

He Loved Me...

He Loves Me Lots

The Gospel of John

Text

1:19-28

Topic

John the Baptist tells a delegation from Jerusalem he is not worthy to loose Jesus' sandal strap

Title

"Born to Loose"

@PreachersNSneakers

... Is an Instagram account that posts screenshots of megachurch pastors next to price tags and the street value of shoes they are wearing in the pulpit.

Besides \$1000 classic Jordans and \$3200 Air Yeezy 2 Pure Platinums, the account started revealing other expensive items:

- A \$2000 Louis Vuitton laptop case.
- A \$2500 Ricci crocodile belt.
- A \$2000 Gucci backpack.

Reactions to the site are predictably polarized:

- One person commented, "Everyone spends money in ways others think are an absurd waste. Just because nobody is scrutinizing your finances doesn't mean you wouldn't or don't fall into similar indulgences. So lighten up."
- Another person wrote, "Pass the collection plate; *daddy needs a new pair of shoes.*"

(I'm fortunate that no one has the account @PreachersNCoffee)

If John the Baptist had an Instagram account, it would have been called *@PreachersNSandals*.

He says, "It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose" (v27).

I'll organize my comments around two questions suggested by the text: **#1 Are You A Voicer?**, and **#2 Are You A Looser?**

#1 - Are You A Voicer? (v19-23)

I don't watch *The Voice*, but I understand that the judges don't see the contestants, not at first. They hear the voice then make their decision.

John the Baptist will reduce himself to nothing more than a "voice crying in the wilderness" (v23). He wanted to be heard and not seen.

Joh 1:19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

The apostle John, the author of this Gospel, will mention "Jews" some seventy times. Most often, he uses it to identify those in authority.

The priests and Levites knew who John was.

It's not going too far to suggest John had been watched and scrutinized all his life.

There are 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the ministry of John the Baptist. Scholars refer to it as the Intertestamental Period. Those of us in the pews call it the "400 Silent Years" because it was a span where no new prophets were raised, and God revealed nothing new to His people.

As far as we know, nothing of supernatural significance occurred in the Temple. The priests came, performed their duties, finished their rotation, and went home.

One day in the first century, a priest named Zacharias was performing a once-in-a-lifetime service when he entered alone into the holiest part of the Temple to offer incense for the nation.

The angel Gabriel appeared to him to announce the miraculous birth of a son to Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth. They were to name him John.

He would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb and have an Elijah-like ministry getting the Jews ready for the Messiah.

When Zacharias emerged, he was "mute and not able to speak... because [he] did not believe [Gabriel's] words" (Luke 1:20). It was big news.

His tongue was loosed nine months later at the naming of his son.

The Jews could not have forgotten; if anything, as John grew, so did their anticipation.

At the heart of the Old Testament is the expectation that God would send a unique king, associated with King David's dynasty, to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth and rule it from Jerusalem.

The nation of Israel was expecting one or more important Old Testament heroes to arrive. The Temple delegation wanted to know if John thought himself to be one of them.

Joh 1:20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

"Christ" is not Jesus' last name. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains, "In Hebrew, "Messiah" means *the anointed One*, which in Greek is translated as "Christ." The idea of "the anointed One" comes from the Old Testament practice of anointing priests and kings with oil."

Hopes were high among first-century Jews for the arrival of the Messiah. A source I found explained there were three beliefs on how Israel was going to get freed from Roman occupation:

1. Take aggressive action against Rome, e.g., the Zealots.
2. Use methods of passive resistance.
3. The coming of Messiah.

Those with Messianic hope believed that God or His representative would intervene in history on behalf of His people. One researcher writes, "This view is represented in Qumran in the *Psalms of Solomon 17*. *Psalms of Solomon 17* looks forward to a Davidic Messiah who will march on Jerusalem, banish the Gentiles from the city, reassemble the tribes of Israel and establish the ideal kingdom."

Joh 1:21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not..."

The delegation knew their Bible. In the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi predicted that the prophet, Elijah, would return before Messiah's coming:

Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

If John was not the Messiah, maybe he was Elijah. John denied being Elijah.

Joh 1:21 "... Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

Moses said in Deuteronomy 18:15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren..." Later in John 6:14, we read that, "When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

A Prophet like Moses would be a mere man, not the Son of God. He would be a deliverer from their Roman captivity but not from sin and death.

Let's briefly reconsider John and Elijah. Jesus said of John, "This is *he* of whom it is written: 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:10 &14).

Further in Matthew, Jesus said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 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.' Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist" (17:11-13).

Jesus told his disciples that Elijah is coming, a future occurrence, and that Elijah had already come - a past occurrence.

John the Baptist would have fulfilled Malachi's prophecy had Israel responded to his message.

Two important things are at work in the Elijah prophecy: Man's free will and God's providence.

All the parties involved had genuine free-will:

- John the Baptist had free will to obey God or not. Compare, for example, Samson, who mostly disobeyed God.

- Israel's leaders were given a choice to receive or reject Jesus. The Lord lamented for them that He would have gathered and protected them, but they willfully refused.

If things had gone differently, God would have provided for it. We can only speculate how it would have all shaken out, but it would have. Jesus would have been crucified, and the prophecies of the Last Days thus far recorded in the Bible would have been fulfilled to the letter.

John told them he was not Elijah because he wasn't Elijah. Not Elijah in the flesh; only in the same spirit.

Joh 1:22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"

There was no one else on the list of possible deliverers. Yet God was obviously blessing John's ministry.

