

**“Recognizing the Greatness of Jesus” ~ Luke 3:15-22**  
January 27, 2010 ~ Mercy Hill Church ~ Pastor John Ferguson

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Intro: Back in 2013, Time Mag: “The Republican Savior. “ Marco Rubio tweeted, “There is only one Savior, and it is not me. #Jesus.”

No matter what you think of Rubio and his politics, or whether you like Republicans or Democrats or despise them all (!), we all have a tendency to look for someone who can crown the next political savior (Obama, Trump, etc.). I think part of the reason for that is we look upon our world and sense intuitively how our society is broken, and how things could be better, and it seems if we can just get the right person in, then we can have “heaven on earth.”

This is how people thought when a wild-eyed prophet by the name of John the Baptizer arrived on the scene outside of Jerusalem. He was saying all the right things, and it caused people to wonder if he was indeed the Savior that his people had so long been waiting for.

The ancient biographer of Jesus, Luke the Physician, includes details about this scene so that he can introduce us to Jesus, who indeed is the Savior of the world, who has come to deal with something far, far deeper than our political problems, real or perceived. He has come, Luke will tell us, to bring us back into relationship with the Creator of the universe, the one He invites us to know as “Father.”

### **Recognizing the Greatness of Jesus ~ Luke 3:15-22**

We’re going to take a look at a scene in which Jesus comes to be baptized by John, and something incredible happens that helps us to understand not only who Jesus is, but something of his mission which has incredible relevance for our lives.

So whether you are a seasoned follower of Jesus, or whether you are completely new to the person of Jesus just trying to gather some information about him that will be useful, I want to invite you to journey with me to the wilderness of Israel on the shores of the Jordan River where the crowds are buzzing with anticipation as we listen in on how Luke introduces us to the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

**15** As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, **16** John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

#### **1. The Expectation of Political Greatness**

(1) Prophetic silence for over 400 years; now John arrives on the scene with a prophetic voice.

(2) Popular: crowds were responding to him in droves

- Mt. 3:5, “Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
- Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 18:5.2, “...he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to exercise virtue, both in practicing justice toward one another and in pity toward God...”
- Luke 7:28, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.”

(3) Tiptoe expectation: Is he the Christ?

- “Christ” is not the last name of Jesus; it is a title meaning “Anointed One.” (Also, “Messiah”)
- The title refers to the one they anticipated who would come and deliver “heaven on earth.” In their minds, it was supposed to be someone who would lead a revolution and overthrow Roman rule of their land and establish Israel as the queen of the nations.

## 2. The Exaltation of Proper Greatness

1. At the height of his popularity as a preacher, John pointed himself to Jesus Christ.
2. K. Hughes, “A rabbinic saying...stated that disciples ought to do everything for their masters that a slave does, except for one thing — untie his sandals. That was simply too much to ask any Jew to do for another Jew.”
  - John the Baptizer: *Compared to the coming Christ, I am not even worthy to be the lowest of the low. That's how great he is! I am nothing, less than nothing. He is everything. I am not even worthy to be his slave.*

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **17** His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

### 1. The Internal Work of Jesus

- (1) John baptized with water, but Jesus baptizes with the Spirit of God himself.
  - Acts 2:16-17, “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days it shall be, declares the Lord, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.’”
- (2) Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit—the personal presence of God—onto and into the lives of his followers. The Spirit opens our hearts to believe the good news of Jesus (Cf. Acts 16:14), and this same Holy Spirit pours God’s love into our hearts.
  - Romans 5:5, “...God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

### 2. The Winnowing Work of Jesus

- (1) John speaks of Jesus baptizing people with the personal presence of God, and also with fire.
  - Some take this to be another way of saying the presence of God which is sometimes associated with fire (cf. Exodus 19:18; Acts 2); some take this fire to be symbolic of judgment (cf. vs. 17). But it might be more accurate to see this as a fire that purifies.
  - Mal. 3:1-4, “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; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire.... He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.”
- (2) John does speak of Jesus with a winnowing fork in his hand. The very result of the life and ministry will be a separating (cf. Mt. 25) which when it is all said and done necessarily entails a judgment, called in vs. 17, “unquenchable fire.”
  - Ryken, “John could call people to repent, but Christ could actually hold them to account. He is the Judge as well as the Savior.”
  - D. Bock, “That is why judgment can be good news. Where there is judgment, there is the offer of mercy.”

