

John the Baptist

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Let us understand this prophet, John the Baptist. According to the Scriptures, John was filled with the Holy Spirit “while yet in his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). We are also told his coming was in the spirit and power of Elijah. Historians tell us that John’s penetrating, uncompromising ministry led nearly 1 million people to repentance. Vast multitudes left their cities and towns and went into the wilderness to hear the prophet and be baptized into repentance in preparation for the kingdom of God.

Only Jesus knew the fallen condition of the human heart more perfectly than John. No class of people escaped the Baptist’s judgment: soldiers and kings, sinners and religious leaders alike were all brought into the “valley of decision.” John’s baptism was more than a simple immersion in water. He required a public confession of sins as well as the bringing forth of righteousness (Matt. 3:6, 8).

Jesus testified that John was “more than a prophet.” He said, among those born of women, “there has not arisen anyone greater than John” (Matt. 11:9–11). John was a “seer prophet,” which meant he had open vision into the spirit realm. He testified that “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven” (John 1:32). He saw “the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7). He witnessed “the kingdom of heaven” (v. 2). John had insight into the secrets of men’s hearts. His vision penetrated the veneer of the well-respected Pharisees; within their souls he saw a “brood of vipers” (v. 7). Understand this about prophets: they are aware of things that are hidden from other men.

But when Jesus came to be baptized, before the heavens opened

and the Holy Spirit descended, John saw something that was overwhelming even to his standard of righteousness. He gazed into Jesus's heart, and he saw no sins, no lies, no lusts. John saw a level of holiness that, without knowing he was gazing at the Messiah, caused him to utter with astonishment, "I have need to be baptized by You" (v. 14).

Jesus, as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:36), was without spot or blemish. This is exactly what the prophet beheld in Jesus: spotless purity of heart. Christ's virtue took John's breath away! The powerful emanation of Christ's inner purity made John immediately aware of his own need. When John saw Jesus, he discovered a level of righteousness that was higher, purer than his own. This great prophet looked into the heart of Jesus, and in the brightness of Christ's holiness he cried, "I have need."

And so it is with us. Each time we see Jesus, each successive revelation of Christ's purity makes our need more apparent. As Christ's holiness unfolds before us, we cannot but echo the same cry of John the Baptist: "I have need to be baptized by You!"

Yet, in the beginning of our walk, we embraced life in our own strength, trusting in our own skills for success and attainment. Yes, we turned to God, but mainly in times of grief or trial. But as the Lord brings us into maturity, what we once considered strengths are actually discovered to be more subtle and, therefore, more dangerous weaknesses. Our pride and self-confidence keep us from God's help; the clamor of our many ideas and desires drown the whisper of the still small voice of God. Indeed, in God's eyes, the best of human successes are still "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17).