

## **The Gospel of John - #6 - 11/08/2020 - "What Do You Say About Yourself?" John 1: 19-28**

**Introduction: IL-** Sergey Torop is a [Russian](#) former traffic cop who claims to be "reborn" as Messiah, Jesus Christ returned, and he says he is not God but the "[Word of God](#)". Also known as "Jesus of Siberia," Torop has an appearance similar to depictions of Jesus. He dresses in white flowing robes and has long brown hair and a beard. Before claiming to be the Messiah, Torop worked as a traffic policeman until he was fired in 1990. He founded the Church of the Last Testament in Siberia in 1990. The Church of the Last Testament has been described as being a mixture of beliefs from the Russian Orthodox Church and Buddhism. There are about 5,000 members of his cult. The church currently resides on a 10,000 acre spread, the largest religious camp in the world.

There have been many "pretenders" to the title of Messiah down through the ages. Jesus foretold, in Matthew 24: 5- "Many will come in My name saying, 'I am the Christ' and will lead many astray." The Apostle John who wrote this book now begins the narrative of the earthly life of Jesus most importantly. The author is prompted by the Holy Spirit to write about the dedicated service of John the Baptizer and about his relationship to Jesus as His Master. The account begins with a visit from Jewish authorities to: 1) confront this 'wild man' in the desert by the Jordan, 2) John's marvelous responses, and 3) a powerful statement by John the Baptizer about himself in relation to the REAL Messiah, Jesus Christ. Let's get started...

### **The Collective Interrogation- Three probing questions. [Verses 19-22]**

"And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him..." Two things right off the bat to spell out. First, I need to highlight the word "Jews" in this verse so that there is no thought of the word being anti-Semitic or racially motivated. The word "Jew" is used almost 70 times in John's Gospel while only occasionally in the other three Gospel accounts. And it is intended by John to focus not on the whole nation of Israel but specifically on its leaders, as the questions come here from the priests and Levites. We'll consider them more closely under our second point. Second, I want you to know that this chapter records part of the first week of Jesus' public ministry. Notice, if you will, the references to "the next day" as you look over the chapter. So, this account about the Baptizer, who had been ministering publicly for over six months to urge people to repent, details the experiences Jesus had in that first week of ministry on the other side of the Jordan! Here I want us to think about the questions of these leaders as they seek to nail down who this Baptizer really is, and see how John responds to their inquiry. These priests and Levites have come out to the wilderness on the east side of the Jordan River, most likely covering 16 to 20 miles from Jerusalem, so these questions are deliberate and pointed, not off the cuff in casual conversation!

**'Who are you?'** They asked the general question first, of course, and John answered distinctly and purposefully, not who he is but who he isn't- he isn't the Christ, the Messiah. The Jewish people had read about and heard about a Messiah coming- a Messiah who would deliver

them from Roman rule and enemy oppression or so they thought, and these “reports” wanted to be certain about John’s claims as he preached and baptized and as both Jews and Gentiles began to follow him. The men from Jerusalem had no doubt heard the press releases about John but they wanted some confirmation directly from him! I believe John could have “confessed” something entirely different if his heart was not right before God! But he was determined to make it known to anyone that he was not a rival to Jesus or antagonistic to Jesus.

**‘Are you Elijah?’** The Jewish contingent now gets more specific- not ‘who are you?’ but ‘are you Elijah?’ Perhaps because John looked like a re-incarnation of that great Old Testament prophet and perhaps because the later prophets, like Malachi, predicted the coming of Elijah. Malachi 4: 5- “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes!” 2 Kings 1: 8 reminds us, “He (Elijah) wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather around his waist.” What was John’s attire? Matthew 3: 4 tells us- “Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist.” Hmmm! Something more geographic might have prompted their question about Elijah. John’s ministry was out in the wilderness on the east side of the Jordan River across from Jericho and was the very area where Elijah ministered and where he anointed his prophetic successor, Elisha! John’s answer was brief- “I am not!” No pretense, no second thoughts about elevating his stature in their minds to make himself out to be a great man. He simply told it like it was! Another question followed immediately...

**‘Are you the Prophet?’** In Deuteronomy 18: 15 Moses told the people of Israel- “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers- it is to him you shall listen.” Some expositors believe the words of Moses refer to Isaiah or Jeremiah while still others believe it refers to Jesus Himself. One thing is sure- that prophecy by Moses does not refer to John the Baptizer. He answers even more briefly here with one word- ‘No!’ Hi answers become more brief- 5, 3, 1 word(s)! John could have answered with the words of his priestly father Zechariah when John was born- in Luke 1: 76- “And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High.” But his intention, out of a spirit of humility and obedience, was to honor THE Messiah, not himself! That is one very powerful lesson from this incident in John 1. John held his ground with each question, even when they repeated the first one- “Who are you?” This time they added that they needed to give an answer to those who sent them. This was no afterthought on their part and certainly not a visit they relished. They were on a mission to determine who this bearded wonder out in the desert was so that, if they needed to, they could trash his name and mission to everyone back in the holy City of Jerusalem. Their follow-up question was issued to nail down whether John was a religious fanatic or a demented cave dweller ready to cross the river and pounce on the leaders of the people of Israel. So they ask, ‘What do you say about yourself?’ John’s answer leads us to this second point...

