

Jesus and John the Baptist

See Lk 7:18-35

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.^a

²When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples ³to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

11:2 The One to Come?

John's question here may reflect confusion over the Messiah's role. If, like many Jews, John was expecting a political Messiah who would overthrow the Romans, his imprisonment may have caused him to wonder why Jesus wasn't taking action. Jesus responded by clarifying the kind of kingdom he had come to establish: a kingdom that would bring healing, liberation and good news—but not necessarily political power.

⁴Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^b are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ⁶Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

⁷As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. ⁹Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

¹¹I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. ¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵He who has ears, let him hear.

¹⁶"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others:

^a1 Greek *in their towns* ^b5 The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy. ^c10 Mal. 3:1

100 people
you should know

John the Baptist Something New

Fashion starts with a single purpose: to turn people's heads. At first the new look is a shock. Many say, "Wow"; some say, "Ugh!" Whether it's short skirts or long, nose rings or earrings, paisleys or pastels, the new must stand out to gain attention.

John the Baptist was something new, and he certainly stood out from his surroundings. Though he could have been a priest like his father, he exchanged those linen robes for a garment of coarse camel's hair. He took to the wilderness, scavenging grasshoppers and wild honey rather than settling in Jerusalem where he could have savored a portion of the offerings people presented to God.

John's unusual style helped direct attention to his burning message: The Messiah was about to arrive, and people must change their ways. Crowds flocked to hear John, and he baptized them in the Jordan River as a sign of their repentance, thus earning for himself the nickname "the Baptist."

No less an authority than Jesus said that John was as great as any man who had ever lived (11:11). In the same breath Jesus added that the lowest-ranking person in the kingdom of God, now drawing near, was even greater than John. Although John represented the best of the old order, the new order of God's kingdom would outshine his greatness by far.

John had no difficulty accepting this comparison. When he saw Jesus he recognized "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He considered himself unworthy even to untie Jesus' sandals. John the Baptist did not intend to attract attention to himself; rather, he pointed to Jesus.

When Herod Antipas arrested and executed John (14:1-12), most of John's disciples followed Jesus. It took a long time, however, for some who lived in far-off parts of the world to get the full message about Jesus (see Acts 18:24-26; 19:1-7). They, too, quickly adopted the Christian way. Despite John's great influence, it was a mark of his success that he left no distinctive "church" of his own. His followers were ready for Jesus.

LifeQuestions

How can your lifestyle help prepare people for Jesus?