

Why John the Baptist Is the Second-Greatest Person to Ever Live

“I [Jesus] say to you, among those who are born of women, there is no greater prophet than John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28).

If we took a poll to name the greatest person history has ever known, it's highly unlikely that John the Baptizer would even crack the top ten or top thousand. Jesus is in a category of his own: God incarnate. But the Bible is clear that John is preeminent among the rest of us who are not members of the Trinity.

First of all, we read in Luke 1:15a that John “will be great in the sight of the Lord.” Jesus makes it even clearer a few chapters later, saying, “I tell you, among those who are born of women, there is no greater prophet than John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28).

This is an incredible statement, especially when you consider the fact that John spent the majority of his life living in obscurity. He began his public ministry in his late 20s or early 30s, and although he drew a lot of attention, it only lasted a few months before Jesus showed up. John was thrown in prison shortly thereafter, where he was beheaded as a young man.

What was so great about this bug-eating, honey-chugging, gospel-preaching, sinner-baptizing eccentric? From Zechariah's prophecy and elsewhere in the gospels, we can glean at least seven aspects of John's greatness and true greatness in the sight of God. Below are two of them.

1. John came from Spirit-filled parents.

Both John's mother, Elizabeth, and his father, Zechariah, were filled with the Holy Spirit. In Luke 1:41b, we read, "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" and then prophesies over Mary. In Luke 1:67a, "Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" over his son at birth. Luke tells us on numerous occasions that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit throughout his gospel. Simply put, being Spirit-filled means to be like Jesus by God's power.

2. John was filled with the Holy Spirit.

John himself was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Before John's birth, the angel Gabriel said, "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15b). The Bible also says, "The hand of the Lord was with him" (Luke 1:66b). That's another way of saying that the Holy Spirit was present with him, through him and in him through the course of his life.

John did not become the greatest man who ever lived through morality and good behavior, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we look at the life of John, the point is not to merely do what John did, but to be transformed through, filled with, and empowered by the same Holy Spirit who made John great and gave him great ministry. The Spirit will make you moral, but that's a byproduct and not the main thing. His goal is not to just make you better, but to make you new.

How is your personal relationship with the Holy Spirit? How can your personal relationship with the Holy Spirit improve?
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