

5th June 26, 77 11A.M
(Mason vint)

Greatness of JOHN, THE BAPTIST

Matt. 11:11

INTRODUCTION:

To the greatness of John, the Baptist. There had been 400 years of silence. Prophecy had been quiet. At last, the silence was broken. And a voice was heard in the land - speaking like those of old. It was the voice of one who was clad in an ordinary cloak and a leather girdle. He sounded like one of the old prophets.

Old Bishop Hall put it this way - his raiment was rough, and so was his tongue. And if his food was wild honey, his speech was a stinging locust.

The character of his preaching was that he spoke plainly about sin. And he taught the absolute need of repentance. And he stated that men who repented must be proved by their works. And he warned men to not rest in outward privileges.

He spoke plainly about Jesus Christ. He was mightier than he. And he baptizes with water only while Jesus was going to add the spirit. He spoke very plainly about the Holy Spirit. And he spoke very plainly about the awful danger of the impenitent. He told them there was a wrath to come and he preached of the unquenchable fire. He spoke very plainly about the safety of the believer.

As we think about the greatness of John, the Baptist. There are so many things that make him great. We would ask the question why did the Lord Jesus seek baptism with John. Jesus was spotless and John's baptism was of repentance. I suppose one of the explanation is - at this age, Levites were bathed and anointed, and admitted to service. So in this way, our Lord, showed his humility by coming and being baptized of John. As proof of his humility. Another thing, Jesus came and was baptized of John because of his identification. It firmly fixed him among the people that he had come to save. And of course, it was a matter of submission

with our Lord who came for this baptism.

As we consider the man today, we will stand upon the shoulders of one of God's great men. John's brief and fiery ministry of judgement and repentance was one that that seriously denounced Herod and the Herodias, in their adulterous union. John was cast in prison for this. And John sent a question from prison - a question to Jesus from the dungeon. And Jesus sent back an answer.

On one occasion, Jesus asked the crowd, what went ye out into the wilderness to see. A reed shaken with the wind. Here was a man that was popular. He had emptied the cities. Had come to the Jordan Valley to hear him preach. He was a prophet, but he was more than that.

But as we search for his greatness, we think of his origin. Where did he come from. You trace a great river back to its source. And the other rivals of John the Baptist said "there was a man sent from God whose name was John." That was as far as John could go in accounting for the greatness of the Baptists. It as far as any man goes to fathom the depths of the great personality. Back of all of our histories and biographies, lies the mighty purpose of God. There is a man sent from God.

But sending such a man into the world, God lets him come through channels and through instruments. Which lie within our own observation. Therefore, when we look at the stream that contributes to the great river of life, Luke takes it back and says- a certain priest named Zachariah and his wife of the daughters of Aaron, was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God. (Home)

In a letter stating his qualifications for a position, as a tutor or school teacher, Carlisle wrote, "not forgetting among my other advantages, the prayers of

religious parents, a blessing of which if I speak less of it - I do not feel less than he." It is a blessing and a blessed thing to have had a godly father. Whose example is still reaping. The blessedness of parents whose prayers and whose love still attends you.

Born of such parents from the day that he was able to think, John was taught to deny himself. He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb. Now John's garments of skin and camel's hair, and his diet of locust and wild honey, did not make him great. But it is worth noting that luxury and self-indulgence had no place in the training of the man who Christ was to call the greatest of the sons of men.

We frequently speak of good environment for our children, and for youth. But if we generally mean all the opportunities - with money, which money can buy, little responsibility, and none of the self-discipline which reveals the hidden powers. We call this good environment.

After this, training at the home and self-denial - John was trained in the desert. He went away in solitude. He retired. In order that he might get away from the face of man, and see more clearly the face of God.

