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# **Who Are You?**

**# 973-A**

**Series: Let God Be God**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# Who Are You?

The sentry stood at his post, armed and ready. His job was to see that no one passed that gate who did not have official business with the King. No tourists, no reporters, no curious bystanders, and certainly no enemies were allowed. War had been declared, and no one was allowed into that Royal Palace but those who had been assigned such duties that they required it.

Suddenly an elegant automobile of the most expensive variety rounded the corner below and screeched to a halt, just outside the Royal gates. The driver jumped out of the car and stood at attention as he opened the rear door for his somewhat impatient passenger. The man in the back, obviously the owner of the car and the object of the chauffeur's respect, stood to his feet and approached the armed guard, who stood at perfect attention, eyes forward, head erect.

"I've come to see the King", the distinguished looking guest announced. With that, he pulled out his card and handed it to the stone-faced sentinel. No one who saw that card would question that he was an important man from the kingdom's perspective. He was a famous industrialist, world-renowned for his financial expertise. "Oohs" and "Ahs" were the order of the day when he entered a room, a restaurant or an auditorium. The guard, however, was unimpressed! "I'm sorry, sir," he curtly answered, "the King cannot see you today."

We need not repeat the industrialist's reply. The lines in his face indicated that his blood pressure was reaching for a new high, and the words that came from his lips did not befit a man of such supposed dignity. He was, to say the least, angry. Just about that time, an old army jeep pulled up to the gate just behind the man's limousine. Out of the jeep jumped a bedraggled soldier, just back from the front lines. His uniform was covered with mud, and his face looked like the "before" ad for a shaving cream commercial. "Who goes there?" the guard announced in staccato-like tones. Out of breath, the soldier replied, "Sir, who I am does not matter. I am

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nobody. What matters is that the King is on his throne, and I am representing him. It is urgent that I see him immediately.”

Without so much as a hint of emotion, the robot-like sentry barked out “Entrance Allowed: I will announce your arrival to the King.” The businessman’s anger could no longer be controlled. “How dare you!” he cried, “I am a man of great stature in this country and am known the world over. This man has come bearing no name but the King’s and has been admitted to the palace immediately. What is the meaning of this?” With that, the guard quietly responded, “Sir, there is a war going on. The man who just passed through is an ambassador, a man assigned to the front lines to represent the King. The King is not impressed with the positions of men. He is rather impressed only by those who come, not calling attention to who they are, but to who he is. He is the King! Those who are about his business need no identity, but that they belong to him!

That guard could well have been representing our King, as well. We, too, are in the midst of a bitter war, and we, too, have been called upon to become ambassadors, men and women known not for *who we are*, but rather for *who we represent*. And we must remember that if we are to be effective ambassadors, then a world who is asking: “Who are you?” need not hear our name, but rather His!

As we wind our way into the precious pages of the New Testament to take a deeper look at the life of God on earth, we find that before a new chapter can be written in the life of our King, we must first come face to face with a man who understood this principle of humble ambassadorship, a man named John. He was no ordinary man. From the very moment the angel of God appeared to his father, Zacharias, to foretell his birth, it was obvious that God had something special in mind for his life.

He did not live a sheltered childhood. Rather, we read that he was filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth and lived out his early years as a Nazarite in the desert. About A.D. 26, this rough-sounding lad began his public ministry. In today’s society we might characterize John as a street evangelist, one who went where sin was rampant and, preached a gospel of repentance without apology. He was not mindful of his reputation; he was only concerned that the people, so unaccustomed to his brand of evangelism, would turn from their wickedness.

He had no expectations for fame. Rather, his God had clearly

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proclaimed to him that his was to be the role of a way-maker. He was to be the voice of one in the wilderness, preparing the people for one who was to come. Never did he appear to be tempted to upstage the Coming One. And when the one he was destined to proclaim arrived, there was not a hint of jealousy or competition in his message. He bore no ambitions that the name of John the Baptist live on. His goal was to point the finger of God in the direction of eternity and wait for the Son to make his appearance on the stage of life.

Nonetheless, his was such a dramatic ministry that it was only natural that the people, in general, and the Pharisees, in particular, could not help but wonder if, in fact, he were the Messiah. The Gospel of John records for us his answer to that question, and at the same time records an event in the life of Jesus that formed a bridge between His wilderness experience and His first public ministry. It is that passage with which we open this lesson. It is found in John, and we will read it from the Life of Christ in Stereo.

