

## What do you say about yourself?

### Part 2

John 1:19-34

Series #6

**Introduction:** Take your Bible and join me in John chapter 1, the Gospel of John, chapter 1.

One of the most important and most difficult exercises of the Christian life is to think rightly about yourself. The temptations to pride are relentless – to have an inflated and unrealistic view of your value and worth. And the opportunities for finding your worth in the wrong things are without end. But there are also plenty of wrong thoughts in us about true humility as well. We are tempted to think that self-abasement – simply putting myself down in comparison to others is humility. We might think that self-sacrifice is humility – simply giving myself to the service of others. We might think that self-depreciation and self-despising is humility – having a view of our self which is filled with thoughts of how we don't measure up and don't really matter in this world. But are those things really humility? And if they are not, what is true humility and how do we pursue it? How should we view ourselves – in other words? If I would ask you, what do you say about yourself – what would be the key to your answer?

The world would tell you that the key to a proper self-image is self-esteem. You are good enough and smart enough and pretty enough, and people like you – so you should have warm fuzzy feelings about yourself. But you already know that this self-esteem thing is like taking a shower with dirty water. It's supposed to get you clean and help you, but it just makes things worse.

The Scriptures give us a much different approach. One that we have seen displayed in the life of John the Baptist in John chapter 1. John the apostle begins his account of the life of Jesus by telling us about the chief witness to the glory and greatness and true nature of Jesus – John the Baptist. And it is in the words and ministry of John the Baptist that we see this model of true humility in the servant of God.

Last week we laid the first 2 building blocks for this heart of humility. We saw that the humble servant is honest about himself, and that he is focused on his Master. We see these truths in John 1:19-34 – and so, let's read that as we begin this morning.

We are not told very much about John the Baptist and his ministry in preparing the way for the Messiah, but don't let quantity confuse you about his importance. He is wildly popular in Israel and his ministry has captured the attention of the religious elites in Jerusalem. So, they send an entourage out to where John is preaching and baptizing to try and find out who John is. As they interrogate him, we see this humility of John put on display which is so very helpful for us as we think about ourselves as Christ's servants. His words are honest about himself and they are focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. As words are always the overflow of the heart – we can understand John's heart – the very core of John the Baptist – by his words. And by his words he

confesses that he is not the Christ and not Elijah and not the prophet promised by Moses. He is simply a voice crying out in the wilderness to make ready the way of the Lord. He is not the light; he is just the witness about that light. He is not the Word in the flesh, he is simply the voice declaring that the Word of God is about to show up. When John thinks of John he thinks of himself as humble and lowly because he is so focused upon his master. The statement in verse 27 is a hinge statement which shifts the focus of the text from John the Baptist to Jesus. John says there that he is not even worthy to untie the sandal strap of the one who is coming after him. This was John using the Rabbi's own language to describe his humble position before Jesus. There was a Rabbinic saying that a disciple should do everything for their teacher except for untie his sandal strap – that should be left for the slaves of the household. But John says – I am lower than the lowest slave before this highly preeminent one. I am not even worthy to untie his sandal strap. And then the rest of the text is about this Jesus who is far greater than John. We looked at that progression last week – but he calls him Lord in verse 23 and then he makes the statement about the sandal strap in verse 27, and then in verse 29 he makes the glorious statement about Jesus – behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This progresses to say that this Jesus is the one whom the Spirit resided upon and who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And this then leads to the climactic statement of truth in verse 34 – this is the Son of God – God himself in the flesh! This is all evidence of John's humility which is built upon the foundation stones of honesty about himself which is informed by his right understanding of his master. In this moment of incredible temptation to take just a little bit of credit, or tout just one of his many credentials and accomplishments – he steadfastly proclaims about Christ.

I want to point you this morning to the third foundation stone in this building of humility, and then I want to show you the structure of the building. Another way to say it would be to say that these first three truths about the humble servant are the inward organs and the last four truths are the outward body of humility. The last four make known to us the life and depth of this humility in the servant of Christ. And the health of the last four depends entirely upon the presence of the first three. So, the humble servant is honest about himself, focused on his master, and this third truth – he is formed by revelation.

