

STATUS MEANS NOTHING!

Matthew 11:2-11 Text vs. 11 *“Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet, whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”.*

We talk a lot about people, or things, being *great*, *greater*, or *the greatest*. Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus was known as *“The Greatest Show on Earth.”* Heavyweight boxer Muhammed Ali was known as *“The Greatest.”* Nebuchadnezzar II, the greatest king of Babylon. Alexander *“The Great”* of Macedonia. Peter *“The Great”* of Russia. Ramesses *The Great* of ancient Egypt. The *“Great”* Genghis Khan of Mongolia. But Jesus said, *“John was greater than anyone ever born of women.”* Well, great men like Moses had a mother. David had a mother. Abraham had a mother. Everyone who has ever born has had a mother. You had a mother!

But what Jesus was saying was, John the Baptist was *“The Greatest of All Time.”* John’s *“greatness”* had to do with his special place in history. Not any special talent. Not holiness. No personal accomplishments he may have had. In fact, immediately after stating John was the *greatest “among those born of women,”* Jesus said, *“Yet, whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”* (Matthew 11:11b) That means the least person in heaven was holy and had a new immortal body, while John was still on earth and wasn’t there yet.

So, Jesus called John the Baptist *“the greatest”* because John was chosen by God to be the forerunner of Messiah. John’s mission was to prepare the world for Christ’s arrival. And when John introduced Jesus to the world as the *“Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:35–36) that was his introduction of Jesus to the Jews. God chose John to break 430 years of divine silence that had existed since the prophet Malachi which made John the bridge from the Old Testament to the New. John’s ministry was predicted in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. And John preached with the power of Elijah. He stood on the edge of a new era. He was willing to be *nothing*, in order that Jesus could be *everything!* You see, John was much more than a prophet. John’s true greatness was recognized by God. But John was neither a prince nor a king. He didn’t have wealth. No power. He was just a man. A man who believed in Messiah and was totally committed to preparing the way for Messiah. He knew Jesus’ purpose was to be Messiah. So, status meant nothing to John! In that huge crowd beside the Jordan River that day, John said, *“I’m not worthy to carry His shoes!”* John knew his own place. And he knew Jesus’ place. He knew it was all about Jesus! John was great because he was fulfilling the will of God by magnifying the Lord. And as Jesus got bigger, John got smaller. Status meant nothing to John!

When Jesus came to the Jordan River for John to baptize Him, John tried to stop Him. He looked at Jesus and said, *“I need to be baptized by you! And you come to me?”* (Matt. 3:14) Jesus said, *“It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”* Remember, John’s baptism was for forgiveness of sin. And since Jesus had never sinned, His baptism wasn’t necessary! But Jesus said it *was* necessary for John to baptize Him, because God wanted it *“to fulfill all righteousness.”* And just what does that mean? Righteousness is when you are right in the eyes of God. Baptizing Jesus was right in the eyes of God! John’s ministry was to prepare the world for Messiah. He did his work. He did it well! But he had no idea his ministry would be so short. He didn’t even reach his 35th birthday! John had been sent to preach and to prepare people to receive Jesus. Even after Jesus began His ministry, John continued to preach. But John’s crowds grew smaller. So, one day one of John’s disciples told him, *“Teacher, everybody has started going to Jesus to be baptized. What are we going to do about it?”* John said, *“I didn’t come to compete with Him, I came to prepare the way for Him. I’m glad for what I did. And I’m even happier for Him. He must increase. And I must decrease.”* And John kept on preaching!