And here is the affirmation John made, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” — and he confessed, and denied not, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you The Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” Then said they to him “Who are you? — that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say of yourself?” He said, “I am a voice crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord!’ as said the prophet Isaiah.”

Now those who had been sent were from among the Pharisees; and they asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them, saying, “I baptize in water, but standing among you is One whom you know not; He it is who coming after me ranks before me, whose sandal thong I am not fit to untie.” These things occurred in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

“This is he of whom I said, ‘After me is coming a man who ranks before me. For He was before me. And I knew him not; but that he might be made known to Israel, for this I came baptizing in water.’”

And John made an affirmation, saying, “I saw the Spirit

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descending out of heaven as a dove, and he abode upon him. And I knew him not; but he who sent me to baptize in water, that same One said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining, He it is who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness, that this is the Son of God.”  
(John 1:19-35 Life of Christ in Stereo)

Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and gazing at Jesus as he walked, he said ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.”

Herein lies one of the most incredible responses man has ever given to one of the most commonly misunderstood questions man has ever asked. The question is: “Who are you?” The answer is: “I am nobody special...but I know someone who is...would you like to meet Him?”

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The setting of the story is unique yet common. It is unique in that it is the account of the first occasion since Jesus’ birth in which a man is given an opportunity to share God’s glory with God’s Son. It is common, however, in that what it pictures is a three-dimensional outline of the problem every Christian faces when he begins to be recognized as a child of the King. John’s answer is a pattern of how God in man wants to respond to that problem.

The problem is simply this: Man is looking for something or someone tangible in whom to put his trust. Man is looking for an earthly explanation for a heavenly phenomenon. So whenever God places His hand of approval miraculously on a man or a mission, the world simply assumes that the person acting as a channel is, in effect, the power source rather than the vessel. And so men seek to glory in men; men seek to glory in churches; men seek to glory in programs; men seek to glory in systems. Unbelievers place their confidence in men rather than in the God who empowers men, and the result is that when those men are found to be fallible (and all of them are) faith goes out the window. Believers place their confidence in either the system or the experience that revealed God to them rather than in the Creator God, who simply used that system or that experience to reveal Himself. And so we live in a world today filled with mini-deities, religious gods molded out of the clay of the very materials a sovereign God selected to glorify Himself.

Our God chooses the weakest of vessels to show Himself

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strong, so *no man can glory in His presence*. What a pity, that when God makes something out of nothing, man begins to glorify the something He made. It is a sensitive subject, particularly in the era of the electronic church, where we have molded mini-gods out of men and ministries that must promote themselves to sustain themselves and all the while stealing precious Glory from God.

Our story begins, as you recall, when the Pharisees sent priests and Levites to attend one of John the Baptist's revival meetings, not to respond to his message, but to scout out the competition. They had heard rumblings all over Israel about this man John. He was rugged, plain and uneducated, and yet the crowds pursued him. The masses were infatuated with his message of fire and brimstone. It was a message, not of conciliation, but of reformation; it was a message, not of doctrinal perfection, but of eternal reflection. This "wild man" was wandering through the wilds of the land, calling on men and women to repent of sin and be baptized.

Fearful that this could be the Messiah, the Jews sent an entourage to visit his meetings and gently quiz him as to who he was. Should he prove to be a religious success story, they could take him under their wings and share in his glory. Should he prove to be a religious rebel, they could withhold their seal of approval upon his work, and he would be destined (or so they thought) to a ministry of mediocrity. Should he pretend to be the Messiah, they could quickly put an end to such impractical claims. So they came, not to listen, but to manipulate the situation in their favor.

They asked the question all men ask when one of their contemporaries attracts the plaudits of men. They asked, "Who are you?" Where did *you* come from? John answered their question by removing immediately any doubt that he was the promised Messiah. John possessed, as we shall see, a holy awe of the Coming One. He would not dare to pretend that he could touch, let alone wear, the shoes of God's Anointed One. They did not ask, "Are you the Messiah?" They asked, "Who are you?" But John knew what they were asking. Without so much as blinking an eye, he responded, "I am not the Messiah."