#### **I. The Humble Servant is Formed by Revelation**

- a. This, I think, is probably one of the most underrated aspects of humility in the Church – that humility is dependent upon revelation. In order to be truly and rightly humble before the Lord, you must see the Lord in all the glorious truth of who He is. And how do you see that, but through his revelation of himself. The fuel which keeps the fire of humility hot in the heart is the revealed truth about Jesus Christ. And this is what we see evidenced in John the Baptist.
- b. He was questioned by the religion police on why he was baptizing in the Jordan River if he was not the Messiah, not Elijah, and not the Prophet. What business did he have to be doing such an offensive thing for the Jews? In verses 26-27 he doesn't really answer the question. He tells them – yep – I am baptizing with water. But there is one among you that you don't even know – one who is coming after me – who is so much more glorious than me that I am not even worthy to untie his sandal strap. They don't know him yet, but they will soon enough. Then in verses 31-34 John tells his followers on the next day how it is that he knew Jesus was the Lamb of

God who takes away the sin of the world. He knew it because it had been revealed to him. This one he was sent to reveal is the one who was revealed to him.

- c. And this whole revelation is tied around John's baptism. He came baptizing others to prepare them for the revelation of the Son of God. And now he tells us that it was this very baptism through which the truth about Jesus was revealed to him. So, he said in verse 26 – you don't know him – and then in verse 31 – I myself did not know him, but for this very reason I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel. And then he tells us in verses 32-33 how this happened, and what he is telling is the account of Jesus' baptism. There are many more details given in the other gospels of Jesus' baptism, but John's point here is to tell us how this moment revealed the true nature of Jesus as the Son of God.
- d. He had been told by the one who sent him to baptize that there would be a certain way he would know who the Messiah was. Remember, this was John's one job – to proclaim the soon coming of the Messiah. He had been sent by God himself, as we learned in verse 6 – and he had been given this one task by God – to prepare the way of the Lord. But he didn't know ahead of time who this Messiah was for sure. Now, I am sure he had an inkling. Don't you think he probably heard the story of his mother's cousin – Mary – visiting his mother when they were both pregnant, and how baby John leaped in Elizabeth's womb when Mary entered the scene? Don't you think his parents had told him that this was the Messiah who had been prophesied for so long? For sure! But there still needed to be divine confirmation. That is how human this Jesus was – he was truly human. So much so that there was nothing setting him apart from other humans. There needed to be a divine act confirming and publicly declaring that this Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah, the very Son of God.
- e. And John had been told that the one upon whom the Spirit descended and remained – this was the Messiah – the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. In Jewish life the kings and prophets and priests were all anointed with oil at the outset of their service. This was the public and symbolic act which set them apart as anointed by God. But at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan he was anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove and remained upon Him. This was the public ceremony of heavenly appointment for Jesus. This was to let everyone know that Jesus of Nazareth was the anointed one from Heaven. And it was completely taken out of the hands of human authority so that no one could say this was humanly contrived or made up. This was God's Messiah – and John could not be more convinced of that very fact! And because John is convinced of that fact, he is humbled before this Jesus. He sees him as he has been revealed to him, and this brings about this great humility of heart. And this forms the triform of a perfect foundation for humility – honesty about myself, focus upon my master, and formed by revelation about my master.
- f. So, for us as Christians this means that the path to humility is not primarily a look at ourselves, but rather a look at our glorious Lord and Savior. If your humility is formed by anything other than a holy reverence and awe before the Lamb of God, then it will prove to be another expression of pride masquerading as humility. True

humility must look with the eyes of faith upon the revelation of Jesus Christ and find its place worshiping at his feet. There is a reason that worship in the Greek uses a word which means to bow down. It is only when we see the truth about our exalted Lord that we will put our face in the dirt and bow before Him in every area of life. And we will only see him as preeminent as a result of revelation.

- g. Therefore, the pathway to your own humility is dependent upon your own continuous intake of revelation. This is one of the insidious and hard to recognize effects of not keeping your nose in your Bible – it is a pride filled view of yourself. The less you see of Christ the more you will see of yourself. And the more you see of yourself the more you will be exalted in your own estimation. The hydrating drink which will rejuvenate the humility of the thirsty soul is always the water which flows from the spring of Jesus Christ. The truly humble servant is formed by revelation.

