

Hymns: 19 The Light of the World Is Jesus 67 Wonderful Words of Life  
Scripture: Psalm 119:18-24

Big Idea: Jesus Christ is the Answer

Good morning.

“Is it bigger than a breadbox?”  
“Animal, vegetable, or mineral?”

Do those questions ring a bell? The parlor game Twenty Questions originated in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, we have our own twenty questions. These involve difficulties and misconceptions that we ran into as we studied John the Baptist.

Repeatedly, you heard me say we will address a certain question in some future sermon and then punctuated it with “Don’t miss it.” Well the good news is, you didn’t miss it. That day has finally arrived. The questions serve as both a review and an aid to understanding John and the Dispensation of Law. See how many you can answer.

1. How did John’s mother know John’s name?

You recall, the angel Gabriel told Zacharias, the boy’s father, that his name would be *John* (Luke 1:13). Then Zacharias was struck dumb. Since he couldn’t speak, how could he tell his wife Elizabeth? The simplest answer is he told her the same way as he told those at his son’s circumcision who assumed his name would be Zacharias. He **wrote**, “His name is John” (Luke 1:60-63).

2. Was John’s father able to hear when he was unable to speak?

In Luke 1:62 it says that “they made signs to” Zacharias. If he could hear, that would seem unnecessary. Still the Bible repeatedly refers only to his speaking ability being stopped (vv. 20, 22) and then restored (v. 64). Perhaps they didn’t realize he could hear when they saw him using hand gestures. That’s my take. I believe he could hear.

3. Was John a Nazarite?

First, we must understand the definition of a Nazarite. It’s given to us in Numbers 6:1-21. Here are the particulars:

1. It is a vow that is entered between a man or a woman and God (v. 2)
2. The Nazarite separates himself **to** the LORD (v. 2) for some period of time (v. 13).
3. The Nazarite separates himself **from**:
  - wine or vinegar of wine (v. 3)
  - strong drink or vinegar of strong drink (v. 3)

- grapes in any form (v. 3) or grape products (v. 4)
  - cutting hair on the head (v. 5)
  - dead bodies (v. 6) including kinfolk (v. 7)
4. Shall be holy (vv. 5, 8)

Only one Bible character is singled out as being a life-long Nazarite: Samson (Judges 13:5). Many believe Samuel also fit that bill, but that is speculation based on his mother Hannah's vow (I Samuel 1:11):

that dedicated him to the Lord and  
that his hair would not be cut.

John came **onto** the scene mistaken for Elijah. He dressed like him. Here's a description of Elijah from:

II Kings 1

*[8] ... He was a[] hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his [hips]. ... [This] is Elijah the Tishbite.*

John lived a rugged life and proclaimed the word of the Lord in a similar way to Elijah. Was Elijah a Nazarite? No.

**What** did John wear, and what did he eat?

Matthew 3

*[4] And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leather[] girdle about his [hips]; and his [food] was locusts and wild honey.*

He ate bugs! (What do you think about that, Henry?) What else do we know about his eating habits?

Luke 1

*[15] For he [John] shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

Jesus adds this:

Luke 7

*[33] For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He ha[s] a devil.  
[34] The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!*

From this we learn that John's diet was restricted, and he did not drink wine. That's all there is to link John with being a Nazarite. I would conclude we cannot say either way for sure, but

most likely he was not a Nazarite.

4. While we're on the topic. What about Jesus? Was He a Nazarite?

Emphatically no. He was from the city of Nazareth. That made Him a *Nazarine*, not a *Nazarite*. Although the words have a very similar ring, they have very different meanings. As stated in the passage just read and elsewhere we know Jesus drank wine (Luke 7:34; Matthew 26:29; 27:48). He also raised the dead. Clearly, he did not follow the Nazarite rules.

5. Did John have long hair?

We're not told. Since I have my doubts about John being a Nazarite, I also doubt that his hair was any longer than usual for men of his day.

6. Did John really eat bugs?

Leviticus 11:21-22 specifically lists *locusts* as clean food under the Law. People still eat locusts in various forms around the world today. They are nutritious although low in carbohydrates. Honey makes a good companion from a nutritional standpoint. The Bible says he ate locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4). That alone should settle the matter.

7. Did John perform miracles?

The Bible says in John 10:41 that John "did no miracle."

8. What is the meaning of the word baptize?

Baptize means *dip, immerse, submerge*.  
Baptism means *immersion, submersion*.