One day, he preached a message on marriage and divorce. Herod’s name came up in that sermon. Remember Herod? He was the son of Herod the Great. The Herod who had tried to kill Jesus along with all the other boy babies born in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. Herod Antipas was a Jew and ruled Galilee and the eastern side of the Jordan River valley one third the way down the Jordan River where John was preaching. He was called "Herod the Tetrarch" and "King Herod" in the New Testament, although he never held the title of king. Well, Herod Antipas was married. But there was scandal in the palace. Herod had become involved with his brother’s wife, Herodias. Herod had made his wife leave the palace so he could marry his brother’s wife. And when the Jewish leaders heard about that, they were angered. Herod was committing adultery. They were even more outraged when they heard that Herod had gone ahead and married Herodias, because marrying your brother’s wife was condemned as *incest* and prohibited by the Law of Moses. However, the religious leaders were afraid to say anything because they were afraid of Herodias and didn’t want to lose their official positions. But John wasn’t afraid of losing his position. He had nothing to lose. He was willing to call sin, sin, no matter who was doing it. And when the word got out that John had publicly condemned that marriage, Herodias was outraged. She wanted to kill John. But her husband Herod was afraid to do it because he believed John was a prophet and the people might riot. So, Herodias told her daughter Salome who had danced for Herod and his guests, *“Go into that banquet and tell Herod to give you the head of John the Baptist, right now, on a platter.”* She ran back into the banquet room with her mother’s request. And even

though Herod knew it was wrong, and it could cause him some trouble down the road, he needed to save face in front of his guests, so he ordered an executioner to go to the prison and cut off John's head and to bring it to him on a platter. When John's head was brought in on a platter, Salome took it and gave it to her mother.

Now, there's no way to make any sense out of that. John was a man who had taken a stand for God. He had the anointing of God on His life yet was arrested for telling the truth. And it cost him his life, because a teenaged stepdaughter danced at a banquet in front of her stepfather and his guests. By the time John was executed, much of his fame was forgotten. It had been replaced by the ministry of Jesus Christ. But if you asked John, "*was it worth such an early death?*" John would surely say, "*I wouldn't have missed it for the world!*" To John, status meant *nothing!* But Jesus meant *everything!* to him!

Now, how about you? Putting God first in life is something every Christian should be doing every day! Make it a priority to spend time with God every day when you wake up! Sure, there are times when it's not possible. But try to make it part of your daily routine, anyway. If you start your day with God, He will help you stay on the right track, even if your day doesn't go the way you planned. If you start your day with God, you will be able to endure whatever comes your way, because your heart will be anchored in God. And when you put God first in your life, it will help you to stay on the right track because you never know where God is going to lead you. If you're always putting other things before God, you'll never know! So, stay on the path God has laid out for you. Going to church every Sunday. Reading the Bible daily. Serving others. Those things may make you think you're putting God first in your life. But there's more to it than that! You can't be faithful doing things in this world and still, at the same time, be faithful to God. Dividing your loyalty between God and the world will cause you to live in unhappiness and confusion. God needs to be first! Easier said than done, you say? Right! Busy schedules make it hard to put God first! You can easily get distracted by daily routines, always choosing between a lot of things. Your job if you have one. Family. Friends. They take time. But making God the number one priority in your life should be your first choice! God has great plans for your life. And when you put Him first, He's going to show you the path to follow so you can walk in the way He has made for you. Psalm 16:11 says, "*You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*"

Now, some have enough money to live comfortably the rest of their lives. They're at a safe place in life socially. Money and fame aren't as important to them as if they were poor and not in good social standing. And there are a lot of people to whom money and fame doesn't mean much. They have different values. Some people have had the idea from childhood that self-worth and their family's name comes from how much money they have. And to have a good social standing, you must have lots of money. But there are some barely getting by each month yet have a strong desire to earn a lot of money. Some believe money will make them more popular. Happier. Some don't care about those things. So, when you really get down to it, status has to do with social or professional standing which means nothing. But despite all that happened to John the Baptist, if you asked him, he would surely say, "*I wouldn't have missed it for the world.*" And what about you? Can you say with John, "*I didn't come to compete with Jesus. I came to prepare the way for Him. I'm glad for what I did, and I'm even happier for Him. He must increase, and I must decrease.*" Now that's how you achieve real status. Not with the world. Not with friends. But with God. And that's the status that counts! AMEN