## II. **The Humble Servant is Clear in his message**

- a. These three foundation stones provide the sufficient base upon which to build the structure of a humble life. And the extent to which these three things are in place is the extent to which these next four truths will evidence themselves in the life of the servant. The more you see yourself honestly as you see Christ more preeminently as shown you in the Scriptures, the more you will look like John the Baptist. So, what did his humility look like? And this answer is more than that he just didn't talk too much about himself, or that he was pleasant to be around. In fact, his whole ministry life is driven by this true humility.
- b. The first evidence I want to point you to is that this humble servant is clear in his message. There is no obfuscation or lack of clarity here. And that is no small statement. Remember that John has caused quite the ruckus in Israel, and he is in some kind of religious hot water when this entourage from Jerusalem shows up. The religion police are on the scene and if ever there was a time where John was tempted to be less than clear about who he was and what he was doing – this was it. But there is not a shred of wavering in the face of their intimidation and pressure. He was crystal clear. Beloved – don't we struggle so often right here? Isn't it in the face of pressure and intimidation that it is the hardest to be clear about Jesus and about our relationship to Him? Isn't it when our co-worker presses us about whether or not we really believe in the exclusive claims of Christ that we are most tempted to soften our testimony and be less than clear? Isn't it when we feel the pressure of relationships or of reputation being hampered in some way by clearly proclaiming the gospel of Christ that we are most prone to obfuscate? What you need to know is that this is pride. The temptation is rooted in making yourself look a little better at the expense of the truth about Christ.
- c. And we see the opposite in John here. He is clear in his message. He tells them of Christ and points them to his preeminence and worth at the expense of his own. And then the next day, he utters that glorious statement found in verse 29. Rather than keep people connected to him, John sees Jesus coming and proclaims – “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” This is not just a declarative statement of fact or observation. John is not asking them to simply turn their eyes to

take in something noteworthy. Rather, this is an imperative interjection. He interrupts their lives with this declarative command – behold this man. This is one of John the apostle’s favorite words because he loves to point people’s eyes to the Son of God. John wants his readers to know the truth about Jesus and to believe upon his name. And John the Baptist wants his followers to know the truth about Jesus and to see him as he really is. So, he commands them to look and then he tells them what they are seeing. He points them to the truth and then he explains that truth.

- d. Look at this man and know that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He has come as the Savior of mankind from sin. He will do that by giving his life as a sacrificial lamb. John is clear in his message because he is a truly humble servant. This is the opportunity and the responsibility of every Christ-follower today. This is what it is to witness for Christ to the lost. We are calling them to raise their eyes of faith to the one who has come to earth to save them from their sin. It is to be boldly clear even in the face of the most intimidating situation. And the key to this clear testimony is a humbled heart focused on the Master and formed by his revelation of who He is.

### III. The Humble Servant is Faithful to his calling

- a. The second fruit we see of this humility in John’s life is his faithfulness. He is simply faithful to his calling. His humble heart precedes his faithful life and ministry. He is called to be the forerunner to the Messiah. He knows his role and he knows the Master of his soul – and that is enough to keep him humble which then keeps him faithful. The popularity of the crowds could not derail him, and the intimidation of the religion boys could not stop him. He was going to finish the task and be faithful because he was humble. And that is always the key to faithfulness – humility. If there is pride in your heart you will find a way to reason yourself out of faithful obedience. You will think that you know better than your Master, or that you have found a better way than what he has prescribed. You will be tempted to play fast and loose with the message because you will see an opportunity to make a name for yourself. But if you simply want to be faithful to your Master and do as He has commanded, then you must be humble before him!

