

### **Prepare For Spiritual Renewal (John 1:19 – 34). Overview one.**

Comparing ourselves with others is common practice. We compare our looks, dress style, income, education, skills, popularity, and social standing with others as we seek out our position in society. Jesus once compared John the Baptist to all the other people who came before him, declaring that not one of them was greater than John (Matthew 11:7 – 11). But John was quick to downplay his own importance, claiming to be nothing more than a humble servant, called by God to prepare the way for Christ. John then went on to make three humble comparisons between himself and Jesus that should instruct us about how we should approach Christ for restoration and renewal.

**Comparison 1: “I baptise with water, he will baptise with the Holy Spirit.”** (John 1:26, 33<sup>1</sup>) We know how much our identities can be wrapped up in our work. For John, the title, ‘The Baptist’ clearly identified his occupation and calling. And yet John was quick to point out the utter inadequacy of his water baptism without Christ’s baptism of the Holy Spirit. If you were working in the garden on a hot day you would probably remove your dirty clothes, take a shower, and put on clean clothes before going to be a guest at an important dinner party. But John understood that coming into the holy presence of God requires more than a just a bath. It requires the deep inward cleansing of our souls that only Christ can bring about through the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as God breathed his Spirit into humanity at the beginning of creation, so Jesus came to save and renew our sin-tainted souls by breathing his Spirit into us again, following his death and resurrection (see Genesis 2:7 and John 20:22).

**Comparison 2: “The one who comes after me has surpassed me, because he was before me” (1:30).** From childhood we learn of the importance of being first. We like to be the first one chosen, the first in the cue, or the first to finish the race. Even the older twin declares to the younger twin, “I was born first”. In this world being first gives people status over those who come after them. But John used this little word play to declare that even though he was born before his younger cousin, and he began his ministry before Jesus (see Luke chapters 1 – 3) Jesus soon surpassed him in significance. In fact, John knew that because Jesus is God’s Son, he pre-existed John from the beginning of time (John 1:1 – 3). John’s knowledge of Jesus’ true identity led John to make this third comparison with him...

...**“He must become greater, I must become less” (John 3:30).** John made this humble statement to his own disciples when they observed that all the people who had once followed John were now following Jesus instead. But upon hearing this news John didn’t begin developing a strategy to regain the people’s allegiance. Instead he reminded his disciples that he was nothing more than a Christ’s humble servant. The fact that the crowds were now following Jesus rather than him was an indicator that John had done his job (in fact, John eventually directed some of his closest disciples toward Jesus – John 1:35 – 37). We mustn’t underestimate how hard it must have been for a highly esteemed preacher and prophet like John to watch his faithful flock begin to leave him and follow another. However John knew that, *“a man can receive only what is given to him from heaven... the one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks as one from the earth”* (John 3:31). In other words, John knew that he was merely an earthly servant who had been entrusted with a heavenly message. But now that Christ himself had come from heaven John’s role as Christ’s earthly herald had reached its end. After making this statement, John quickly faded away (as all people do).

John the Baptist demonstrated his wisdom and humility by comparing himself, not to the other people or prophets, but to Christ alone. But John didn’t live long enough to see Christ’s own humility when the one who is in very nature God was stripped naked and died a shameful death on a cross for the sins of the world. Could John have known that this is what Christ would do when he proclaimed to his followers, *“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29)? As we begin our Refresh week let’s remember that it is human pride that has led our world into sin and human discord. But Jesus has said, *“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matthew 23:12). Therefore, as we come to Christ to seek individual and community renewal let’s join John in humbling ourselves before our Lord who humbled himself for our sake.

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<sup>1</sup> John the Baptist is not the same John as the one who wrote the gospel of John.

**Prepare For Spiritual Renewal (John 1:19 – 34). Study one.**

1. What was it about John the Baptist and his ministry that made people think that he could be the Christ or a great prophet? (See John 1:19 – 25 & Mark 1:1 – 5)
2. How did John perceive himself and his role within the plans of God? (John 1:21 - 23)
3. What did John mean when he said, “*I am not even worthy to untie the sandals of the one who will come after me.*”? (John 1:26 – 27)
4. What was the point of John’s water baptism? (John 1:24 – 27, 31).
5. What did John mean by his statement, “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!*”? (John 1:29)
6. What did John mean when he said, “*A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me*”? (John 1:30, 34)
7. Personally speaking, what is the difference between water baptism and Christ’s baptism of the Holy Spirit? (John 1:26, 32 – 33)
8. List some practical ways that we can demonstrate our humility before Christ, just as John did?

If you haven’t already done so, take time to read, reflect, and pray through the study in the **‘refresh ‘08’** booklet under Sunday, 3 February.