

“John the Baptist Appeared . . . Preaching”

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Read Mark 1:2-8

John the Baptist is the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1. He came as the forerunner to the arrival of King Jesus. He came to prepare the way by calling people to repentance and confession for the forgiveness of sin. John is a unique person. Although the role of prophet would continue after John, he is the last of his kind. After him a new order would begin. The simplicity of John's life is compelling. He was one of only three lifetime Nazarites (cf. Samson, Samuel). One of the arresting features of a life-long Nazarite was their vow never to cut their hair (Numbers 6). John was thirty years old when he appeared baptizing individuals in the Jordan. The imagery of a man with thirty years worth of hair wearing the garment of skin set him apart from the general populace. Anyone existing at that time in that geographical location fully understood what he represented.

John's entire life consisted in his complete devotion to God by preparing the way of one who was coming. This marked him and his ministry. Nothing John did detracted from this singular pursuit. The text before us highlights three aspects of John's ministry (Mark 1:2-8): the source of his authority, the nature his ministry, and the quality of his humility.

It is in verse 7 that we see John's humility. John clearly saw his ministry as one of secondary importance when contrasted with that of the One to come. He knew that he was of lesser strength and lesser worth. John fully understood that he was not the Christ (John 3:28). He understood that his role was one of preparation. He equally knew that the One to come must "increase" while John, of necessity, must "decrease" (John 3:30). John knew that the One to come was "from above [and] is above all" (John 3:31).

Mark expresses John's humility by noting John's confession that he was not worthy to unloose the latchet of the Messiah's sandal. When a guest entered a home, the thong of the visitor's sandals would be untied by a slave before entering the foot bath.

John places himself lower than the house servant. Was John using exaggerated speech or was John sincere? Personally, I believe John understood who the One was and thus saw himself as nothing in contrast to Him who alone is worthy. Man's inbred arrogance blinds him to his true nature. Man believes himself to be better than he actually is. Modern talk shows always paint the picture of man as intrinsically good. The snap shots are always "air brushed." Never do we see man for what he is. Our self-deception exists because we compare ourselves against others when the

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comparison should be between God and man. It is only when this happens that we will see ourselves for what we are, and it is only when this happens that we can receive, by grace alone through faith alone, the offer of Christ alone.

It is when this happens, that we, like John, readily admit that we are lower than any household servant and that we, like John, are unworthy to unlatch the sandals of the Messiah. May the Holy Spirit continue to open our eyes to the reality of our Lord's "above all" status and may we always see ourselves in need of and recipients of His excessive grace.