



Heaven on Earth (Part 4) – The Word and the Witness

JT English – September 9, 2018

How are we doing this morning? Are we good? Good. It's so good to see you guys. My name is JT English. I'm on staff here overseeing The Village Church Institute. If you are new here, we're in a sermon series on the gospel of John. I would invite you to open your Bibles to John 1:19-28. As you're turning there, I want to share a life update from something that happened in my life last weekend that just felt awesome.

First of all, who else is glad that college football is back on? Yes. Amen. I am a huge Nebraska fan. I grew up a Nebraska fan because my family lived in Nebraska. I actually chose my university, Colorado State, because I could not go to CU Boulder because my parents would have disowned me. I'm a huge Nebraska fan. My parents have lived in Nebraska my whole life. I have family in Lincoln, Omaha, South Sioux City, really all over the place.

For those of you who don't know, Nebraska football is a big deal in Nebraska because it's literally all they have in Nebraska. They love their Huskers in Nebraska. Something that is really great... My grandparents live in Lincoln still. They've lived there their whole lives. They have been married for 66 years, which is just awesome. Praise the Lord. They have had 66 years of faithful, covenantal, Christian marriage, which has just been awesome.

They both turn 90 this year. If I were trying to embody and model my life after somebody, I would look to my grandfather and just say he has loved his wife faithfully. He has loved the Lord faithfully. He has just been a man I would like to represent and embody. I'm grateful that he's my grandfather. Unfortunately, a few years ago, he was diagnosed with dementia. The Lord has been kind. It has been slow to onset. His personality hasn't changed significantly, but he is losing his memory.

We took my little baby girl, Bailey, who just turned 1 a few months ago, to go meet him. He hadn't had the chance to meet her yet. Before he lost more of his memory, we wanted to make sure he got to meet his great-granddaughter. We took them back last weekend. The reason we chose last

weekend was to go to a Nebraska football game. It's funny how the calendar worked out like that. "We're going to come back when college football is starting."

We were sitting there in the bleachers. It was my mom; my stepdad, Thomas; and I. Macy and Bailey were back at the house with my grandparents. I'm just so excited for this Nebraska football game to start. I'm totally pumped and excited. There is so much energy. The new coach is back in town, and there is lots and lots of excitement.

I'm sitting there about 30 minutes before kickoff. I'm sitting there on the bleachers with Thomas. There is this guy who is recognized by a bunch of people in the stands. It's a guy named Ben Sasse. He's a United States Senator from the state of Nebraska, and he is selling concessions at the stadium in Nebraska. If you know what a Runza is, it's kind of like a meat sandwich like at Subway. Some people know what a Runza is. People in Nebraska know what Runza is.

It doesn't get more peak Nebraska than to be at a Nebraska football game eating Runzas while Ben Sasse is selling them to you. It felt like peak Nebraska. Here is what is crazy. I am reading Ben Sasse's book right now, *The Vanishing American Adult*, and I'm a big Ben Sasse fan. Regardless of political persuasion, he's just somebody who I think has helpful thoughts and is worth interacting with. Here he is selling a Runza at a football game. It was just like, "What is happening right now?"

People are running over to him. I actually run over to him. I never do this. I swear I never do this. I was like, "I have to get a picture with you to show that this happened." I have a little laminated card of people who I have permission to get selfies with. It's Matt Chandler, Jen Wilkin, Ben Sasse, and Bono. I don't do selfies with anybody else, but I'm allowed to get selfies with those people.

I run over and get a selfie so I can prove it happened. If I see you later, I'll show you that this happened. Then I go back to my seat to sit down, and some people were like, "Who is that? What is going on?" I'm like, "That is your state Senator, Ben Sasse of Nebraska." People didn't know who he was, but some people definitely knew who he was.

