

John the Baptist – a Disciple 'Like his Teacher'

We are called to be disciples of Jesus, to learn from him and to practise what he taught. Thankfully, we are not asked to attain moral perfection like he did, as it would be impossible. We are instead asked to try our best and to be like him. Jesus said:

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master (Matthew 10:24–25).

A man who understood this very well was John the Baptist. Jesus gave him the exceptional commendation that “among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28). However, John humbly believed that he was “not worthy to stoop down and loose the sandals of his teacher” (Mark 1:7). John pointed out that even though Jesus was born after him, and started his ministry after him, he was ‘before’ John in terms of authority and importance:

This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me is preferred before me” (John 1:15).

John accepted that Jesus was always going to be above him; he understood what was (and was not) asked of him. It was enough for him to be like Jesus.

Same Sayings

John was like his teacher in a number of ways, especially in the things which

he said. Many of his phrases recorded in the scriptures are identical to those used by Jesus. Below is a selection of them:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand

- John – Matthew 3:2
- Jesus – Matthew 4:17

Brood of vipers!

- John – Matthew 3:7
- Jesus – Matthew 12:34, 23:33

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire

- John – Matthew 3:10
- Jesus – Matthew 7:19

Gather the wheat into the barn

- John – Matthew 3:12
- Jesus – Matthew 13:30

Fire that shall never be quenched

- John – Matthew 3:12
- Jesus – Mark 9:43

Duplicate Deeds

John was also like his teacher in the things that he did; his actions were described in very similar, sometimes identical terms to those of Jesus. Below is a selection of them:

The angel Gabriel prophesied that John would be “great in the sight of the Lord” (Luke 1:15). That same messenger from God was sent to Mary, to announce that she would give birth to a son called Jesus. He told her that

Jesus would be “*great and... the son of the Highest*” (Luke 1:32).

During his life, John was known by Herod as being a “*just and holy man*” (Mark 6:20). This makes his eventual execution by that wicked king even more shocking. When Peter accused the Jews of denying Jesus and having him killed, he described Jesus as being the “*Holy One and the Just*” (Acts 3:14).

Mark 6:20 tells us that Herod “*heard him [John] gladly*”. Regularly in the life of Jesus, we read that large crowds “*heard him gladly*” (Mark 12:37).



Repeated Rejection

Despite John the Baptist having all these qualities, the ruling Jews did not recognize him as God’s messenger, called Elijah in Malachi 4:5. Consequently, he was to suffer and be killed. Jesus told this to his disciples:

Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands (Matthew 17:12).

Despite all of Jesus’ qualities he was

not recognized as the Messiah. Rejected by the leaders and most of the people alike, just like John, he was to suffer and be killed.

Loved Alike

Both John and Jesus had disciples who loved them and whose love towards them continued after they had died. We read after the death of John:

When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:29).

Similarly, when Jesus had been crucified and was pronounced dead:

[Joseph of Arimathaea] bought fine linen, took him down, and wrapped him in the linen. And he laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb (Mark 15:46).

John the Baptist was not the Christ, nor did he try to be (John 1:20). Like John we should humbly accept that Jesus will always be above us. Although we cannot attain to his perfect standards, we are asked to try to copy him to the best of our abilities.

However, John’s excellent example shows that we can be like our teacher in word and deed. Like John, through the grace of God we can look forward to becoming like our teacher, raised from the dead and given immortality.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:5).

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