9. Did John the Baptist institute the ritual of baptism?

No. This one was covered in a former sermon.

Luke 3

[3] ... [John] came into **all the country about Jordan**,  
preaching **the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins**;

Baptism came from a Jewish religious tradition to signify cleansing and turning to the Lord by *proselytes* (non-Jews) converting to the Jewish faith.

10. What was the significance of John's baptism?

This was also covered in that previous message.

John picked up the practice of baptizing to emphasize the **cleansing** from sin and **turning** to the Lord. The Jews had lost their way in **legalism** and worse yet, **idolatry**. John's message was one of a turning of **hearts** back to the Lord.

*...man looketh on the **outward appearance**, but the Lord looketh on **the heart**. (I Samuel 16:7)*

11. Both John and Jesus' disciples baptized at the same time. How did John's baptism differ from that of Jesus' disciples?

Jesus and John were on the same page. Their message was the same as they were both led by the same Holy Spirit of God. John (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) both preached "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Their baptism was of repentance. There was no difference in their baptisms.

12. Did Jesus baptize? John 3:22-23 vs. 4:1-3

The scripture clearly answers this.

John 3

*[22] After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and **baptized**.*

*[23] And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.*

But wait, there's more.

John 4

*[1] When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and **baptized** more disciples than John,*

*[2] (Though **Jesus himself baptized not**, but his disciples,)*

Did Jesus baptize? No. As the scripture says (John 4:2), it was actually His disciples who performed the baptisms.

13. Was John Elijah?

This is one of the more puzzling questions about John. You may recall **what** John said when he was asked that question.

John 1

*[21] And they asked him, What then? Art thou Eli[jah]? And he sai[d], I am not...*

That seems clear enough. But wait a minute. What about the following three passages:

Luke 1 The angel Gabriel speaks to Zacharias, John's father about John:

*[17] And he [John] shall go before him [Messiah] **in the spirit and power of Eli[jah]**, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

Matthew 11 Jesus said:

*[12] And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

*[13] For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*

*[14] And **if** ye will receive it, **this is Eli[jah]**, wh[o] was [predicted] to come.*

At the end of the Old Testament, the last two verses, was the prophesy that Elijah would come before the Messiah sets up his kingdom. The Jews were waiting and watching for Elijah. It was the next event on their prophetic calendar. He would come and prepare that way for the Messiah.

After the transfiguration, the disciples asked Jesus about this as well.

Matthew 17

*[10] And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that **Eli[jah] must come [first]**?*

As we just indicated, the scribes were focused on the last two verses of the Old Testament.

*[11] And Jesus answered and said unto them, Eli[jah] truly **shall** come [first], and restore all things.*

*[12] But I say unto you, That Eli[jah] **is** already [come], and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they [wished]. Likewise also [shall] the Son of man suffer of them.*

*[13] Then the disciples understood that he sp[o]ke [] of **John the Baptist**.*

In two passages, Jesus seemed to say that John was Elijah. Yet John said that he wasn't. How do we reconcile these statements?

The key is to carefully examine Jesus words in Matthew 11 and 17. In Mathew 11, it is conditional. He said **if** they receive the kingdom offered by Jesus, **then** John has to be Elijah. Did the Jews receive Jesus? In Matthew 17 he said no. The Jews killed John and would soon kill Jesus. He offered Himself during His triumphal entry and just a few days later, the Jews condemned Him to death.

The Jews **rejected** Jesus, therefore John **cannot** be Elijah. Jesus made a legitimate offer. The people chose to reject it. Jesus says

that Elijah *shall come* speaking of the future (Matthew 17:11) before Jesus' **second** coming and *is come* speaking of the present (Matthew 17:12) in the person of John the Baptist to

announce Jesus at His **first** coming.

15. How was John similar to Elijah?

- John dressed like him. (Mark 1:6; II Kings 1:8; 2:8)
- Both were prophets of God. (Matthew 11:9-10; I Kings 18:2)
- John preached the same message that Elijah will preach. (Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 1:17)
- John did what Elijah will do. (Malachi 4:5-6)
- John came “in the spirit and power of Elijah.” (Luke 1:17)
- He was a **type** of the Elijah to come.

16. Who baptized John the Baptist?

We have no such record in the Bible. When Jesus had the opportunity to baptize him, He didn't (Matthew 3:14). It's fair to assume that he **wasn't** baptized, but we really do not know.

