

**Luke 1:15-17**  
**John the Baptist**

History is full of “greats.” Alexander the Great, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Alfred the Great, even Charlemagne means *Charles le magne*, or Charles the Great. Muhammad Ali famously claimed “I am the greatest.” Our world has its own definitions of and qualifications for greatness. Often, though, the world confuses true greatness with celebrity. God measures greatness in terms of heavenly values, not worldly ones.

**John’s Greatness**

One thinks of great humility when it comes to John. “There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.” John 1:6.

John came from a priestly family, yet he did not become a priest nor did he seek to earn their approval. Matthew 3:7-8, “<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?  
<sup>8</sup>Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”

“Great in the sight of the Lord” is the only measure of greatness that matters. Zacharias and Elizabeth were described this way, and it is a phrase often used to show God’s approval, The word, *megas*, means great in scope and importance.

This greatness is not dependent on riches, intelligence, power, influence, family connections, or anything other than the grace of God.

The opinion of Christ is clear, Matthew 11:11, “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.” Think of the implications. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, Isaiah, etc. all fall short of John the Baptist.

**The Doctrine of Election**

The promise that John will be “great in the sight of the Lord” implies that John will be righteous. Receiving the approval of God means that John was justified before the Lord. This promise is given even before John is born.

It begins while he is in his mother’s womb, “he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.” This is validated by Luke 1:41, “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb” a statement clearly intended to mean more than the natural manifestations of pregnancy. There was never a time in the life of John the Baptist when he was not under the influence of the Holy Spirit; there was never a time when John the Baptist was not saved.

No child is too young to hear the gospel. If they are old enough to sin, they are old enough for grace.

**A Word about Alcohol**

It is concisely stated that John “will drink no wine or liquor” and this is placed in the context of being “great in the sight of the Lord” and being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Is this descriptive or prescriptive of behavior?

First, we can state that this is in keeping with John’s general disregard for earthly pleasures, even earthly conventions. Matthew 3:4, “John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.”

It could also mean that John was a Nazarite, Numbers 6:2-3, “<sup>2</sup>When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, <sup>3</sup>he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes.” This vow was usually temporary, though both Samson and Samuel made the commitment lifelong.

Nevertheless, in 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul recommends wine to Timothy as an aid, “No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” Also, its value in improving one’s mood is also noted, Proverbs 31:6-7,

“<sup>6</sup>Give strong drink to him who is perishing,  
And wine to him whose life is bitter.  
<sup>7</sup>Let him drink and forget his poverty  
And remember his trouble no more.”

And, it must be remembered that the first recorded miracle of Jesus was the making of wine (John 2).

Yet the Bible clearly condemns drunkenness

Romans 13:13, “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.”

Ephesians 5:18, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”

1 Corinthians 5:11, “But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

### **John’s Calling**

John was to be the “forerunner” of the Messiah. He was to have the privilege of announcing the Messiah, or introducing Him to the world. John 1:29, “The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

And he did this in the “spirit and power of Elijah.” Elijah was a great prophet during the time of the divided monarchy. Perhaps his most famous encounter is recorded in 1 Kings 18. He proclaimed God

boldly, 1 Kings 18:36, “ At the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word.”

This does not mean that John *was* Elijah, nor is he the prophet spoken of in Malachi 4:5-6, “<sup>5</sup>Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Matthew 17:10-13, “<sup>10</sup>And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” <sup>11</sup>And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; <sup>12</sup>but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.”

### **The Opportunity**

An old Jewish proverb states that “no parent is happier than their saddest child.” Remember that Zacharias and Elizabeth were filled with “joy and gladness” (v.14). Godly children are a great joy. Nothing is more important. Not brains, beauty, health, nothing.

John would . . .

“turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord”

The word is commonly used to describe repentance leading to conversion.

“turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children”

The role of the father

“turn the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous”

The word for disobedient is one who is stubborn and hard-hearted. Even the most obstinate sinners will be impacted by John’s ministry

“make ready a people prepared for the Lord”

The ultimate result was that there would be those who were ready to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

### **Take Aways**

No child is ever too young to be introduced to their Savior.

How do you strive to be great?

How do you measure the success of your children?