's doing *too much*.

[As you read Isaiah's prophecy, you come to *this* ...] "I am the Lord; [i.e. *Jehovah; the Existing One*] that is my name! **I will not give my glory to another** ..." [It's His name *and* His glory, because He's the only One that truly exists, dependent on nothing and no one] — Isaiah 42:8a NIV



If the *glory of God* (the Existing One) was to be revealed *through* the Messiah, and *God will not give His glory to another*, guess who the Christ is! **The fulfillment will *always exceed the expectation***; because, He's God! **The name 'Jesus' means, "Jehovah is salvation"**.

You know what I left out? The Malachi passage that Mark quotes talks about *heaven's floodgates* pouring out blessings, and the *vine* bearing fruit, and the *devourer* being rebuked. (Mal 3:10-11) Only, **the devourer is pictured as locust**. Well, **Jesus revealed Himself as the Vine, and John came devouring ... what? Locust!** (Mark 1:6)

Jesus said that **John was the last *and* greatest of the prophets, though the least in the kingdom are greater than John**. (Mat 11:11-15) It's quite a statement. And it's true in several ways.



If you define greatness by the *mission* of the prophet, his was to **pave the way for God Himself**. As John's father had prophesied ...

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; [i.e. God] for you will go on before the Lord [i.e. Master] to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins ..." – Luke 1:76-77 NIV

In faith, **John was calling his people to repentance, and baptizing them, and teaching them salvation by grace through forgiveness, in anticipation of the One who would come to accomplish it!**

And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." [But wait, that's something only God can do; has someone been reading Isaiah?] – Mark 1:7-8 NIV

You have to see that, at this point, John doesn't know that he's referring to Jesus!

[Matthew quotes even more] "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." [Again, more terms reserved for God; He probably assumed this is when the Messiah/Jesus would establish His throne] – Matthew 3:11-12 NIV



Now, if you define greatness by the *message* of the prophet, well, **John's preached that God Himself was about to visit man ... in bodily form!** And *God Himself* had told John this unbelievable news.

... the word of God came to John ... in the desert. – Luke 3:2b NIV

And John had *no idea, no clue*, how God would look when He arrived. He could *only imagine*; but, of course, he couldn't.

So, **if you define greatness by the sheer shock of the prophet** (upon the realization of the fulfillment of their words), **this is one of the greatest setups and surprises ever conceived!** Because, the Lord had left out one *teeny-tiny detail*.

[Later John explained] "I would not have known him, [the One who would embody God] except that the one who sent me to baptize with water [God] told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'" [The glory of Jehovah, which makes us existing ones in His image] – John 1:33 NIV



Likely site of Jesus' baptism at Bethany

But, John *knew Jesus* ... quite well. They were cousins *of some sort*. Six months *after* John's mom became pregnant, Jesus' mom became pregnant, and they lived together for *three months*. (Luke 1:24-39, 56)

Through dreams, stars, Magi, and Heavenly Hosts, God made it clear that Jesus was the Messiah and John was the forerunner. Tradition, *not scripture*, says the families even fled to Egypt together.

They likely spent Passovers together; young Jesus probably felt bad that John couldn't drink wine. **John knew Jesus and His righteousness so well, in fact, he refused to baptize Him.** *BUT*, John, his family, and *all* the Jews, thought the Messiah, the *Son of David*, would set up an *earthly kingdom*.

Then Jesus came ... to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." [Because the fulfilling has everything to do with the *big reveal!*] Then John consented. – Matthew 3:13-15 NIV

John's got'a be thinking, "The Christ is here, I'm here, the people are prepared; if ever there was a perfect time for God to appear, this is it! And then, He did.



The heavens opened, and the dove descended, right onto ... *his cousin*. The Father spoke. Jesus rejoiced. The crowd cheered. But John, he was a fire-glazed, pie-eyed statue of a *heart attack*. "It just can't be. **I grew up playing with God? I made forts with God? I spit off a bridge with God?!**"

You'll have a very similar reaction when you finally see Him face to face. **He so often appears in ways we fail to recognize.**

Oh, how the words of Isaiah the prophet, the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, must've flooded in ...

"I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed — I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he." [The One who has always, and will always, exist] – Isaiah 43:11-13a NIV

Why did God want His Word to record that John was six months older than Jesus? (Luke 1:24-26) Maybe just so we could feel John's *jubilant!*

He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because **he was before me.**’” – John 1:15b NIV

“Hey, guess what! My cousin is just *preexistent*. The *Savior* and *Messiah*. The *Son of God*.”

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! **[He’s clear into Isaiah 53!]** This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.” – John 1:29-32 NIV

But, when Herod imprisoned him, and it looked like the end, and Jesus didn’t use His *God powers* to save him ... he had questions. **God may have revealed His identity, but certainly not His strategy.**

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, **[like feasting and drinking with tax collectors and prostitutes (Luke 1:15)]** he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, **[John had previously proclaimed, “He is the one who comes after me,” (John 1:27)]** or should we expect someone else?” **[Wow. There’s those expectations again]** – Matthew 11:2-3 NIV

God reveals His greatest surprise to His greatest prophet, who sees the Dove descend onto Jesus, and even professes Jesus as the Lamb of God, and now *he doubts? Even for a second?* Yes! Why?

And, it’s all because **his cousin isn’t acting like God ... God is acting like his cousin!** Did Jesus change? No. He’s the same yesterday, today, and forever. Did John expect Jesus to change? Yes, because Jesus didn’t “act” like God when they were growing up. And, John is caught so off-guard, he’s wondering: **“Jesus, are You the One? Because, You’re not really acting like the Savior.”**

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. **[These are all the things John expected the Lamb of God to do. But, now listen ...]** Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” – Matthew 11:4-6 NIV

What?! **When would anyone ever fall away on account of Jesus?** Oh, when He isn’t what we expect. **He doesn’t promise a life free from troubles and trials and tragedies.** So, **don’t you make the mistake of doubting Jesus when He doesn’t match your expectations.**

You can trust that His fulfillment will only and always exceed ‘em.