

Hymns: 46 I am Resolved 47 I Surrender All  
Scripture: Psalm 139:1-14

Big Idea: Our Identity is in Christ

*Identity politics.* Have you heard that term? What does it mean? *Identity politics* is the practice of political groups forming around race, religion, cultural background, gender, etc. It is distinctly different from *party politics*.

Hillary Clinton relied primarily upon party politics. While her opponent ran under the banner of the Republican Party, Donald Trump, now President Trump, won the election by appealing most strongly to the **identities** of the working person, the taxpayer, and people with traditional values.

Trump tapped into the movement that started with the *Tea Party* – a grassroots groundswell of taxpayers. While Clinton was an *establishment* candidate, Trump was *anti-establishment*. He wanted to **throw** the bums out.

As you may have noticed, none of this is new. A corrupt religious establishment was in power in Israel at the time of John the Baptist. He led a movement that **exposed** these establishment types and called the people of Israel to return to **true devotion** to the Lord. These people came from all walks of life. They turned **from** legalism and idolatry, **to** a genuine, heart-felt relationship with the Lord.

## Review

Last time, we learned:

- that the word *baptize* is a Greek word untranslated – called a *transliteration*.
- *Baptism* was immersion used by the Jews to signify a cleansing of strangers (called Gentiles) who came to convert to Judaism.
- John burst onto the scene at age thirty.
- He was a *rock star* of sorts as he **preached to** and **baptized** multitudes.
- John's message was the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.
- He focused on changing hearts.
- John preached the **golden rule** and **fearlessly** put his finger on the **sins** of the people.

Last time, you may recall, we left off with a question. Who is this John the Baptist? What is his **identity**? That's our theme for today.

He spoke with such authority and wisdom, the people wondered. Could this be the one we've been waiting for?

Luke 3 puts it this way:

[15] And as the people were [waiting] in expectation, [] all men [reasoned] in their hearts of John, whether [or not] he [was] the Christ [],;

Clearly, the Jews were looking for their Messiah. They wanted to know John's **identity**. Who **was** he?

*[16] John answered, saying unto them all, I **indeed** baptize you with water; but one **mightier** than I cometh [referring to Jesus], the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: **he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:***

So what did he *mean* when he said that Jesus Christ will *baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire*? We'll answer that question in two parts.

First, the Holy Ghost:

Romans 8

*[9] But ye are **not** in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

Every person who accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior not only has eternal life but also receives His Holy Spirit. Notice also the triune nature of God running through this verse and the usage of *Spirit God* and *Spirit of Christ* to refer to the same Holy Spirit.

That we are *baptized* into this Spirit is made clear in the following passage:

I Corinthians 12

*[13] For by **one Spirit** are we all **baptized into one body**, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been **all made to drink into one Spirit.***

Next, let's tackle the phrase *and with fire*. This is another reference to the **judgment** topic that flows through this chapter. It's the same judgment that we looked at earlier referring to the Day of the Lord. The final judgment casts the lost into the Lake of Fire (Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:43-49).

Luke 3 continues along this same line:

*[17] Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable [fire].*

This illustration from agriculture was very familiar to the people of that day. Wheat and chaff were divided on the threshing floor. The fan was used to blow the chaff away from

the wheat. Once separated, the wheat was gathered up and stored. The chaff was gathered and burnt up. Note the floor is **cleared**. There's no in-between here.

The phrase *unquenchable fire* is a familiar reference to the Lake of Fire that we are told will **not** be quenched. Of course, the wheat represents the **saved** and the chaff represents the **lost**. This is a sobering picture for those who choose to reject the Lord.

Then, we have a reference from the book of Acts that reveals that John's ministry **expanded** in scope saying:

Acts 13

*[24] [] John [] preached [] the baptism of repentance to **all** the people of Israel.*

We already learned John preached to **multitudes**. Here we learn that **all Israel** heard him. They were without excuse.

„switching back to Luke 3

*[18] And **many other things** [] preached he unto the people.*

The Bible record gives us a very abbreviated account of John's teaching. But the Bible gives us much more than this account of his ministry to help us know him.