Joh 1:23 He said: "I am 'THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS: MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

One commentator writes,

The imagery was that before a king would visit a town, a messenger would go before him to announce his coming. The townspeople would hurry out to clear away the obstacles and fill in the washed out parts of the road to smooth the way for the king's coming. The messenger didn't call attention to himself, but to the coming king.

John's Elijah-like ministry was unique. We're not expected to wear camel hair or eat locusts or be under lifelong Nazarite restrictions.

There are, nevertheless, encouraging parallels between John and ourselves:

1. John had a miraculous birth. Those of us in Christ have had a miraculous second birth. Unless you are born-again, you are not a child of God.
2. John was filled with God the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. A Christian has God the Holy Spirit indwelling them from the time they are born-again forward.
3. John conducted his ministry in the wilderness. The world we are in can most definitely be described as a dangerous spiritual wilderness. Jesus has left us in it to make a difference.
4. John's message and our message are essentially the same. Men are sinners, and Jesus is their Savior. Repent and be saved.

We are many 'voicers' crying out with compassion that Jesus *came* and *is coming*.

#2 - Are You A Looser? (v29-34)

There are no surviving artifacts or descriptions of Jewish shoes from the period of the early Bible.

We do know that Jews were taught the craft of sandal making while slaves in Egypt.

The Biblical sandal was either leather or wooden footboards held to the foot with leather thongs.

Sandals were prominent in the Exodus:

- On the night of the first Passover, we read, "This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the LORD" (Exodus 12:11).
- Twice in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Lord reminded His people that in forty years wandering, their sandals did not wear out (8:4 & 29:5).

The Jews developed extra-biblical sandal regulations. The right sandal always went on first, followed by the left. The left sandal was to be tied first, and the whole process reversed when taking the shoes off.

John the Baptist used sandals to illustrate the fixed mindset of a servant.

Joh 1:24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees.

We know the Pharisees as the conservative sect among the Jews. They emphasized the keeping of outward rules, rites, and rituals to achieve inward righteousness.

- A person can, in their strength and by their effort, reform, and that's great. Only God can transform a person from within.
- Reformation does nothing to change the heart. Transformation changes the heart, thereby affecting everything we do.

Joh 1:25 And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

The Jews practiced baptism, but not the way John was doing it. The Jews had (and still do have) a practice called *mikveh*. A *mikveh* is a ritual bath that purifies the person entering it. A person will immerse him or herself in a *mikveh* upon conversion to Judaism, after any time of impurity, and before religious holidays.

John was doing the baptizing, and he was doing it on Jewish people, even calling on the Jewish religious leaders to repent and be baptized.

John told the delegation he was not one the Big Three they were expecting. His denials confused them.

Joh 1:26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know.

They're called teaser trailers. They are short video clips that let you know about an upcoming movie. They drop before the more lengthy trailers.

John gave the delegation a teaser. When he said, "I baptize with water," it indicated Someone else was coming who would baptize in a medium other than water. Further, John told them this Someone was already in their midst. He would not reveal Jesus as the One nor explain His baptism until the next day.

Joh 1:27 It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."

In verse fifteen, John had said, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.' " This declaration must have been a recurring teaching in John's ministry. Every week I say, "Ready or not, Jesus is coming." Maybe John opened his baptisms with verse twenty-seven.

John, you remember, was Jesus' cousin. He was born *before* Jesus. Jews would naturally think John superior to Jesus based on birth order.

Listening more intently, John's claim is a declaration that his human cousin, Jesus, was "before" him in the sense He pre-existed. The opening verses support this, having revealed Jesus as the Word Who was with God, and Who was God.

"Whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." Sandaled feet in the first century got nasty dirty. It was a show of practical hospitality to remove a person's sandals and wash their feet.

Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus will take advantage of foot washing as a teachable moment.

On the night before His crucifixion, no one volunteered to wash feet at the meal He was sharing with His disciples. It was especially bad because they ate

the meal semi-reclining on low pillows. Someone's filthy, stinking, feet were in your vicinity.

Jesus "rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded" (13:4-5).

Making application, Jesus said,

Joh 13:14 If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

Joh 13:15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

Congregations practice foot washing. We don't see it as an ordinance to be practiced so much as an illustration.

The disciples ought to have fought over who would have the privilege of washing feet - especially the Lord's feet. After three-plus years with Jesus, they still had no idea what it meant to serve.

Do you know what they also did not have? They did not have the gift of God the Holy Spirit poured out upon them. That wouldn't happen until after the crucifixion. When His disciples seem flummoxed, we need to put it in perspective.

We, on the other hand, cannot claim ignorance. We have God the Holy Spirit to illuminate what we can do to serve Jesus, His followers, and the unsaved.

John the Baptist thought himself unworthy to remove the Lord's sandals to wash His feet. *Too bad he didn't live long enough to hear of Jesus' washing His disciple's feet.* I would have liked to have been there when John was trying to process that.

No matter how long you've been saved, Jesus should constantly amaze you. Everything about Him was unexpected. There is a holy foolishness to the plan of God becoming flesh. What other king condescends so much?

Joh 1:28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Your Bible may have Bethany instead of Bethabara. Same place, two names. It's a historical, geographic detail that reminds us these events are true, and happened just as written.

It also lets us know the authorities had to come to John, instead of him being summoned by them. His authority was greater than theirs.

So is ours as ambassadors for the Lord.

We are not worthy to "loose" a sandal strap, but the Lord nevertheless uses us as *loosers*.

- Believers pick up defilement from the world and could use a thorough washing by the Word of God shared with them.
- If you are not a believer, you stand before God dressed in filthy rags. Jesus has taken upon Himself the sin of the world. If you will believe Him, He will take away your filthy garments and exchange them for His white robe of righteousness.