Thomas DeQuincy said no man will ever unfold the capacities of his intellect. Who does not have a checkered life with solitude. John learned to meet and to endure even loneliness. That is often the lot of God's true children. Think of the greatest of all preachers and prophets. With only the Dead Sea and the desert for his seminary. And with the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah for his illuminating text. Waiting upon the thought of God. The grandest thought that can take hold of mortal man.

Now I come to ask, wherein was his greatness. And wherein did this man have great authority. And wherein did his voice have such strength. And where great audiences were drawn.

If you think about John the Baptist and you think about our own age. Today, everything is questioned. And what men and women, and youth are seeking for today is a note of authority. And we are searching and asking questions about everything. And that's the way that John the Baptist was up against it. In Luke's Gospel, Chapter 20, Verse 1:8, the chief priest, Scribes, and elders, raised the question of the Saviour's authority. From what source was his authority. They asked, and who gave it. Verse 2 - The Master's answer was a powerful and a penetrating one as he pointed then to the greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist.

Jesus asked a question in V. 4. The baptism of John - was it from Heaven or of men. If the admission of the critics conceded that it was of Heaven, the Lord would have answered - why did you not believe it.

V. 5 - If they had said of men, they feared the people. Because they were persuaded of John that he was a prophet.

V. 6 - So we mention this. Now let us see what the greatness of this remarkable man. The secret of his life as we consider it. I want to look at three areas this morning, very briefly. First of all, in his living. Second, in his preaching. And thirdly, in his illumination.

I. IN HIS LIVING

Before his birth, the angel of the Lord declared, Luke 1:15. He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost. Now all greatness is derived of Jesus. V. 4. This is true for the church, for the home, and for the state, and for the world. You remember that Jesus could confront a man like Pilate and remind him - thou couldst not have any power against be except it be given from above. John 19:11.

And when Jesus spoke these words, he was referring to the power invested in Pilate. To determine his crucifixion.

Now what made John the Baptist such a wonderful example in his life.

First of all, it was characterized by separation. The Scripture says, he shall be great in the sight of the Lord. And shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. Luke 1:15. Without a question, this reference is to the Nazarite vow, Num. 6:1-8. It was a vow which separated a man from anything calculated to be carnal, artificial, or fleshly. Wine and strong drink are symbols of worldly stimulants. This is why Paul says, be not drunk with wine, wherein in excess - but be filled with the spirit. Eph. 5:18.

Now the man who knows greatness, in his living - he must rely not upon anything in the world. But his confidence must be in God alone.

The second thing about living, his life was characterized by consecration. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke 1:15. Here of course is the supreme secret of greatness. And this was no evidence in the life of our blessed Lord as man. He lived in the power of the Holy Spirit and from the moment that he was anointed

on the banks of Jordan, to his final cry on the cross - men and women recognized that there was something of authority and greatness in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Men were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the Scribes. Matt. 7:28-29. When Jesus performed his acts of mercy, he created the same impression. They were astonished and said, where cometh this man's wisdom and these mighty works. Matt. 13:54. And of course, he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

What was true of Jesus in a large measure was discernable in the early disciples. And especially in John the Baptist. When the Holy Spirit came upon him in the fullness of the anointing, as it did in the day of Pentecost upon those disciples, there was a boldness and a faithfulness in their way of living and witnessing. You only have to go through the book of Acts, and underscore the word boldness.

The problem in our generation is that we are not prepared to meet the terms of John the Baptist. We don't like the word separation. And we dislike the word consecration. Therefore, we don't know the greatness and the authority that can be explained only through the divine.

II. THROUGH HIS PREACHING

In John 1:23, we read here a voice crying in the wilderness. Now this is very dramatic and very important. The eyes of John were upon the son of righteousness. And his tongue was a flame of fire. The Scripture says the pure in heart shall see God.

They shall see God, and shall not fear the face of man. This was the preaching of John the Baptist. And this characterized his preaching.

First, there was faithfulness. Then he saw Jesus appear on the banks of Jordan, he exclaimed, behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. John 1:29. Now this is the central message of our Christian Gospel. I'll come back and say more about this in my final point.