Something like that is going to happen today in our text. There is a lot of energy, a lot of passion, and a lot of excitement around a person who we're going to look at today named John the Baptist. He is in an unexpected place, the wilderness; doing an unexpected thing, baptizing people; and he's bringing an unexpected message, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

Here is what we have learned so far in the gospel of John. The prologue does an incredible job at looking at two things: the Word and the witness to the Word. The Word is in John 1:1. **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men."**

Then, in verse 6, it doesn't keep talking about the Word. It starts talking about the witness to the Word. **"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."**

I thought Matt's sermon several weeks ago was so helpful, talking about how sometimes witnesses are mistaken for the Word. Sometimes witnesses can be mistaken for the Word. John the Baptist says, "I'm not coming to witness and testify to myself. I'm coming to witness and testify to the Word, to Jesus, to God's Son."

What we're going to look at today in John 1:19-28 is going to continue that theme. What John, the gospel-writer, is trying to do is show you that if you want to be an ideal witness to Jesus Christ, follow the example of John the Baptist. If you want to be a disciple of Jesus, if you want to know what it looks like in a world of confusion and chaos to be a witness for Christ, look to John the Baptist.

Look at John 1:19 with me. **"And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him..."** This is a really important question. **"Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' So they said to him..."** Another identity question. **"Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"**

He said, **'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as the prophet Isaiah said.'** (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, **'Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.'** These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

Here is what you're going to see about the ministry of John the Baptist. John the Baptist knew who he wasn't, and he knew who he was, all because he knew who Jesus was. What does it look like to be an ideal witness of Christ, to learn what it looks like to grow and testify to God's work in our lives? You have to know three things. *You have to know who you're not, you have to know who you are, and you can only know those two things because you know who Jesus is.*

John Calvin, one of my favorite theologians, opens up his most famous work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, with this phrase. He says, "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." In other words, Calvin is saying, "If you want to grow as a disciple of Jesus, if you want to know what it looks like to represent and be a disciple of Jesus, you must grow in a knowledge of God."

In other words, there is no way for you to grow in your Christian life if you're not growing in a knowledge of God. If you aren't growing in your adoration, your affection, and your heart's compassion for a love of Jesus Christ, you're not growing as a disciple of Jesus. Growing in your knowledge of God is an absolutely essential part of your discipleship.

Growing in a knowledge of self is also an absolutely essential part of your discipleship. Sometimes, evangelicals forget that. We think we can actually grow in a knowledge of God without growing in a knowledge of self. What Calvin is trying to say here is that it's absolutely impossible. You might ask John Calvin, "It feels like a chicken or egg. Which happens first? Should I grow in the knowledge of God first or in knowledge of self first?"

He ultimately says, "It's a reciprocal relationship that is always, always growing. The more you grow in the knowledge of who God is, the more familiar you will be with who you are. The more familiar you are with who you are, the more familiar you'll be with who God is." You're going to see that exact same thing play out in our text with John the Baptist. John the Baptist knows what he's not, he knows what he is, and he knows those things because he knows who Jesus is.

Look back at the passage with me. This passage starts with the knowledge of self. Look at verse 19. **"And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'"** Isn't that an interesting question? It's almost like John, the author (we have a lot of Johns today), wants us to answer that question also.

"Who are you?" It's kind of a scary question. When all of the facades and the self-projections, the images of strength and having it all together, maybe not even who people say you are, but when the doors close, when the lights are off, when nobody else is around, who are you? That's the question that the Levites and the priests are asking John the Baptist. "Who are you? Why are you out here in the wilderness? On what authority do you think you're doing these things?" Before John the Baptist says who he is, what does he say? He says who he is not. John knows who he is not.

1. *Disciples know who they are not.* Look back at the text. As soon as they ask him, "Who are you?" He says, "I am not the Christ." **"He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ."** You see, there is an expectation that I know many of you are familiar with of a Messiah coming, of a Christ coming to save Israel from Roman authority and Roman rulership. "Are you this person? Are you the Anointed One? Are you the one who is powerful and mighty? Are you the one who is going to save us from our sins? Are you the one we should be expecting?"

