

John 1:19-28

This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ "Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet we are expecting?"

"No."

²² "Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah: "I am a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Clear the way for the Lord's coming!'"

²⁴ Then the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?" ²⁶ John told them, "I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. ²⁷ Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal."

²⁸ This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

Background

John 1:19–28 offers a deeper look into the ministry of John the Baptist. In verse 19, we see the first of many encounters with the Jewish religious leaders, a group often portrayed negatively throughout the Gospel of John. These leaders, including the Pharisees, were known for their legalism and hypocrisy. They sent a delegation to question John's authority, as he operated outside their system yet attracted large crowds. They were jealous and wanted to "check him out." Verse 28 tells us that John was baptizing at Bethany; however, this is not the town where Mary and Martha lived, but a location likely near Jericho in Perea.

Teaching Points

1. Jesus was the predicted Messiah, but not the expected popular Messiah.

When the delegation from Jerusalem questioned John the Baptist, their first concern was whether he was the Messiah. This reflected the strong Messianic expectation in Jewish society, fueled by Old Testament prophecies and the desire for a conquering king to free them from Roman rule. After 400 years without a prophet, John's sudden appearance sparked speculation. But John clearly denied it, stating, "I am not the Messiah." Instead, he identified himself as the

prophetic “voice shouting in the wilderness” preparing the way for the Lord. He revealed that the true Messiah was already among them, but was unrecognized because He didn’t match their expectations of a powerful, popular deliverer.

2. John the Baptist was not Elijah, but he could have been Elijah.

The Jerusalem delegation also asked John if he was Elijah, as prophesied in Malachi 4:5, or “the Prophet” mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:18—both figures expected before the Messiah’s arrival. John denied being either.

So why does the teaching point say that John *could have been* Elijah? This can be a confusing subject, but the answer is found in what Jesus said in Matthew 17 after the Transfiguration. There, Jesus seems to say both that the Elijah prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist and that Elijah is still to come. This is not a contradiction. If the Jews had accepted Jesus as their King, John the Baptist would have fulfilled the Elijah prophecies of Malachi 4, and the kingdom of heaven would have been established. However, because the Jews rejected Jesus and His kingdom, the physical kingdom was postponed.

When the Lord returns, an Elijah-like figure *will* precede His second coming to set up His kingdom. It may be Elijah himself or one of the two witnesses from Revelation 11.

Application

1. Let’s be humble road builders like John the Baptist.

When asked about his identity, John the Baptist humbly responded that he was not the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet. He was just “a voice shouting in the wilderness” (v.23), quoting Isaiah 40:3. His role was to prepare the way for the Lord, like a road builder clearing obstacles for the coming King. John showed deep humility and saw himself as unworthy to even serve Christ as a slave. His mission was to remove spiritual barriers so people could meet the Messiah.

Likewise, we’re called to be humble “road builders,” helping others overcome doubts, hurts, or misunderstandings so they can come to faith in Christ.