The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived
Scripture: Matthew 11
Code: BQ52011

But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:9-11)

A mark of John's greatness was his privileged calling. Until Christ's own ministry began, no human being had been called to a task as high and sacred as that of John the Baptist. In many ways his privilege overshadowed that of Mary, who gave Jesus birth. John was chosen to announce and prepare the way for the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of kings.

Jesus now asked the crowd a third question: **But why did you go out? To see a prophet?** The answer to that question is clearly yes. As already mentioned, John the Baptist had developed a large and dedicated following in addition to his disciples, and most of the people did indeed consider him to be **a prophet** (Matt. 14:5; 21:26).

The prophetic office began with Moses and extended until the Babylonian captivity, after which for 400 years Israel had no prophet until John the Baptist. He was the valedictorian of the prophets, the most dynamic, articulate, confrontational, and powerful spokesman God had ever called. As the last prophet, he would not only announce that the Messiah was coming but that He had arrived.

In true greatness, the right person is always matched to the right position. A person with much potential will accomplish little if his talents are not channeled into work that takes full advantage of those abilities. No person can fulfill his human potential like a Christian can, because God omnisciently matches our talents, gifts, and calling. In John the Baptist the greatest man and the greatest human mission came together by God's sovereign and providential direction.

Jesus assured the people that John not only was a prophet but **more than a prophet.** Quoting Malachi 3:1, He said, **This is the one about whom it is written, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You."** The expression **before Your face** means to be in front of, or to precede. An expanded translation, as interpreted here by Jesus, would read, "Behold, I, Jehovah, send My messenger John the Baptist to be the forerunner of You, the Messiah, and to prepare the people for Your coming."

John was both prophet and fulfillment of prophecy. He was the Lord's **messenger** who was to **prepare** [the] **way** for Messiah and who would even baptize Him. He announced the Messiah and ministered to the Messiah with his own hands—as no other prophet had done or would ever again do. After thousands of years of God's preparation and prediction, John was given the unequalled privilege of being the Messiah's personal herald.

Continuing His praise of John, Jesus said, **Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.** To emphasize the unquestionable truthfulness of what He said, Jesus prefaced His words with **verily** *(amen),* a term of strong affirmation often simply transliterated as "Amen."

Born of women was a common ancient expression that simply referred to basic humanness, to identification with the human race (see Job 14:1; 15:14). Jesus' point was that, as far as mankind is concerned, **there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.** He was the greatest human being who had lived until that time. From an earthly perspective, John's character and calling made him the greatest man yet born besides Jesus Himself. In superior qualities as a human being, John was unequalled.

Arisen is from *egeiro,* which means to rise up or to appear on the stage of history and was often used of prophets, both true and false (see, e.g., Matt. 24:11, 24). Not only as a human being but as a prophet, no one had **arisen** to equal John, because he was sent on the very threshold of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

But lest the people misunderstand the nature of John's greatness, Jesus added, **yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.** Although he was a spiritual giant among men, John's unique greatness was in his role in human history, not in his spiritual inheritance, in which he would be equal to every believer. Therefore, **the least in the kingdom of heaven,** the spiritual dimension, **is greater than he,** that is, than anyone in the human dimension, including John.

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