The last thing John wanted to do was to share God's glory. Quickly he settled that issue. "I am not the Christ," he answered. Such a thought was blasphemy to him. Undaunted, they came back with question number two, "What then? Are you Elijah?" In a straightforward reply, he answered: "I am not!" The Jews were

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expecting Elijah to return to prepare the way for the Messiah. John was quick to acknowledge that Elijah he wasn't; but the way-maker he was. This they could not comprehend. Ignoring his second negative, they asked him one more question, "Are you the Prophet? Are you the prophet we believe must come before Messiah comes? Are you Jeremiah, come back to proclaim the coming day of the Lord?" John quietly answered with a simple, "No".

The priests and Levites persisted, and once again they asked that loaded question, "Then who are you? What do you say of yourself?" John answered by quoting from the prophet Isaiah, stating that he was indeed not the Messiah, but the one crying in the wilderness, making the way for the Lord to come. Again, the confused Jews could not comprehend what John was saying. "If you're not the Messiah, and not Elijah, and not the Prophet, then why are you baptizing?" they asked. "I baptize with water," John declared, "but there is one coming, one whose shoes I am not worthy to tie, who will come baptizing men into the Spirit."

### HE MUST INCREASE

We don't know if this satisfied them or infuriated them, but we do know that the next thing we read about takes place the following day. John was apparently preaching and, suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he sees the One coming upon whom the Spirit had descended, the one whom God had told him was — "The One Who Was To Come". John stops, raises his head, and shouts, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." The Jews understood what that phrase meant. They had heard Abraham declare, "God will provide Himself, the Lamb." They knew the Lamb meant sacrifice, and the Lamb of God meant perfect sacrifice. They knew the only one who could take away the sins of the world was the perfect Lamb, without spot or blemish. John was declaring in no uncertain terms that the Messiah had come. The following day John was standing, talking to two of his loyal followers, when Jesus walked by again. Gazing at the Master, John loudly proclaimed once again, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples who had been following John now turn and follow Jesus instead.

Here was a man who had given his life to proclaiming a message, to building a following, to calling a nation to repentance. Suddenly, his message was complete; his following was following the One he proclaimed was coming, and now the nation must listen to the



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Master, Himself. Were they to reject Him, their blood would be upon their own hands. His job was virtually finished. He could dismantle his organization, do away with his public relations manager, fire his administrative assistants, and cancel his future crusades.

The issue was finally crystallized in John, chapter three, verse 25, when both John and Jesus were baptizing, and John's followers began to question him about the matter. It reads like this:

Then, there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

(John 3:25,26)

"John," they cried, "that fellow you raved about at his baptism is now baptizing, and the crowds are all going to his meetings. What do we do?"

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

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

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

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:27-30)

My friend, you have just heard the Gospel. You have just witnessed how the Spirit of God in a man responds to glory. The Spirit of God in a man always responds to glory by giving it to the Son. No one else is capable of receiving it. For man to receive glory is for God to be robbed of the glory man has received. It was never intended for him. John's only reason for living was to point men to the Savior. When men began to make a savior of him, he flatly refused to cooperate. "Who are you?" they insisted. "I am nobody in particular," he replied, "but, oh, here comes someone worth meeting. I'd like you to meet the Lamb of God."

Here was John's chance to get co-billing with God. Here was John's chance to see his name in lights, right alongside the King's. Here was John's chance to pull out his card, like that man in the opening illustration, and demand an audience. But John knew who he was. He was nobody, but somebody God had decided to

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use. So what did he have to boast about? He was alive for one reason: to tell men that the Christ was coming. Now that Christ was beginning to make Himself known, John had two choices: he could step up on the platform alongside Jesus and announce, “Here’s the guy I told you about; if it wasn’t for me, you wouldn’t even recognize Him. We’ll share the offering tonight.” Or he could quietly fade into the background, praising God and giving glory to God that the King had arrived at last.

John looked at Jesus and declared, “He must increase; but I must decrease.” In other words, you’re not going to hear much more about John. John was just a vessel. Now the source has arrived, and the vessel need not be prominent any more.

This is one of the most difficult lessons for a Christian to learn. It is one of the most difficult lessons for the church to learn. It is certainly one of the most difficult lessons for organized evangelicalism to learn. The lesson is this: *The more you want men to hear about your Jesus, the less they need to hear about you.* Yes, I know that you are the instrument God wants to use to share the good news. But, beloved, if you let God be God in you, they will be so in awe of who your God is, they will scarcely even know you exist. They will not go away remembering your organization, your pastor, or your church. They will go away simply in awe of who your Jesus is.

