

John the Baptist was a significant transitional figure. He is the first prophet in 400 years, the last Old Testament prophet, and the herald of the Messiah. His role is so important that Jesus says of him “among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist!”

In this passage we will look at how John, though having a great ministry of his own, humbly pointed to Christ and made way for Jesus.

22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized 24 for John had not yet been thrown into prison.

25 Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.” 27 John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

- John Makes Way for Jesus (v 22–24)
- John is Not Jealous of Jesus (v 25–27)
- John Understands His Role (v 28–30)

John is an important figure in his own right. Luke 1 records his miraculous birth; he was going to be a special messenger sent from God. He is introduced in this gospel in 1:6-8, “6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light.”

Mark 1 tells us about what he did, preaching and baptizing. Matthew 3 tells us his message was “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He had a large impact for “all Judea,” and “all Jerusalem were going out to him.”

The other gospels record John’s arrest and beheading right after the temptation of Jesus. John lets us know in v 24 that there was a period of time between these events and that John the Baptist continued to preach and baptize.

John’s popularity even reached the palace of King Herod, and his preaching even had an impact on him. However, when John pointed out Herod’s sin of having his brother’s wife it landed him in prison and eventually cost him his head.

- **John Makes Way for Jesus (v 22–24)**

After the events recorded about Jesus’ interaction with Nicodemus, Jesus and his disciples move back into Judea. This was where John the Baptist had been ministering and had baptized Jesus. Other passages, like John 4:2, tell us it was the disciples who did the actual act of baptizing, not Jesus.

So what happened to John the Baptist? He moved. He goes to Aenon near Salim. This is in Samaria. As noted John the Baptist is there because there was a large amount of water where he could baptize.

John the Baptist moves making way for Jesus. By moving out of the way he made it possible for Jesus’ ministry to grow. Though he moves, he does not quit. He continues his ministry. He continues to preach repentance and baptize those who come in preparation for the coming Messiah. Interestingly, this is in Samaria, which figures prominently in chapter 4, and Jews looked down on Samaritans.

- **John is Not Jealous of Jesus (v 25–27)**

John the Baptist’s disciples get into a discussion with a Jew about purification. This is likely the purification mentioned in chapter 2 verse 6, and how that applied to the baptism that John and Jesus were doing.

The Jews’ concern however, was not theological, but rather concern about the success of Jesus’ ministry. They run to John in alarm. They are jealous of the popularity of Jesus. They will not even use His name referring to Jesus as *He* or *Him*.

Their concern about Jesus is that He is baptizing as well, and crowds are flocking to Him. They see Jesus as a threat



to their teacher. John was the one who started baptizing. The crowds used to come from all Judea and Samaria to hear *him* and be baptized. Now, Jesus was in their territory, and the crowds were coming to Him.

They were definitely loyal, but even they recognized that John had testified to Jesus. If they knew what John had been preaching and teaching why were they jealous? Shouldn't they too have recognized Jesus as the Messiah? Could it be that they enjoyed the popularity that came with being with John?

John's reply was void of any jealousy. Rather than compare himself with Jesus he took a heavenly view. **"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven."** John understood that his success had not been his own doing, but came from God. He understood what Jesus would tell his disciples later, "without Me you can do nothing." If God was now blessing the ministry of Jesus, he could be happy about that too. John was content to rest in the sovereignty of God.

- John Understands His Role (v 28–30)

The fact that John could be calm and unaffected by another's success is due to his focus being on Christ. He understood who he was and what his role was. He reminded His disciples **"You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ.'"**

Just like when the religious leaders questioned him about his identity, he was straightforward in asserting that he was not the Christ. Many people flocked to him to be baptized, hoping that he was the Messiah, but he repeatedly told them that he was not. John knew that *Jesus* was the Messiah. Even his disciples, who were jealous, recognized that he had testified to whom Jesus was. Back in chapter 1 verse 29, he had said of Jesus "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Not only did John recognize who he was not, he also understood his role, "I have been sent ahead of Him." True to his calling and his ministry, John reminded his disciples that he had been sent ahead of the Messiah. His role was to prepare the way for the Christ. Focusing on Christ kept John from jealousy and self-pity.

John used the idea of the best man at a wedding to illustrate how he saw himself as compared to Jesus. Like a best man who rejoices for his friend who has found a wife, John rejoices in Jesus' success because he knew He was the Messiah. In those times, the friend of the bridegroom had the responsibility of taking the bride to the groom. This was what John's role was. He preached

that people needed to get ready for the coming Messiah, then that Jesus was the Messiah, and now that they were going to see the Christ. The fact that many people were going to see Jesus was a sign of John's purpose being fulfilled, and this gave him great joy.

While some of John's disciples were jealous of the people going to Jesus instead of John, he took joy in seeing them go to Jesus. Jesus was the Messiah; they needed to go to Him. It was only through believing in Jesus that they could have eternal life.

John stands as a rare example of humility. He kept his eyes fixed on Jesus. Because he was concerned about leading others to Christ, he was not worried about his own success. Romans 12:3 says, ³For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among **you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think**; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."

John's last statement in verse 30 is a great life motto, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Are we willing to take a back seat, not worrying about our own success? What is most important to us? The building of fortune and our own success, or pointing others to Jesus? Our desire should be to see Christ glorified.

John, the greatest man according to Jesus, humbly focused on pointing others to Christ not building his own reputation. He understood that he must become less important and that Christ must be most important. He trusted in God's sovereignty, understood his role, and gladly made way for Jesus.



Bible Studies:

7:00 am Tuesdays – Bible study – Governor's Large Conference Room – Open to All: Legislators, Constitutional Officers, Lobbyists, Staff

8:00 pm Tuesdays – Legislator Only Bible Study – Perkins