Now I have learned throughout the years in my preaching, that the only time when the voice of authority makes an impact is when I have been faithful to the Gospel.

It is the easiest thing in the world for a preacher to water down his message in order to make it pleasing and to make it popular. It is easy also to rationalize a sermon because a preacher may have fear of the critics who may brand him as this, or that, or the other.

But the word of God is clear in itself. And the true exposition of preaching - expository preaching makes the text exactly what it means.

Thus we know that God has not promised to bless our systems or our discipline. But he has promised to bless his word. Isa. 55:11. My word shall not return unto me void.

At Wheaton College, Dr. John R. Scott, a pastor from London pointed out in a message three things in authority of the history of the church. First, that authority resides in the individual's reasoning.

Second, is that authority resides in that church's teachings, and traditions.

Third, is that it resides in the word of God, the Bible.

Then he adds the fundamental difference between reason, tradition, and Scripture is that wherever reason and tradition are the words of men, however true they may be. How ever much the Holy Spirit may have blessed them. But he said Scripture alone is the word of God.

And it is not something that is to despise. These have their place but the word of God is supreme. And John the Baptist was faithful in preaching the word of God.

Luke 3:7. He brought to them a burning question. A whole generation of vipers. Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come. And who hath warned you, he says. How can you flee from this wrath. If you are not fleeing from your sins and coming, he says, to Christ.

V. 8 - He challenges his hearers to an urgent demand. Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance. And there are those who say it is easy to show the fruits, in God's lives. Any tree may shake with the wind but the fruits are they known. He says, bring forth your fruits as evidence. Now this is a desert preaching, pressing for the claims of Christ.

V. 9 - He said a testing crisis is going to come. And now also, the axe is layed at the root of the tree. That is the message of this forerunner of Christ. That the axe at the root of each tree, and by which each fruitless tree in due time would be hewn down.

The word of John would judge them on the testing day. Every time you hear the Gospel of Christ in the power of God, is an axe layed at the root of your life. That will be used by the hand of the judge by cutting down the fruitless impenitent. Hath Jesus not declared that the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him on the last day. John 12:48.

Another thing about the preaching of John, was that it was fearless. When he called them a generation of vipers - that was a challenge. All men knew in their hearts whether John was the Christ or not.

V. 10, 14 - The people came. The Publicans came to him. And the soldiers came to him. To ask him what shall we do. The preaching of John was power. The man whose eyes were upon the atoning Christ, and here are three groups of people and inquirers.

He preaches brotherly love unto them. And he preaches honesty and business, V. 13. And he preaches forbearance and contentment, V. 14.

John was telling the world what he was sure of and what they could believe in. And in terrible earnestness he told them without any lack of conviction, the bedrock convictions which he had. That the kingdom of God was at hand and that men must repent of their sins and that the Christ was the one to look too. And he shook the world.

When he preached, he created a sensation. The priests, the Levites, wanted the groups to come out and interview him. And they said unto him art thou the Christ.

He said, No. Art thou Elijah. He said No. Art thou one of the prophets.
And John was mighty in having these claims and these titles pointed towards him.

But he told all of these that he was just a voice crying in the wilderness.
Who I am makes no difference.

Most men today think too much of who and not enough of what.

Not very far from Winchester, there is a monument to Virginia's unknown
dead. There is this inscription. "Who they were, none knows. What they were,

all know!"

*Courage to stand & denounce sin & hypocrisy - Took Courage in the Palace - Preserved
adulterous pair "Herald it is not lawful for thee to have her; you are breaking God's command"
Sermon, cost John his life - Greatest man - Head on a silver charger to please the
Whore of a half-naked dancing girl!*

Yes, the greatness of his preaching, it was terrific. John preached and the
multitudes flocked out to hear him. And to see him. When they came, John called
them to repentance. No wonder guilty herod when he heard of the preaching of Jesus
was stricken in his conscience. John, whom I have beheaded, is risen, from the
dead. The soul of John the Baptist marches on. The voice in the wilderness. Every
word that he uttered bears that message.