John has captured the essence of discipleship. He has learned how to become invisible, so His God can become visible. He has learned to disappear so Christ can appear in all His glory. The process is not complicated, but it is difficult. For each time the world approaches you and asks you, “Who are you?”, the temptation will surface again for you to tell what you’ve done, or who you’ve influenced, or even how God has used you, rather than quietly, by your response, drawing attention simply to the one who IS. You can elevate yourself in a thousand ways, many of them so subtle, even you are unaware that you are doing it. But when you do, there exits from your spirit a touch of that confident assurance that you are a nobody Somebody chose to use, and there enters that emptiness that comes when someone has stolen glory from God.

### BEHOLD THE LAMB

One last thought clamors for our attention from this passage. Not only did John the Baptist make no attempt to steal the glory from the Son, he went one step beyond. He took each occasion,

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even though it meant losing his own disciples, to carefully point men not only to Jesus the coming King, but to Jesus their Savior. It is popular today to exalt Jesus as friend. It is popular today to exalt Jesus as the essence of kindness. It is popular today to exalt Jesus as a good man, even as the god-man. But it is not, nor has it ever been, popular to exalt Jesus as Saviour. There is something about God having to die for the sins of the world that the natural man cannot stand. For one thing, if there is to be a Saviour, there must be a confession of sin, and man detests that. Secondly, if there was a Calvary, then every man has a decision to make, and the failure to make that decision is, in essence, deciding to ignore the Cross and perish in hell. Man would rather not have to even face that issue.

But John knew why Jesus came, do you? Jesus didn't come to reform man; Jesus didn't come to exalt man; Jesus didn't come to excuse man; Jesus came to redeem man. Jesus came to take miserable, lost sinners, who were destined for an eternity in hell and, recognizing that they could not pay the price for their sins, He came to pay the price for them and offer to them entrance once again into the presence of His Father as holy, blameless, brand-new creatures. Not made over—reborn.

Every time John saw Jesus or heard Jesus, one statement rang from his lips, "Behold, the Lamb of God." If His very presence does not evoke from us that exact response, then we have missed the reality of why He came.

Should you be reading this, or hearing this, even though you may have followed Jesus for a long time, if you have never reached the place in your experience when, as you beheld Him, suddenly there burst forth from your heart, "Behold, the Lamb of God!", I invite you right now to do what John did...to behold the Lamb as *your* perfect sacrifice. Acknowledge Him right now as your Savior, the one who took on Himself *your sins*, and accept Him right now as your Lord, the one, who having died for you, now wants to live in you His wonderful, supernatural life.

Behold, the Lamb is waiting! May He enter your life today, and having cleansed you of all your sin, may He then begin to assume His rightful place in your heart as Lord. May your lips proclaim with John's, "He must increase; but I must decrease."

And if you are a Christian, I humbly bring you this warning: The path to spiritual maturity is lined with subtle traps. Mine fields

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are set before you by Satan with only one purpose: to move you ever so slightly off your course. If God should use you in any way to glorify His Name, the enemy will move in and begin to tempt you to share that glory. It may begin with a simple compliment over some small thing you've done. Or it may be the applause that often accompanies performances of any kind. It could even be the temptation to tell others of the spiritual growth that God is miraculously bringing about in your life, but to share it in such a way that your name is mentioned alongside God's.

Before long, you will acknowledge God's greatness, but inwardly wonder how God ever managed before He had you to use. You'll sheepishly let others brag on your ministry, without feeling a tinge of remorse. Finally, you will reach that stage where you will begin to promote yourself, or your ministry, or your church, *as though by promoting it you were proclaiming Christ.*

It may be years before you awaken to the fact that the glorious joy of letting God be God in you has disappeared. Your work may be flourishing, but you may be only storing up wood, hay, and stubble. And all because, at some point in time, when men asked, "Who are you?", you looked in the mirror, were impressed with what you saw, and forgot to answer, "Who I am doesn't matter, sir; I am simply an ambassador for the King. He is on the throne. He it is who is to be praised."

None of us is immune. But if we are to live out our Christian lives as God intended, from this moment on, every one of us must, like John, remember, *He must increase; we must decrease.* In fact, we must decrease to the point that when they ask "Who are you?" our only answer will be, "Praise God, I'm His!"

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