

What Do You Say About Yourself?

John 1:19-28

INTRODUCTION:

We live in a world today, where there is no shortage of opinions. We live in a world today, where people throw identities around hoping any one of them will stick because they don't realize that a proper identity has to be rooted in reality. By far this world is upside down because in yesteryear a person had to live in reality and only escaped by the imagination. Now people live only in the imagination and rarely visit reality.

How we live our lives is directly related to, and impacted by, who we believe ourselves to be. Again, there is no shortage of critiques and opinions who want to fill our minds with who they think we are, but it only comes down to who we know we are. For instance, many will waste their lives living under the opinion of a false authority (i.e. broken, traumatic parents) who have declared a false verdict that we are this or that, when reality, or more specifically, God says we are not. Why do we give free rental space of our minds to those who are false authorities? Many people are stuck in their lives from growing and becoming who God says they are because of emotional experiences or personal egos. Many buy into their advertisement that they are better than reality says they are because for a bit a few blew smoke and our egos grew too large. If we don't learn to evict the false authorities, then the voice that grows our ego or tears down our soul will only grow louder within us. At some point, we must break free from the delusions and live in reality.

The only way that we as believers should identify ourselves is in direct relation to who Jesus is. This is exactly what we will find as an example in the person of John the Baptist.

John 1:19-28

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me,

the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.¹

I. Who are you? (19-22)

- A. One of the biggest questions we face as humans is the question of identity.
- B. Today, we are lost to this very question because we have removed from our society the only one to give us the real answer.
- C. Many identify themselves based on their feelings, but it changes when the feelings change.
- D. “Who are you?” is a simple question with profound meaning in how it is answered.
- E. The religious inquirers asked John the Baptist this question. One might say the first press conference of the Jesus movement.
- F. They were curious because their egos couldn’t take the fact that this man was drawing a crowd with a religious tone.
- G. The inquirers knew something was up because of all the people going out to see him, and so they pondered who this strange man was.

Andreas Köstenberger,

1:19 What is at stake now is the Baptist’s identity and the nature of his ministry; later the focus will shift to Jesus. According to Luke, crowds came to John from all different walks of life (3:7–14). Matthew refers to both Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7). Here in the Fourth Gospel we are told of priests and Levites coming to John; later the evangelist mentions that Pharisees were coming to Jesus as well (1:24). Ministering mainly in and around the temple area in Jerusalem, priests and Levites were specialists in ritual purification and thus the ones most capable of dealing with issues arising from the Baptist’s ministry (see 3:25) (Ridderbos 1997: 63; R. Brown 1966: 43; contra Barrett 1978: 172). The authorities also would have been keen on controlling any activity that might lead to subversive actions against Rome (Morris 1995: 115).

Although the present incident seems at first glance to be nothing but an innocent fact-finding mission, it reveals that the Jerusalem authorities kept a watchful eye on John’s activities. This casts an ominous shadow forward on Jesus’ ministry, which is about to begin.⁷ The Baptist seems

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Jn 1:19–28). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

to realize this; he responds to the interrogation rather guardedly and only gradually reveals his true identity. At the heart of the delegation's mission appears to be a challenge to the Baptist's legitimization for engaging in his ministry. The very fact that emissaries from the Jerusalem authorities show up on John's doorstep serves as a show of power and as a signal that the authorities will not tolerate in the long run a ministry that runs counter to their own purposes.⁹ In the end, John identifies himself, not as an OT messianic figure, but as Isaiah's "voice crying in the wilderness," a transitional figure calling for repentance and heralding God's salvation.²

H. How would you answer that question if you were asked?

II. Who I am! (23)

A. Knowing who you are gives you the strength to do what you need to do.

B. John knew who he was!

C. Knowing who you are gives you confidence in the face of criticism, questions, and ridicule.

D. Many have given up their integrity, their mission, and their purpose because they never spent the time discovering who they are in relation to Jesus. When fortune or failure finds them, they unravel.

E. John knew who he was by first knowing who he wasn't. (21)

My first memory of really dealing with who I was was in the 7th grade when I was getting into music. I was a fan of Garth Brooks who was the biggest thing at the time, and everybody bought those Mo Betta shirts like he wore. I sang that year in a talent show of some sort and wore a shirt like I'd seen him wear with my black hat. My grandad afterward sat me aside and told me I did a good job, but there was one thing I needed to remember. He said, "We already got a Garth, what we don't have is a Jeff. You be you because that is who YOU are supposed to be."

F. This approach is sometimes hard for us to accept because our own egos get in the way.

² Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). *John* (pp. 58–59). Baker Academic.

- G. Many spend their entire lives trying to be someone they aren't, and so we miss who God really made them to be. It's disappointing because we all have something to contribute.
- H. John simply stated, "I am the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.
- I. This statement in Isaiah 40 is about the Lord returning to Jerusalem to comfort His people and to bring great joy.