**The Critical Identification- Three helpful details. [Verses 23-25 and verse 28]** “He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’ as the prophet

Isaiah said..." It will be helpful, I believe, to determine from the text who these leaders are who have come to grill the Baptizer and find out, as best we can, where this communication took place...

**Priests and Levites-** In the Jewish religious society of Jesus' day priests who served in the Temple and in its surrounding courts numbered more than 20,000. Jerusalem was a mega-city and the Temple and its parts and purposes required a lot of hands-on ministry by the right people. John the Baptist's own father was a Temple priest who served with many others on a rotation basis throughout the year. Levites also worked around the Temple. They were also priests- any Levite could serve as a priest but not all priests could perform the special duties of the Levites. Levites had to have come from the tribe of Levi which dated back to the days of Moses and the giving of the Law. John's family came from the tribe of Levi. One of their primary responsibilities in the days of Moses was to transport the Tabernacle and all its parts and furnishings. Once there was a Temple, Solomon's and then Herod's in Jerusalem, the Levites took on the cleaning of all the furniture and items of worship and sacrifice. They also were charged with the responsibility to give praise to God through music in the Temple and out in the courtyard. They were the first "worship leaders" ever in the service of God! These two groups- we don't know their number on that day, were sent by the Pharisees...

**Pharisees-** We need to be clear about who they were and what they were like- not what THEY would say about themselves but what Scripture says! There were about 6,000 of them at that time in history. And they would have been miffed if we asked- "What do you say about yourselves?" Their hasty response would be- "Well, our name says it all!" The title Pharisee means, "Separated ones" and they took great pride in separating from common Israelites and proudly devoting themselves to the meticulous keeping of the Law- not only the Law of Moses with its 613 commands, but adherence to what was called the Mishnah, which was a commentary on the Law that expanded the Law to minute details. When Jesus was underway with His ministry, He encountered and challenged their "religiosity" and their pretend holiness. They loved the praises of men, but Jesus knew their hearts and in Matthew 23: 13 He told them to their faces- "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in!" So these religious but lost leaders were the ones who sent the entourage to John the Baptizer- they needed to know if they were going to lose control over their little world of the praise of men and the prestige of position and authority over the nation! Where this conversation took place is worth detailing....

**Bethany across the Jordan-** The King James Version and a few others refer to this location in verse 28 as Bethabara. That place name only occurs one other time in Judges 7: 24 in the amazing account of victory for Gideon and his small band of soldiers. That ancient city on the east side of the Jordan River is no longer in existence. Some Hebrew scholars believe it should be called "Bethany" but then we get into hair-splitting because there is another Bethany on the west side of the river two miles from Jerusalem. It was the hometown of Lazarus, Mary

and Martha were Jesus sometimes visited and stayed in their home. As long as we recognize that that east-side Bethabara or Bethany is no longer there we won't have to cry 'foul' about the accuracy of our Bibles! Plus, that area was famous as the ministry location for Old Testament Elijah and New Testament John the Baptizer. I am of the view that God orchestrated to exact location of this encounter between John and the leaders from Jerusalem- it was a fitting spot and John did a wonderful job identifying himself honestly to the Jewish contingent- honesty before them and most of all before God!

### **The Correct Insight- Three personal applications. [Verses 26 and 27]**

"John answered them, 'I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know...'"

**Self-evaluation:** John's "testimony" was that he was "the voice" to announce the coming of Jesus with a very simple "Get ready for it!" message- "Make straight the way of the Lord!" In those days before paved highways a king who was planning a long journey into the outer reaches of his domain would send workers on ahead to check out the roadways and fill pot-holes and knock down large piles of rocks or clear branches to make the road more than passable but smooth riding for the king in his chariot. That is the word picture here. John is saying he is the voice- the messenger of the King to tell the road repairmen to get ready- the King is coming! John could have boasted about being a great man who deserved attention for his spotless credentials, but he chose, humbly to turn attention onto Jesus. When the Jewish representatives from the capital city asked, "Then why, if you are just a voice, are you baptizing people?" John knew this was the key moment to lift up the Person who really is the Word of God- Jesus Himself- the One everyone needs to listen to and turn to in faith! John knew his baptism was a water baptism that represented someone getting their heart right to receive the Messiah but he had been telling his followers and those coming to be immersed in the Jordan that Jesus is the worthy One! John knew he didn't deserve to be a voice but he would do it for his Master. He expressed his humility when he made it clear that he was not even worthy of removing the sandals from Jesus' feet like a slave would do in order to wash the master's feet. His honest self-evaluation would have been: I am a nobody telling other nobodies about Somebody- the Savior, who can make them children of God through faith! How would YOU evaluate yourself? What do YOU say about yourself? More importantly, what do you say about Jesus? Who is He to you? **Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_ to me!** It's a simple question but it requires honest evaluation- serious introspection through the truthfulness of God's Word. Maybe like the Apostle Paul- a former Pharisee himself, you might be able to say, with Galatians 2: 20- 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who **loved me and gave Himself for me!**'"

**Conclusion:** IL- D. L. Moody once said, "I'm glad we are saved by grace and not by good work, because I don't want to sit in Heaven and listen to everybody brag about how they got there!" The Pharisees were braggers- John was not! He saw himself as a beggar telling other beggars where they could find the Savior who would give them all that they lack and more spiritually! I trust that you know how you would see yourself and how you would see the Savior!