John doesn't just say, "No," does he? What does he say? He says it three times. **"He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ."** You could not have a more emphatic denial. If we were reading it in straight English rather than a translation, it would say something like, "There is no way. Absolutely not. I'm not the guy." That's what John the Baptist is saying. "There is no way. Absolutely not. You've got the wrong guy. I am not him. Don't put those expectations upon me, because I'm not putting those expectations on myself."

Isn't it interesting here too? I'm excited for the rest of this sermon series to build out. One of the things that the gospel of John is so famous for is Jesus' "I am" statements. We've done a sermon series through those before. "I am." Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life. I am the Light of the World. I am the door of the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life," like we just sang. "I am the true vine."

In this gospel, Jesus says over and over and over again, "I am." How does John begin his witness to Jesus? He says, "I am not. I am not." See, what John is trying to do is contrast these two statements. Jesus is the I Am. We are not. The great thing about Jesus being the I Am (this is really good news) is you don't have to be. Yet, we try to be sometimes, don't we?

We try to be the bread of life, provide for all people. We try to be the light of the world. We try to be the door of the sheep or the good shepherd or the resurrection and the life. We try to be the truth.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the I Am and that you are not. We'll come back to that more in a minute.

They also ask him, "**Are you Elijah?**" What a really weird question, right? "**Are you Elijah?**" Elijah is an Old Testament prophet. You see, there were expectations not only that Christ was going to come but that Elijah was going to come back. You see, Elijah was taken up into heaven. At the very end of the Old Testament, God says in Malachi 4:5, "**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.**"

Not only were the New Testament communities expecting a Messiah to come. They were expecting Elijah to precede the Messiah. They were expecting Elijah to come back as a prophet testifying to Christ. They're wondering, "If you're not the Christ, if you're not the Anointed One, if you're not the Messiah, you must be Elijah. All of this energy and focus is on your ministry here in the wilderness. Are you Elijah?" What an opportunity for John the Baptist to gain an advantage over them, to grasp after power, or to view himself highly.

So many of us are faced with those temptations also, right? "You're just a great teacher. You're a great mom. You're a great dad. You're just incredible at your job. You do things so well." "**Are you Elijah?**" What does John the Baptist say? "No, I'm not Elijah." See, this expectation that Elijah was going to come is placed upon John. John says, "Don't place those expectations upon me. I don't have those expectations for myself."

What is fascinating about John the Baptist saying, "I'm not Elijah," is that Jesus does call him Elijah. In Matthew 17:12, Jesus says of John the Baptist, "Elijah has already come, and you missed him." You see, John the Baptist did not detect as much significance in himself or in his ministry as Jesus did. That needs to sink in for a second. John the Baptist did not detect as much significance in himself or in his ministry as Jesus did.

Christians often do not realize who they really are in Jesus' eyes. How much better is it for Jesus to speak a better word over you than for you to speak over yourself? How much better is it than for you to be applauding yourself or giving yourself a pat on the back or expecting others to do the same, to fan the flame of our own self-love... How much better is it for Jesus to say a better word over us than we would say over ourselves?

See, John the Baptist humbly submits himself and says, "There is nothing significant about me. There is nothing significant about my ministry. I'm simply out here in the wilderness baptizing with water. I'm not Elijah. Elijah does miracles. He calls fire down from heaven. He calls water down from heaven. He is a great prophet, declaring the things of God. I am just a voice in the wilderness."

How much better is it for us to think lowly of ourselves and for Jesus to speak a better word over us? "So you're not Elijah. Are you the prophet?" Not only were they expecting the Messiah. They were also expecting a prophet. There was this great hope that a prophet would come declaring the things of God as the kingdom was established.

Look at Deuteronomy 18:18-22. God says, **"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him."** In other words, "Whatever the prophet says, I say. Whatever he says, do it, as if I am saying it to you, because he speaks authoritatively."

Verse 20 is very important. **"But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die."** God takes his Word very seriously. God takes revelation very seriously. He says, "If you presume to speak a word on my behalf that I have not commanded you to speak, you have made me a liar, and the consequences are grave for you."

