

According to Jesus, John the Baptist has a lot going for him. Jesus labels John the greatest of the prophets.

Crowds of people hikes out into the desert near the Dead Sea to hear John's message. John offers not sugar-coated platitudes but harsh words pointing out people's sins and calling them to repentance. His message clearly comes from God. His clothing of animal skins and diet of grasshoppers and honey make him strange. Nevertheless, people listen to what John has to say because he speaks with godly authority.

Despite John's credentials, Jesus tells his disciples that even "the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater" than John. That's because those of us who are heirs to the grace of God through Christ's sacrificial death have a direct relationship with God through the resurrected Christ. Living before the blessings that come from God following Pentecost, John knows only of the "works salvation" of the Hebrew scriptures. As post-Pentecost Christians, we are able to have a direct relationship with God that transcends what John preached.

John knew the God who could be encountered person to person only in the inner throne room of Jerusalem's Temple once a year on what the Bible calls "the Day of Atonement." Now, because of Christ, we all can have direct access to God through prayer without an earthly priest. Our intimacy is such that we can call God *Abba*, an intimate word for father. Not even John's status back then could top the relationship we now can have because of what Jesus has made available for us.

*Jesus, thank you for the incredible and direct relationship we can have with God that you have made possible. Help us not to neglect this precious gift but to practice living in your presence daily. Amen.*