

John 1:19-23

19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

*21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he *said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."*

22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

Last week, we began to look at this story of the interview John the Baptist had with some priests and Levites who were sent to John by the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the leaders of the Jewish religion in the days of Jesus.

The entourage had the mission of finding the answers to two questions. First, who are you? Second, what is this baptism you are doing?

We looked extensively at the second question last week. If you want the notes to that sermon, you can get them on our webpage. I do not put them there to toot my horn. I put them there because I believe these sermons are what God wants our church to hear, and those who are visiting our church to hear. I want you to get those notes for your benefit, not mine.

Since we have looked at the second question last week, I wish to come back to the first question that the group asked John. Who are you?

I think this question was asked to discover if John will pose a threat to them. The questions were asked not to learn what they can gain. The questions were asked to learn what they might lose. Is John a danger that will cause them to lose control of the people, the temple, and the money coming into the temple? Power, prestige, and their purse were their gods.

This morning, I want us to learn how this question was answered as revealed in this text. I also want to see how this question in answered today.

John the Baptist

Who are you, John? Notice the suggestions or the thinking of the religious leaders. Was John the Christ they were looking for? Was John Elijah? Was John one of the prophets?

John answers the question with two responses. Both responses reveal the depth of John's spiritual life. He was a man of God. That was obvious to all including the Jewish leaders. Otherwise, they would not have sent this group in the first place. Notice the two responses.

First he says emphatically, "No! I am not the Christ." The tone in which John answered is one of outrage. It angered John that they would ask him if he were the Christ. How John answers this question along with the other questions and answers reveals the depth of John's spiritual life. He was a man of God.

The second answer was to reveal exactly who he was. Look again at verse 23. "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" He identified himself by the purpose for which God had sent him. His purpose of coming was to prepare the way of Christ. He was to help people prepare their lives for the coming of Messiah. As he did as God wanted him to do, John found fulfillment, joy, and satisfaction.

In telling who he was, he was also giving a message to the Jewish leaders. In a sense, John was spinning the table on them. Who are you?

The Jewish Leaders

The question is never asked to the group of their identity. But by them being there, it shows who they were.

They were people who were basing their right standing with God on keeping the Law. Though they saw themselves as being perfect, they were blind to what was real. The Bible says that the Law had the ability to condemn, but did not have the power to redeem. They had no righteousness in the eyes of God. They were right only in their own eyes. We can be very self-deceiving.

These were a group of people who were power hungry. As I said, I think John posed a threat to their power. By that statement of reality, these men's true god (idol) was power, prestige, and money.

We can talk more about them, but I want to take the remainder of our time to allow God to tell us who we are. Here is the answer. You are either similar to the Pharisees or you are similar to John the Baptist.

You may be similar to the Pharisees in that you have not reached the position of right standing with God, but you are trying your best to get there. The emphasis is on you. You come to church. I want you to come to church. You give your offering. I want you to give your offering. You may be a member of this church. I want you to be a member of this church if God has called you to be a part of this body. However, if your purpose of coming, giving, and belonging is to attempt to be right with God; your attempts will never, never, never work.

Ephesians 2:9 says that being saved is not of ourselves. It is not as the result of works. Titus 3:5 tells us that it is not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness that God has saved us.

I need to give you the rest of Titus 3:5 and then go back and give you Ephesians 2:8.

⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and ^[a]that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

There is the combination that is of God that leads to salvation. It is God's mercy accompanied by God's grace. God is merciful in not giving what we deserve. God is grace in that He gives to us what we don't deserve.

These are total opposites. As we understand that, they we are at a place where we can take a further step. That is, to ask the question of ourselves, "Who are we?" I pray that the Holy Spirit will be our examiner, not us.

Who are you?

How do you answer the question, "Who are you?" How do you answer that in accordance to your spiritual life.

In the broadest sense, we either answer the way the Jewish leaders answered, or we answer the way John the Baptist answered. The answer we give is the reflection of where we are in our spiritual condition.

Those similar to Pharisees

We don't want to be like the Pharisees. We will reason all we can to not be similar to the Pharisees. However, if we are trying to gain position of right standing with God through works, we are doing like the Pharisees. I didn't say you are Pharisees. But you are working your right standing with God like the Pharisees did. All other religions are doing just that.

We have already talked about those who will have to relate to the Pharisees. The Holy Spirit will tell you that you need a Savior because you are unable to work out your own salvation. Cry to God for mercy and grace.

Those similar to John the Baptist

As I look at all that John the Baptist said, one word comes to my mind--Disciple. His life is what it looks like to live the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

There is no such thing as being a Christians and not being a disciple. You are either a follower of Christ or you are not a follower of Christ.

A disciple is one who knows and follows Christ, one who is being changed by Christ, and one who is committed to the mission of Christ.

If you have been around for the past few years, this is nothing new. You have seen this before.

A disciple knows Christ in a personal relationship that is real and that is relevant. Do you have that personal relationship with Jesus? He is not the historical Jesus. He is the living, resurrected Jesus who indwells us through the Holy Spirit.

A disciple follows Christ. He follows Christ's teaching. He obeys the commandments of God. He follows in obedience to baptism. He follows in loving one another. He follows Christ by making disciples of Christ. He follows to the point of being like Christ. He follows by obeying. He obeys because Jesus is Lord. If you don't obey or don't want to obey, then how can you call Him Lord? That is why the group from Jerusalem came looking for John, he was acting just like Christ.

A disciple is being changed by Christ, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. That takes place through an ongoing discipleship education that includes private and corporate Bible studies, and active prayer life. If you are not being changed by Christ, are you a disciple of Him?

A disciple is one who is committed to the mission of Christ. What is the mission of Christ? I have come to give life and give it abundantly. I've come to seek and to save that which was lost. Part of

that commitment is being what God wants you to be with Jesus in your life. John was the voice crying in the wilderness. That is what God made him to be. In the carrying out your purpose of being saved and created, you are showing commitment to Jesus Christ. Are you on missions for Christ? When's the last time you shared Christ with someone? Who are you praying for to become a believer?

Who are you?

Some of you need to change who you are. What Holy Spirit now showing you, you are not proud of.

Discipleship through membership of MBC.