Verse 21. **"And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him."**

"Okay, so if you're not the Christ, and you're not Elijah, surely you're this great prophet, declaring the things of the Lord to us, giving us a word from the Lord. A prophet speaks the very words of the Lord. 'Thus says the Lord,' a prophet says. There are so-called prophets who are presuming to speak on God's behalf. Surely you're one of these prophets."

John the Baptist says, "No, no, no. Don't place those expectations upon me, because I don't think I'm speaking a word from the Lord." John the Baptist has an incredibly high view of biblical authority and God's Scripture and God's Word. Despite his incredibly important ministry, proclaiming the

kingdom of God, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,**" despite many people getting baptized, despite God using his ministry in supernatural ways, he does not envision himself or his words as anything of major consequence.

Again, he's taking a lowly position, a humble position. His words are actually recorded in Scripture, and he says, "I'm not a prophet." One of the most important things you can learn this morning, not just in your head but in your heart, is who you are not. So often, we're trying to figure out who we are. One of the best ways to do that is to confess and declare who we are not.

You see, John the Baptist is giving us a model here. "I'm not the Christ. Don't put those expectations on me. I'm not a supernatural miracle-worker like Elijah. Don't put those expectations upon me. I am not the prophet. I'm simply a voice in the wilderness." It's so important for you to hear this. You will be able to walk in greater Christian freedom when you have a clear sense of who you are not.

So many of us in this room, myself included, are living with false expectations that either we have put on ourselves or others have put on us that give us a pedestal or that give us an opportunity or power or authority or that need something from us. We put these expectations on ourselves that God has not placed upon us.

You see, we know in our heads that we are not Christ, but our hearts are still learning that. Here is what I mean by that. Only God is unchangeable; we are not. Only God is infinite; we are not. Only God is all-knowing and omnipresent and all-sufficient and all-powerful; we are not.

My son Thomas and I were at the Nebraska game. I told you we went to the game last week. It actually ended up not being a game. It ended up being a rainout, which was a total bummer. Two and a half hours of sitting there in rain and cold, and my sweet 3-year-old son goes to his first football game, and he's literally kind of crying in my lap and shaking. I'm like, "Buddy, football is great. You're going to love this. It's going to be fun. Toughen up." Oh, man. That poor kid. He'll be fine.

Here is what he did. It's raining. We're maybe an hour and a half or two hours into the rain delay. We're debating, "Should we go home, or should we stay? We're two hours in. It feels like we've invested so much in being here. Let's just stay." Thomas has this little red poncho on that we bought him. He's kind of shaking, and I'm holding him.

Out of nowhere, he goes, "Stop the rain!" It was the cutest thing. We weren't like, "Hey, buddy. Tell the rain to stop." He was just like, "Rain, stop!" Who else does that? Jesus does that. Right? If the rain would have listened to him, he would be preaching today, not me. It was hilarious when it happened. We were laughing and joking.

Then I realized afterward that he already has a heart that tells him he's more powerful than he actually is. He's 3. How much more true is that of us? What kind of expectations of power and authority and influence and ability are you putting on yourself that nobody else is putting on you? Perhaps somebody else is putting it on you and saying, "Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah? Are you the prophet?" "No, I'm none of those things. I'm simply a voice in the wilderness, baptizing with water, making a way for the Lord to come."

I have talked about this a few times from the stage, so many of you know that my wife and I have been in a challenging season with health. For those of those who don't know, she has a tumor in her leg. We thought it was cancer. It's not, but it's still a really trying, difficult season as she deals with a lot of pain and lack of mobility. We're trying to kind of re-figure out life.

I have to tell you that in know in my head that I am not the Christ, but in that hospital room, I wanted to be. I know in my head that I can't save my wife, but when she's crying from the pain, I want to be. So many of us live with that. What the Lord has taught me over the course of this summer is that though I confess Jesus as Lord with my mouth, I'm having to continually learn that he is Lord and I am not with my heart.