Isaiah 40:1-6

40 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

- ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.
- ³ A voice cries:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
- ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."³

- J. John the Baptist's message is one of joy, but one of judgment as well because of where the religious elite found themselves in regard to their unfaithfulness to God.

Malachi 4:4-6

- ⁴ "Remember to obey the Law of Moses, my servant—all the decrees and regulations that I gave him on Mount Sinai for all Israel.
- ⁵ "Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives.
- ⁶ His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Is 40:1–5). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

K. John knew his identity lane and stayed within it. John the Baptist was the forerunner to God coming to Jerusalem but not in a cloud or fire, but tabernacled in flesh and blood as the man, Jesus.

L. Many of us are lost, our relationships are in turmoil, and growing questions about our purpose worry us inside because we have never invested the time to discover who we are in Christ. Therefore, we have no boundaries of authentic identity.

III. What I do (24-28)

A. Why do you baptize?

Dr. Bob Utley

Proselyte baptism was normative in ancient Judaism for those Gentiles wishing to become converts, but it was highly unusual for Jews themselves to be baptized (the sectarian Jews of Qumran practiced self-baptisms). This text may involve Messianic implications from Isa. 52:15; Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 13:1.⁴

Isaiah 52:15

¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.

¹⁴ As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.⁵

⁴ Utley, R. J. (1999). *The Beloved Disciple's Memoirs and Letters: The Gospel of John, I, II, and III John: Vol. Volume 4* (p. 17). Bible Lessons International.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Is 52:13–15). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

Ezekiel 36:24-27

²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules⁶

Zechariah 13:1

“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.”⁷

B. John stated what I do is baptize with water as a precursor to the one coming after me. Matter of fact, He is already among you.

F.F. Bruce

The emphatic “*I baptize in water*” prepares the reader for the mention of someone else who will baptize in a different medium. For the moment John does not speak of this different baptism, but he does speak of the one who will administer it. He is the one for whom John is preparing the way as forerunner, the one who is coming after him. By all accounts the forerunner is less important than the person for whom he prepares the way; John underlines his own relative unimportance in comparison with the Coming One by saying that he is unfit even to perform such a lowly service as untying his sandal strap for him.⁸

C. Again, water represents to the Jewish mind a new birth, new beginnings, or a new stage of something.

D. John stands completely ok to be in second place.

Frederick Bueckner speaking of John when Jesus shows up on the scene,

One day who should show up but Jesus. John knew who he was in a second. "You're the one who should be baptizing me," he said (Matthew 3:14), but Jesus

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Eze 36:24–27). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Zec 13). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁸ Bruce, F. F. (2018). [The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes](#) (pp. 50–51). Kingsley Books.

insisted, and so they waded out into the Jordan together, and it was John who did the honors.⁹

E. He recognizes his unworthiness in comparison to Jesus.

F. He takes the position of a servant.

G. All that he did was in direct relation to who he was in relationship to Jesus.

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Overall, John's ministry may be compared to that of the OT prophets who beckoned a righteous remnant to come out of the people of Israel (Carson 1991: 146). "I baptize with water" (carrying a concessive connotation) implies a contrast that is not made explicit—unlike in the Synoptics—until 1:33, where John speaks of "one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (Ridderbos 1997: 67; Morris 1995: 123).

Rather than dwell on his own ministry, John immediately shifts the focus to one whom his interrogators do not know, "one who comes after me" (i.e., his as-of-yet undeclared successor, an echo of 1:15; cf. 8:56–58). Note that, by his own acknowledgment, not even John himself knew Jesus' true identity apart from divine revelation (1:31, 33) (Beasley-Murray 1999: 24). John's self-confessed "ignorance" is a further instance of humility that throws into even starker relief the one who possesses original knowledge (1:18; 7:27–28) (Bultmann 1971: 92 n. 1).

In his own estimation, John is not even worthy to untie the straps of Jesus' sandals (cf. Mark 1:7 pars.; Acts 13:25). Rabbi Joshua b. Levi (A.D. 250) taught, "All manner of service that a slave must render to his master, the pupil must render to his teacher—except that of taking off his shoe" (*b. Ketub.* 96a). The Baptist, however, acknowledged that he was unworthy to untie Jesus' shoelaces, a task judged too menial even for a disciple (Daube 1956: 266–67). This is a telling statement of how great the Baptist considered Jesus to be.¹⁰

Conclusion

Louie Giglio

Humility is not a character trait to develop, it's the natural by-product of being with Jesus.

⁹ <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2016/7/30/john-the-baptist>

¹⁰ Köstenberger, A. J. (2004). *John* (pp. 64–65). Baker Academic.

C.S. Lewis

A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.