17. Was John a member of the church?

No, John was an Old Testament saint. In John 3:29, he called Jesus the bridegroom and himself **a friend** of the bridegroom. In Ephesians 5:23-25, 32, the apostle Paul tells us that **the church is the bride of Christ**.

18. Did John understand what the church was?

We're not told, but given:

- the insight John showed regarding the bride of Christ (John 3:29),
- John's acknowledged mastery of the scriptures being called *Rabbi* (v. 26),
- his extensive teaching (Luke 3:18),
- his reference to Jesus as “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29),
- his declaration of Jesus as “the Son of God” (v. 34), and
- his witness of the certification of Jesus as God's Son during His baptism (vv 32-34),

I believe he understood (but didn't teach) this mystery, and that Jesus would die a sacrificial death as prophesied (Isaiah 53) and as Jesus taught his disciples (Luke 9:22).

19. Why did John while in prison send his disciples to Jesus?

First, let's look back in Matthew 9 while John was also in prison, his disciples approached Jesus:

*[14] Then the disciples of John [came to him], saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft[en], but **thy** disciples fast not?*

Do you get the sense that they felt things were not fair and perhaps there was a bit of rivalry or envy by John's disciples as they looked at Jesus' disciples?

*[15] And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as*

*the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then they [shall] fast.*

Then later, in Luke chapter 7 we find accounts of Jesus healing and even raising the dead. John's disciples *heard* of this and told John about these miracles. Then, John sent two of his disciples to Jesus to see for themselves. They asked Jesus:

*[20] ... Art thou he that should come? or [shall][we] look for another?*

*[21] And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities ...*

*[22] Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and **tell John** what things ye have seen and heard; how that*

*the blind see,*

*the lame walk,*

*the lepers are cleansed,*

*the deaf hear,*

*the dead are raised,*

*[and] **to the poor the gospel is preached.***

In addition to all of the facts just given about John's knowledge in the previous question, he also said:

Jesus is before me (John 1:15)

*He must increase, but I must decrease.* (John 3:30)

John's disciples were jealous for John (Mark 2:18) of Jesus' ministry (Luke 7:23) expanding and having larger crowds (John 3:25-26). John's mission was to point people (including his disciples) to Christ (Matthew 3:2; John 1:36-37). When John sent his disciples to Jesus, he was doing just that.

Jesus caught on immediately and responded with high praise for John and in a nice way told them not to be "offended" (Luke 7:23) by Him. John sent his disciples to Jesus to see for themselves so **they** would believe what John believed and preached – that Jesus was the Son of God – and follow Him.

20. What did Jesus mean when He told John to baptize Him "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15)?

Jesus was the God man (Matthew 1:23).

He would take the place of sinful man on the cross (I Corinthians 15:3).

Man is plagued by sin (Romans 3:23).

While Jesus did not need to repent, man does.

Therefore, Jesus as man's substitute submitted to John's baptism to signify repentance of sinful man (II Corinthians 5:21) in accordance with the will of God.

In addition, by submitting to John's baptism, Jesus validated it. At the same time, God used that occasion to confirm Jesus as His Son with both His proclamation and the Spirit descending on

Him like a dove (Matthew 3:16-17). Two people were authenticated at the same time and the trinity was on display. But there's more:

There's another elegant symmetry played out here you don't want to miss.  
Jesus identifies with man through His baptism  
while man in baptism identifies with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12-13)

God's wisdom is far deeper than we will ever know.  
It's nice to happen upon the fringes of it as we devote time to the study of His word.

Romans 11

*[33] O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

### Application

We started out today remembering the parlor game Twenty Questions. We've considered and answered twenty questions to help us better understand John the Baptist, the Dispensation of Law, and transition to our current dispensation Grace. It seems fitting that we close with one last question. We'll let Jesus Himself ask it.

Matthew 22

*[41] ... Jesus asked them,  
[42] ... What think ye of Christ? ...*

For each of us, there is no greater question,  
for on it hinges our eternal destiny.

Romans 5

*[8] ... God commendeth **his love** toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

I trust that each of you have made your peace with God and accepted the gift of grace freely offered to all.

### Benediction

*Blessing, and glory, and wisdom,  
and thanksgiving,  
and honour, and power, and might,  
be unto our God for ever and ever.  
Amen. (Revelation 7:12)*



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