Maybe there is something in your life where you would confess Jesus as Lord with your mouth, but you need to learn that Jesus is Lord with your heart. You are not sovereign. You are not all-powerful. You are not almighty. You are not all-sufficient. You are not all-knowing. That is part of what discipleship is, not just knowing who Jesus is and knowing who you are. Part of that journey is also learning and growing in an awareness of who you are not.

John the Baptist says, "I'm none of those things." You see, if you do not know who you are not, you will inevitably try to steal glory from Christ, because you will try to be him, and only he can be him. I'm trying to tell you that there is so much freedom in being able to lay down who we are not, to articulate and say and confess, "I am not those things."

Anxiety, fear, and depression riddle our lives because we are trying to live a life that we simply can't live with expectations that we will never live up to. F.B. Meyer says it this way. "The only hope of a decreasing self is an increasing Christ." The only hope of a lower view of yourself is an increasing view of Christ. Disciples know who they are not. We are not Christ. We are not miracle-workers like Elijah. We are not prophets speaking God's Word. Effective witness, effective discipleship begins with knowing who you are not.

2. *Disciples know who they are.* Disciples don't just know who they are not; they know who they *are* because they know who Jesus is. Look back to the text, verse 22. **"What do you say about yourself?"** They're asking him another identity question. He said, **"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness..."** This is a reference from Isaiah 40:3-5 where Isaiah the prophet is saying, "People are going to come declaring that God is coming."

You've heard over and over and over again from this pulpit that the good news of the gospel isn't that you come to God but that God comes to you. The good news of the gospel is God with us. God is on this relentless pursuit to seek you out, not you seeking him out. Isaiah is trying to say here that the whole story of the gospel... Genesis 1, living in Eden with God. Genesis 12, God's presence coming again to dwell with his people through a promise through Abraham in dwelling near his people in the tabernacle, in the temple.

What he is saying is that disciples of Jesus are declaring that Jesus is coming. In other words, John the Baptist does not have an overly high view of his ministry. I don't like talking about the Greek text very often because I want you to know that you have access to the text in the same way that anyone who knows Greek does, but one thing that is really great about this text is it doesn't have a definite article.

In other words, it doesn't say, "I am *the* voice in the wilderness." It just says, "I am a voice. I am *a* voice. There is nothing more significant about my ministry than your ministry. All of us are just voices in the wilderness declaring that Jesus is coming." He's saying, "All I'm trying to do is tell people that they need to make way for the King. Get things out of your life so that Jesus can invade not just one room of your house but every room of your house. Make way in your life because Jesus is coming to take over. He is the true King."

What John is saying is, "I am not the Word. I'm simply one witness to the Word." Look at verse 25. "If that's true, if you have this insignificant ministry, if you're just a voice in the wilderness

declaring the kingdom of God, then why are you baptizing, if you're not the Christ, if you're not Elijah, and you're not the prophet?" John answered them, "Guys, I'm just baptizing with water."

It doesn't say it in this gospel, but in the other gospels, he goes on to say, "I just baptize with water, but one is coming who is going to baptize with fire," a reference to what he does with Elijah. "There is one coming who is going to baptize you with spirit and fire. I'm just baptizing with water." What is he saying? "Guys, I'm just out here in the wilderness using what God has put in front of me. There is a river here, and I'm declaring the good news of the kingdom with what is right in front of me."

So many of us are waiting for a supernatural breakthrough or for God to do something in our lives or to rid us of some besetting sin before we're willing to just use what is right in front of us. John the Baptist simply says, "What does it mean to be a witness of Christ? Use what is right in front of you." You don't need some supernatural breakthrough. You don't need some incredible gift. What talents do you have? What gifts has the Lord given you to testify and witness to the King?"

You have to keep this in front of you all the time. If anything significant happens at The Village Church or in your life or in any church for that matter, it is not because of how good the preaching is or how mediocre it is. It's not because of how good the worship was that weekend or how bad it was. It's not because we're baptizing. It's not because of how good Little Village or Kids Village is or how good our Bible studies are or how incredible your Home Group is.