Now when Jesus went back to the Jordan country, where he had been baptized by
John. The disciples of John gathered around Jesus. And they listened to him. And
this was their verdict. John did no miracle. He never stilled the tempest, nor
opened the blind eyes, nor raised the dead. But all things that John spoke of this
man were true. What was it that John said about Jesus.

Did he talk about Jesus of being a man who was perfect, or blameless. Did he talk about Jesus as being a carpenter. Did he talk about Jesus and his birth. No, he did not talk, about that.

Which brings me to my final point about the greatness of John the Baptist.

III. GREAT IN ILLUMINATION

Even though the Gospel tells us that John came, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe. John 1:7 The Lord Jesus could add, he was a burning and a shining light. John 5:35.

This is another thing that made John great. When the people of that day observed and listened to him. There was one impression. The fact that he was a witness not of men but of God.

First he was a burning light. It was evidenced in his life, in his speech, and there was something warm about him. No one could look at him without detecting the light in his eye. No one could be near him without sensing the fire of his devotion.

To be close to John the Baptist was to be exposed to the very heart of God. Through the word of God, through the Spirit of God. It may burn up the dross but it will reveal gold.

This burning light, I wonder if there is a lack of fire in your life. If you want to see the church filled, D. L. Moody said - then set it on fire. People will come and watch it burn.

Secondly, he was a shining light. Needless to say, there is no shining without burning. The greater the burning, the brighter the shining. The life of John the Baptist is quite a study. Jesus called him the greatest of all the prophets. The greatest born of women. Luke 7:28.

Even though he had great human limitations, I am sure. It is true of every son of ours. We all have our limitations. But if we are going to find the secret of living. We must find the secret of John the Baptist.

Show me a man who can shed light upon the issue of today, and he'll be respected. Show me a person today who has the answers that come from above. Show me young people who solve their problems in the light as listed here.

No wonder the Lord Jesus said - the baptism of John, was it from Heaven or of men. The obvious answer was that it was from Heaven. And that is where true power resides. And that is the reason why God allowed his power to flow through his life.

Do you know that is why men and women are powerless today. They have not this compact with God.

John 1:9
He pointed me to the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world
Yes, in the final place, he was great in his illumination because he said of Jesus

behold, the lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world. It is that witness of John to Jesus that men today - many are trying to silence. The world will talk to you as Jesus being beautiful character. Or some other flowery notes of praise. But the one thing the world will not tolerate today, is what Jesus is. John said the lamb of God, he takes away the sin. God's eternal sacrifice for sin. And he uttered these words and you will find that the cross today still has offense.

The Gospel ceases to become the good news. And only becomes good advice if you leave this out. Shall the churches today, that have been entrusted with the Gospel, become lighthouses. Where the light has been quenched. Worse than that, shall we become lighthouses which burn and flash with some false light.

Behold the lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world. Wherever that is left out - Christianity was left out.

Man is still a sinner, and still his great need is redemption from sin. Calvary has no successor. The lamb of God has no substitute. He is the sinner's only hope. He is the power, the glory of the church, here and hereafter. The lamb of God is no longer upon the cross but he is upon the throne in Heaven. And this greatest of all men, John the Baptist said, look at the lamb of God.

Rev. Bill-13

And you go to the New Testament, and I beheld and heard the voice of many angels a round about the throne. And the number of them was 10 thousand times 10 thousand. And thousands and thousands. Saying with a loud voice. Worthy is the lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, and honor and glory and blessing. And every creature which is in Heaven and upon the earth. And under the earth. And such as are in the sea. And all the things that are in them.

Blessed and honor, glory and power, be unto him. That sitteth upon the throne and unto the lamb forever and ever.