John will begin to fade from the scene in Luke's gospel as Jesus takes center stage. But before Luke shifts gears, he let's us know that not everyone took kindly to the message of John the Baptizer.

**18** So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. **19** But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, **20** added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

### 1. John spoke truth to power, and power put John in prison.

- John confronted Herod for having an affair with stealing the his brother Phillip's wife, Herodias, so Herod threw him in prison. Herod threw a birthday party for himself, in which Herodias' daughter danced a seductive dance for him and his guests. So gratified with her that he promised her anything she asked. In consulting her mother, she requested the head of John the baptist on a silver platter (cf. Mt. 14:1-12).

### 2. John recedes into the background of Luke's gospel as Jesus takes front and center.

- John 1:29, "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

**21** Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, **22** and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

### 1. Jesus identifies with sinners.

(1) Why was Jesus baptized? After all, we are told that he was "...one who in every respect was tempted as we are, yet without sin."

- Mt. 3:13, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"

(2) One reason Jesus was baptized was to definitively identify with sinful humanity.

- M. Card, "One who has never and would never sin submits to a baptism that is a sign of repentance. He is not repenting. He is *identifying*. It is the first step toward an eventual death on the cross. Here, with John, he submits to a baptism of repentance for sins he never committed. On Golgotha we will die for sins he never committed so that he can forgive each and every sin."

### 2. Jesus is identified as the Son of God.

(1) Israel had long awaited a savior—a Messiah—would would be not only be their king, but also the Son of God (cf. Psalm 2).

(2) Also, Caesar was already being worshiped as that son of god in the eastern parts of the Empire. He is a divine pretender.

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## So, why does Luke present to us this information in his historical biography of Jesus?

Luke wants us to know that Jesus is utterly amazing & worth following with everything you've got. As great as the figure of John the Baptizer was, he—and everyone else—pales in comparison to the greatness of Jesus.

Jesus is the true Son of God & the true Savior of the world who humbled himself to be identified with sinners in his baptism and eventually at the Cross, and because of that, he can grant the forgiveness of sins and pour out God's personal presence upon people like you and me.

**Like John, we should be so enamored with Jesus  
that we say, *I am nothing. He is everything.***

**Application #1: Welcome the greatness of Jesus into your life daily.**

1. **John thinks Jesus Christ is everything.** There is no comparison. God speaks of him as his beloved Son. He has been given the name that is above every name. All this is meant to point you to the most obvious thing you should do: **welcome Jesus into your life. Daily.**
2. **Bono: *In Conversation with Bono***, “The secular response to the Christ story always goes like this: he was a great prophet, obviously a very interesting guy, had a lot to say along the lines of other great prophets, be they Elijah, Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. But actually Christ doesn't allow you that. He doesn't let you off that hook. Christ says: No. I'm not saying I'm a teacher, don't call me teacher. I'm not saying I'm a prophet. I'm saying: "I'm the Messiah." I'm saying: "I am God incarnate...." What you're left with is: either Christ was who He said He was: the Messiah or a complete nutcase.... The idea that the entire course of civilization for over half of the globe could have its fate changed and turned upside-down by a nutcase, for me, that's farfetched...! So I ask myself a question a lot of people have asked: Who is this man? And was He who He said He was, or was He just a religious nut? And there it is, and that's the question.
3. **Bobby Jindal**, former governor of Louisiana, “I don't know why I was struck so hard at that moment.... There was nothing fascinating about this particular video.... But watching this depiction of an actor playing Jesus on the cross, it just hit me, harder than I'd ever been hit before. If that really was the Son of God, and he really died for me, then I felt compelled and get on my knees and worship him.”

**Application #2: Adore the greatness of the humility of Jesus.**

**If there was anyone who should be served, it was and is Jesus.**

1. **John tells us he wasn't worthy to untie the sandals on the feet of Jesus.** That was reserved for the lowest of the most lowly slaves. **And yet, Jesus stooped to do that very thing for us.**
  - John 13, “Having loved his own...he loved them to the end.” Jesus washes the feet of his disciples.
  - If there was ever anyone who should be served, it was and is Jesus. And yet, he lays down his life for us
2. **Phil. 2:5-11**, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant**, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..., and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

**Application #3: Make your life one giant sign pointing to the greatness of Jesus.**

- Ryken, “This is the hallmark of authentic Christianity: to exalt the person and work of Jesus.... The whole direction of the Christian life is to make more of Jesus, and less of ourselves.”

**MHC, may we be able to say, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).**