We are simply human vessels trying to be faithful with what God has put in front of us, asking God to move. If God doesn't do it, it doesn't matter how hard we work at our sermons or how great our worship team is or how incredible your home group leader is. If God doesn't do the work, it's not a work worth doing. We're simply trying to be faithful human servants. "I'm just baptizing with water," John the Baptist says. "I'm doing the simplest thing with the simplest thing in front of me." We preach, we baptize, and we disciple, but ultimately, it's all up to the Lord.

We say this over and over and over again. God is not interested in an audience; he's interested in participants. He's asking us to get involved. Again, who are we? John says three things that he is not. "I'm not the Christ. I'm not Elijah. I'm not a prophet." So far, he has said two things that he is. "I am just a voice in the wilderness. I am just a baptizer." He says one more thing that makes all the difference. Verse 26. **"...among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."**

3. *Disciples know who Jesus is.* You see, John knows who he is, and he knows who he's not, precisely because he knows who Jesus is. I find this text incredible. "**...among you stands one you do not know...**" Think of the pomp and circumstance and arrogance of the Levites and the Pharisees coming into the presence of John the Baptist's ministry, asking, "Are you the Christ?"

Who is actually in the audience? The Christ. "**...among you stands one you do not know...**" The religious elite completely miss the Anointed One and the Messiah. He's right there in their midst, listening to John the Baptist's answers. In my biblical imagination, I like to imagine that John the Baptist is looking right at Jesus, not at the Levites and Pharisees. He says, "**...among you stands one you do not know...**"

John the Baptist recognizes Jesus, but the religious elite don't. Please hear this. The only way for you to grow in a knowledge of who you are is to grow in a knowledge of Christ. There is no form of self-exploration or self-discovery or personality test or Enneagram or DISC assessment or conversation with a friend that will teach you about who you are better than a relationship with Jesus.

The only way to grow in a knowledge of true self is to grow in a knowledge of Christ. If your reference for self-discovery is you, you will always be led astray. If your reference for self-discovery is Christ, you will always be led to worship. It is in declaring who Jesus is that we find out who we really are. It is in confessing him as Lord and ourselves as unworthy that we find out who we really are, a focus on identity that is not about self-centered realization.

It's not a quest for rugged individualism. We can only know ourselves in light of knowing Christ. John says one last thing about himself. He says, "I am unworthy to untie his sandals." It's as if being in the presence of Jesus is absolutely overwhelming for John the Baptist. It's as if seeing the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Word become flesh, is overwhelming, and he demonstrates this extraordinary humility.

You know some of the customs of the New Testament. What does a slave do for their master? He washes their feet. Jesus does this for his disciples later in this very gospel. One of the most demeaning things you could have done in that society is wash the feet of your master. It clearly shows an authoritative relationship and a subservient, submissive relationship.

John the Baptist doesn't say, "Let me wash his feet." He says, "I'm not even worthy to touch his sandals. I'm not even worthy to wash his feet. I am so unworthy in his presence that I can't even

touch his sandals." This is where I think evangelicalism must recapture a deep sense of God's holiness and our wickedness, a deep sense of his righteousness and our unrighteousness.

If you want to be in the presence of God, you'd better enter in on your face. What does Isaiah say in Isaiah 6? "Woe is me. I am lost. I'm a man of unclean lips. I come from a people of unclean lips. I can't even be in your presence. You are the King. You are the Lord of Hosts. Have mercy on me because I am unworthy." We don't enter into the presence of God with our worth but our worthlessness. To be in the presence of God is to be made aware of his worthiness in our unworthiness.

Calvin, just a few paragraphs after what we read earlier, says ..."man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty." If you think pretty highly of yourself, it's because you haven't seen God. Do you think highly of yourself? It's because you don't know who Jesus is. A knowledge of Jesus leads us to view ourselves as unworthy, not worthy. A view of Jesus leads us into a throne room on our faces, begging for mercy, begging for grace.