Matthew 3

*[13] Then [came] Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized [by] him.*

*[14] But John forbad him, saying,  
I have need to be baptized of thee,  
and comest thou to me?*

*[15] And Jesus answering said unto him,  
Suffer it to be so now:  
for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.  
Then [John relented].*

What did Jesus mean when He said that they needed to *fulfill all righteousness*? I'll leave that for you to ponder right now. We'll return to it in our wrap-up message where we tackle many of the puzzling questions that come up regarding John.

Luke 3

*[21] Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized,  
and [as He] prayed,  
[] heaven [] opened,*

The next verse elaborates on the meaning of that phrase.

*[22] And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him,  
and a voice came from heaven, which said,*

*Thou art my beloved Son;  
in thee I am well pleased.*

Notice the Trinity is clearly visible here also.

... The Apostle John adds quoting John the Baptist:  
John 1

*[32] And John bare record, saying,  
I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove,  
and it [remained] upon him.  
[33] And I knew him not:  
but **he** that sent me to baptize with water [that would be God],  
the same said unto me,  
Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit **descending**, and **remaining** on him, the  
same is he which **baptize[s]** with the Holy Ghost.*

[that's referring to the distinctly **different** baptism from that of John. We learned about that one a few minutes ago]

*[34] And I saw, and bare record that this is the **Son of God**.*

Here we have it stated explicitly that John witnessed this certification of Jesus from God that He was His Son.

Who among you has traveled to Israel? Did you go to the Jordan River? Two years ago, it was my privilege to make that journey. Our tour took us to a commemorative baptismal site there.

The river was not very wide and was muddy. What a stark contrast from what it was at it's source. There, the water gushed forth from the earth cool, clear, and clean. What was most striking to me at the baptismal site were the **doves**. **White doves** made the place their home as if to serve as a **reminder** of these events.

...back to Luke

*[23] And Jesus [] began [at] **about thirty years of age**, ...*

Note this. Jesus started His ministry at age thirty – the same age that John started, six months earlier, and the same age as Jewish **priests** start their ministry.

Next we learn that Jesus abruptly leaves the scene:

Mark 1

*[12] And immediately the Spirit dr[ove] him [Jesus] into the wilderness.  
[13] And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan;  
and was with the wild beasts;*

*and the angels ministered unto him.*

We can reasonably infer that John continued his ministry of baptism through this forty-day period of time. After that, the Gospel of John fills in the next events:

John 1

*[15] John bare witness of him [Jesus], and cried, saying,  
This was he of whom I spake,  
He that cometh after me is  
**preferred before me:**  
for he **was before me.***

John testifies that Jesus existed before **either** of them was born.

*[19] And this is the record of John, when the Jews [in particular Pharisees (v.24) ] sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?*

Notice they were seeking to know John's true **identity**.

*[20] And he confessed,  
and denied not;  
but confessed,  
I am **not** the Christ.*

John truthfully responded to the heart of their question.

*[21] And they asked him, Wh[o] then?*

They pressed him again to learn his **identity** and offered some more guesses:

*Art thou Eli[jah]?  
And he sai[d], I am **not**.  
Art thou that prophet? [“a prophet like Moses” (Deuteronomy 18:15)]  
And he answered, **No**.*

*[22] Then said they unto him,  
Who **art** thou?  
that we may give an answer to them that sent us...*

There's that **identity** question **again**. Who is this John? Thus far, John told them who he wasn't, but he didn't tell them who he was. Here's his answer.

*[23] He said, I am the **voice** of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet [Isaiah].*

John told them his **identity** was all about serving the Lord.

After nailing down the *who*, they moved on to *why*.

[25] *And they asked him, ..., Why [do **you** baptize] then,  
if [you] be not that Christ,  
nor Eli[jah],  
neither that prophet?*

Despite John being **called** of God and **named** in prophesy, those sent tried to marginalize him. Instead of making further appeals to his lofty status, John **humbled** himself before them and **exalted** Christ.

