

# Explore the Bible: Prepared

December 22, 2020

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 10 focuses on Luke 3:7-18.*

The focus of this week's lesson is on the ministry of John the Baptist as he prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. Let's jump forward a few chapters in Luke and take a look at an amazing statement Jesus made about John: "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28, NIV).

Did you catch that? Jesus declared that no one had been "born of women" who was any greater than John the Baptist. Jesus seemed to be making the case that John the Baptist was the greatest person who had ever been born! If you consider how the world defines "greatness," John was a most unlikely candidate for such an accolade. So, what did Jesus see in John that caused him to declare that this itinerant preacher and prophet was the greatest?

## What made John the greatest?

Maybe it was John's dynamic disposition. You would think that the greatest person who ever lived would have a vibrant, charismatic personality. He would have "the look" of greatness. What about John? Mark 1:6 states, "John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey." John certainly wasn't "a man dressed in fine clothes" (Luke 7:25). John certainly didn't "dress for success," and his diet certainly wasn't going to make for a best-selling diet book.

Maybe it was John's prestigious location. You would think that the greatest person who ever lived would have been stationed in one of the great capital

cities of the world and had a most prominent place of service. What about John? Matthew 3:11 tells us, "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea." John lived way out in the desert wilderness, "out in the boon docks," on the back side of nowhere. Who would ever notice him way out there? This wasn't the place of notoriety, not the typical location for greatness.

Maybe it was John's immense popularity. Now John certainly attracted some big crowds, but the fact is that many, if not most, of the folks who came out to see him were the "curiosity seekers." John was like a novelty item, the new "circus act" who had come to town.

You would think the greatest person who ever lived would have gathered crowds who praised him and loved what he had to say. He would have certainly been a people-person and a people-pleaser, right? What about John? Well, John's message was really quite unpopular. He preached about sin and repentance. Nobody wanted to hear about that, right?

On one occasion John was preaching and the Pharisees came to hear him. These were the religious leaders, the important and powerful people of the day. You would think John would be on his best behavior and watch his words carefully. What did John do? He called them a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 3:7).

Another time John was brought before King Herod. Herod had the power to free or kill John. You would think John would have guarded his words closely. But what did John do? He confronted Herod with his sin of having his brother's wife! (Mark 6:18). That's not the way to "keep your head on your shoulders," and for John, it literally wasn't, as Herod soon had him beheaded.

Maybe it was John's outstanding performance that made him so great. Maybe John was a great miracle worker who did some amazing things

worthy of greatness. What about John? John 10:41 says John “never performed a sign.” No, John never worked wonders or had a great performance, at least not by the world’s standard of greatness.

If it wasn’t his dynamic disposition, his prestigious location, his immense popularity, or his outstanding performance, what was it about John that would prompt Jesus to call him the greatest person ever born of a woman?

## Position and purpose

Two traits of greatness jump out at us regarding John the Baptist. First of all, John knew *his position in life*. John knew who he was and most importantly he knew who Jesus was, and we always see John humbling himself before Jesus. Now there is an attribute of true greatness. In his first recorded words John exclaims, “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. (Mark 1:7, NIV). In John 3:30, he says this about Jesus, “He must become greater; I must become less.” Someone defined humility as knowing who you are and who Jesus is, and then knowing the difference! That certainly describes the greatness of John the Baptist.

And secondly, what made John so great is the fact that he understood *his purpose in life*. And that purpose was to always point people to Jesus. Again, John 10:41 affirms, “Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man (Jesus) was true.” John 1:7 states this about the Baptist, “He came as a witness to testify concerning that light (Jesus), so that through him all might believe.” John came to testify about Jesus, to tell people about Jesus, to point people to Jesus.

Understanding your position and your purpose, that’s not a bad formula for anyone who wants to discover true greatness in life. John discovered it. What about you? Jesus said, “the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (Luke 7:28, NIV). That means that even *you* could become

greater than the greatest person who ever lived!

Live in humility, know your position, understand your purpose. That's the key to true greatness today.

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