Any true knowledge of self, just like John is demonstrating here, should lead us to a deep awareness of our brokenness and should lead us to humility. You see, true self-exploration should actually lead us to our need for Christ. True knowledge of self means that we're intimately aware of our need for Christ. Blaise Pascal says it this way. "Not only do we know God by Jesus Christ alone, but we know ourselves only by Jesus Christ."

Here is what I think is incredible about John the Baptist's ministry. He is zealous for Christ, not for himself. We need more witnesses who are zealous for Christ, not zealous for self, not zealous for their platform, not zealous for how God is going to use their Home Group over and against another one, their Bible study over and against another one, their church over and against another one, or their witnessing over and against another one.

This is about Jesus, not about us. The gospel is good news, not because of who we are but because of who Jesus is. It's not that you are worthy of God's love that makes you amazing. The gospel is not amazing *because* you're worthy of God's love. The gospel is amazing because you are unworthy of God's love, and he loves you anyway. The gospel is amazing because in our wickedness, in our unrighteousness, in the midst of our sin, brokenness, and powerlessness, it's there where grace steps in.

It's not when you've cleaned yourself up into some picture of fake perfection that God decides to love you. It's when you, like John the Baptist, say, "I am unworthy to even touch his feet." It's there (this is next week's message, so I'm not going to get into it) where John the Baptist says, "Behold the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world."

The nearer you get to Jesus, the more aware of your unworthiness you should be. Also, the nearer you get to Jesus, the more you will realize how much grace you have received. The closer you get to Jesus for the rest of your life, the more aware you will be of your unworthiness. The closer you get to Jesus, the more aware you will be of how much grace you have received.

Here are just a few points for us to consider as we wrap up. I want you to think about just a couple of identity questions with me real quick. First, if you're a disciple of Jesus and you want to follow John's example here, what do you need to say, "I am not," to? There is something going on in your life right now or in your identity that you're trying to hold it all together, to white-knuckle it, to just kind of make your way through it, to fist through it, to power your way through, to be all-sufficient, to be all-knowing, to be all-powerful, to be all-wise, and God has not asked you to be those things.

You need to lay that down today because part of discipleship isn't just knowing who we are; it's knowing who we're not. It's really good news to lay that down because as we do it, who are we looking to? The one who is. You don't have to be the Light of the World because Jesus is. You don't have to be the resurrection and the life because Jesus is. You don't have to be the way, the truth, and the life because Jesus is. Where are you trying to play God? Disciples, let's lay those down today.

Second, how is the gospel reshaping and reforming your identity into who you are? Not only, "Who are you not?" but, "Who are you?" You see, Christ is not just an add-on to our existing identity. It's not like I was JT English, living an existing identity, and then I decided to add Jesus on as some kind of accessory to my life. How does Jesus reshape and reform who he says you are?

The gospel isn't the news that Jesus loves the unworthy but that he worthies the unworthy. Where is Jesus giving you worth and value and dignity that you're not believing? Where are you believing that you haven't been made a son or a daughter of the King? What part of your life has the gospel not invaded where you can say, "I am loved. I am beloved. I am a son. I am a daughter. I have received a new identity"?

Jesus doesn't just add to our identity; he gives us a new identity. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If you are in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, and the new is here." Disciples, I want you to ask and answer those two questions. "Who are you not that you're trying to be?" and, "Who are you that you have forgotten that you need to be reminded of today for the gospel?" Let's pray.

To you, Father, and to the Son, and to the Spirit we offer all honor and glory and praise. You three are our God. There is no other God other than you three. We ask you, Jesus, to reshape and reform our identities even in this moment as we submit ourselves to you and to what your Spirit is doing amongst us.

Would your Holy Spirit convict us and remind us that we have not been called to be you, but you have called us to simply be sons and daughters? Would you remind us of this new identity that you have spoken a better word over us, that we don't have to speak a word over ourselves because you have told us that we are beloved, that we are yours, and that we will be yours forever? It's in Christ's name we pray, amen.