[26] *John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;*

[27] *He it is,  
who coming **after** me is  
preferred **before** me,  
whose shoe's latchet  
I am not worthy to unloose.*

[28] *These things were done in Bethabara **beyond** Jordan [means east of the Jordan River from the perspective of Jerusalem, perhaps near Jericho], where John was baptizing.*

[29] *The next day John sa[w] Jesus coming unto him, and sa[id], **Behold the Lamb of God**, {first usage} which taketh away the **sin** of the world.*

[30] *This is he of whom I said,  
After me cometh a man which  
is **preferred** before me:  
for he **was** before me.*

Note again his recognition of Christ's preexistence even though John was born first.

[31] *And I knew him not:*

Note John and Jesus neither grew up together nor even **knew** each other until this time.

[only] *that he should be made [known] to Israel,  
therefore am I come baptizing with water.*

John reiterates his mission to baptize and make Christ known to Israel.

[35] *Again the next day after John stood [with] two of his disciples;*

[36] *And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he sai[d], **Behold the Lamb of God!***  
[37] *And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*

Note John pointed his disciples to Jesus. One of the two was Andrew (v. 40).

## Dual Ministries

### John 3

[22] *After these things [that is, Jesus' baptism, testing, choosing disciples, first miracle, first passover, and His encounter with Nicodemus] came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.*

Don't be confused here. This baptism done by Jesus' disciples (4:2) was **John's** baptism of repentance and **not** Jesus' baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire. John and Jesus were operating in unison and on the same page.

[23] *And John **also was baptizing** in Aenon near [] Salim [perhaps near Jericho and Bethabara v. 1:28], because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.*

[25] *Then there arose a question between some of **John's disciples** and the **Jews** about **purifying**.*

[26] *And they came unto John, and said unto him, **Rabbi**, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, [they're referring to Jesus] **behold, the same baptize[s], and all men come to him.***

You may remember from last time John was addressed as *teacher*. Now, we see a **new** word used *Rabbi*. While the word *teacher* carries with it some level of respect, *Rabbi* means *great one, honorable one, or master*. Except for this reference to John and Jesus' own usage of the word, it is always used in the Bible to refer to Jesus.

This should give you some idea of John's education and teaching. He was not some **nut** or **wild man** who just ate bugs and hung out in the wilderness. He drew his great crowds with his learned preaching and teaching.

[27] *John answered and said, A **man** can receive **nothing**, except it be **given** him from heaven.*

Here we have a sermon in itself. We will stop only to draw attention to it and to say

all that we **have** and  
all that we **are** that is of any value comes from God.

We need to recognize that great truth. No wonder John was humble.

[28] *Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said,*

*I am **not** the Christ,  
but that I am **sent** before him.*

John now gives a clear illustration.

*[29] He that hath the bride is the bridegroom:  
but the **friend of the bridegroom**,  
which standeth and heareth him,  
rejoice[s] **greatly** because of the bridegroom's voice:  
this my **joy** therefore is **fulfilled**.*

John is neither the bride nor groom. He's the friend of the groom. The best man you might say.

*[30] **He must increase, but I must decrease.***

*[31] ...: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.*

Here John contrasts his own humanity with Jesus' deity.

We'll have to stop there for now and pick up here next time (in two weeks). But before we go, let's wrap things up.

### **Application**

We started off today thinking about *identity* politics. We saw people sent from the Pharisees to find out the **true** identity of John. John preached to bring the people back to the Lord and to **identify** with Him. What's your identity? What is it that characterizes who you are?

- Is it your profession or position? I'm a programmer. My wife, Betsy, is a nurse. Is that who we are?
- The company or institution you work for? I'm an IBMer,
- The college or high school you attended?
- Your home state?
- The sports team you follow?
- Your position in the family? Husband, wife, dad, mom
- Your ethnic background?
- Your skin color?
- Your religion?
- Your political affiliation?
- Your astrological sign? Libra, Gemini, you know them

Do these things define who we are?



Believe it our not, many people still follow horoscopes. A wise preacher once said to me. If someone asks you your sign, you tell them it's the sign of the cross. All of those other labels are not really who we are but rather what we do and where we're from.

John described his **identity** from God's perspective. Those of us who know the Lord, are children of the king. What's my sign? It's the **sign** of the **cross**. I trust that's your sign as well.

**Benediction**

*Unto him that loved us,  
and washed us from our sins in his own blood,  
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;  
to him be glory and dominion  
for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6)*

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