### IV. The Humble Servant is Unashamed before men

- a. And this leads directly to the next fruit in this humble servant’s life, and that is that he is unashamed before men. To be faithful, John had to be unashamed and undeterred by his opponents. These religion boys – this official entourage from Jerusalem – are definitely there to cause problems for John. And it would have been an intimidating sight for the crowd to see.
- b. The priests, as I mentioned last week, were some of the most respected men in any Jewish community. They were descendants from Aaron, and they were responsible for the Temple and its sacrificial worship. They lived throughout the land and would travel to Jerusalem for their couple of weeks of service. When they were not serving in the Temple they were looked to as theological experts. And the Levites were their cohorts in the task of keeping religion on track in the land. The Pharisees were a religious party who had committed themselves to strict orthodoxy. While the priests were part of the religious elite because they served in the Temple, the

Pharisees were the religious experts of the common people. They represented the normal person and they were highly respected by the everyday Jew. They were scrupulous about the Law and their name is thought to mean “separatists.” But, instead of separating themselves by clinging singularly to revealed truth, they created a fence of rules and regulations around the Law which they proposed would keep them from ever breaking the Law. And those traditions and rules of men became more important to them than the clear Word of God. And it is the priests and Levites who are a part of the Sadducees and the Pharisees who form the ruling party in Jerusalem during Jesus’ day. They both have differing, but complementary spheres of influence. And they both are competing for the power of influence in society.

- c. Both of these groups – the priest and Levites and then the Pharisees – have a domain of power to maintain in the name of religion. And here is this John the Baptizer interrupting their system and the balance of power. He is suddenly more popular and influential with the people than they are. There simply could not be a more intimidating entourage to show up at the Jordan River – humanly speaking. But John is not influenced or ashamed in any way. His emotions are in check. His fear of man is burned to ashes by the hot flame of the glory of his Savior. He is unashamed of the Gospel of Christ in one of the most charged scenes filled with displays of human power and influence. John is not daunted or derailed. His train stays on the track of bold witness because his engine is fueled by a high view of Christ and his heart is humbled before Him.
- d. Beloved, this is the key to our bold and faithful witness for Christ as well. To be more courageous and unashamed we must be more humble before our Lord. As our culture turns more and more away from truth, we will be placed in moments like this – where the pressure is high, and the tension is great, and the fear of man is through the roof. The only way we will be faithful and courageous in that moment to speak of Christ and his glorious gospel will be a humility fueled by a high view of our Savior.

**V. The Humble Servant is Useful to the glory of Christ**

- a. And this will allow us to be useful to the glory of Christ in the world. That is the last mark of the humble servant – they are useful to the glory of Christ. We find this in verse 34 in our text. John says in his climactic statement – “And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” These verbs are in the perfect tense which means this is something accomplished in the past with ongoing effect. And the ongoing effect of John’s clear and bold witness is that he fades into the background and Christ is exalted as Lord and God. In other words, John the Baptist did what the Lord asked of him. He served as the forerunner preparing the way for the coming of the Lord.
- b. That is why when he is pressed in chapter 3 by his own disciples about this Jesus who is himself baptizing and all were now going to Jesus instead of coming out to hear John the Baptist he will say to them – “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices

greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."

- c. John's life was given completely to this task of becoming less as his Savior became more. He was on this equilibrium where his decrease in renown and fame immediately meant the increase of the renown and fame of his Lord. This is how it works. It is like you and Jesus are on a seesaw as it were, and you can't both be up, and you can't both be down. As the Lord's servant, if you are down, he is up, and if you are up, he is down. So, John says, I must decrease, and he must increase. And this guaranteed that John's life and witness was useful to the glory of the Lord.
- d. When a man asked George Mueller the secret of his service, Mueller responded: "There was a day when I died, *utterly died*; died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied to show myself approved only to God." That is humility fueled by a high view of Christ!

**Conclusion:** Beloved, this is the path to faithful boldness and usefulness for Christ. It is well-marked by saints who have previously walked this trail. We need not get lost in the woods of confusion as the fog of pride descends upon our view. We must simply take that next step down the path of humility. The pathway is lit by the glow of the radiant glory of Christ Jesus. And the rays of his glory to light our path increase as we look more and more with the eyes of faith to the revelation He has given us about himself in the Word. And along the way we find the markings of faithful brothers and sisters who have walked this path before us. In one place we see the life of John the Baptist pointing us further down in humility and up in praise and adoration and service. In another place we come across the Apostle Paul and we read words like "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1 Cor. 15:9-10) And, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) And, "as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. 1:20-21) And of course, the classic text in 1 Timothy where Paul expresses great humility coupled with great praise – "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."