

Transcript

The Jesus Story - John the Baptist

We finished the last session, by looking at the birth story of Jesus and the silent years that followed, and that brought us to the end of Luke chapter 2.

When Luke chapter three begins, the first twenty-three verses are used just to introduce us to John the Baptist. So, if John the Baptist was to play such an important part in the life of Jesus, then we just can't ignore him.

In this session I would like to look a little closer at the life of John the Baptist. I believe we can benefit a great deal by looking at this man. Now, here are just three statements made concerning John.

First, we have the way that John is introduced in John's gospel, 1:6:

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

Then there was the description given by the angel to Zacharias, Luke 1:15:

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord

But what must be the greatest endorsement of them all was made by Jesus Himself. Mt 11:11:

11 Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist

When the Bible makes statements to describe some one like those that we read of concerning John, a man sent from God, to be great in the sight of the Lord: 'And, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist', I think it would be good for us to look a little closer at this man.

To see his mission, and to hear his message, John the Baptist's life was fuelled by one burning passion, and that was to point others to Jesus Christ. The mission given to John was the greatest mission given to any man.

John came as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. 'Prepare You the way of the Lord. Make His path straight.'

I believe that there is so much that we can learn from his life, but more than that, if only we allow some of the motivation and commitment that we see in John's life to impact our lives, then I believe that we would be far more effective in our Christian walk and witness.

In the opening verses of John's gospel we find an amazing link between Jesus, and John the Baptist right at the very start:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

That is the way that the writer of the gospel John introduces us to Jesus. Then in the very next verse, verse six, this is what we read.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

Those two verses alone demonstrate the important role that John was going to play in the life of Jesus.

In this session I want, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to see just what we can learn about from the life and ministry of John the Baptist.

Now, here is something that you may find interesting - to see just how much Jesus and John had in common. It is amazing when we begin to look at the life of John, and see the parallel between these two lives. The lives of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Both were prophesied about in the Old Testament, and both births and names were announced by the same angel. Both births were the result of Divine Intervention.

Both caused astonishment at their births. Both were prophesied over as infants. Both had the same sort of testimony as children and both grew and waxed strong in spirit, both developed in obscurity.

Both appeared suddenly to begin their public ministry, both had short public ministries. Both were hated by the religious leaders of the day. Both were killed in their prime and both buried by their own disciples.

This parallel between the Lord Jesus Christ and John the Baptist becomes more and more amazing the more that we look into the gospels. There has never been a character like John the Baptist, who when you read the outline of his life, and you read the outline of the life of Jesus. For a time their lives run so close that one outline would cover both lives.

Now, before I go any further, I must emphasise this one point. It is impossible to find anyone in or outside of the Bible, who can be compared in any way with the Lord Jesus Christ? He was, is, and always will be the eternal, unique, son of God.

But nowhere in scripture is there a life that is parallel to the life of Jesus, in so many ways, as the life of John the Baptist.

But in no way could it ever be said that John was a type of Jesus Christ. The ministries of John and Jesus were totally different. John was sent by God to prepare men. God sent His son that the world, through Him, might be saved.

I believe the bible elevates John to a position for a purpose, to show us the importance of his mission and his message. Where the bible lifts John is where we should lift John. Where the Bible draws the line is where we should draw the line.

This is the position that the bible lifts John to, and that is where the bible draws the

line. This is where the parallel between these two great lives ends. John's disciples buried him, and gradually disappeared.

The disciples of Jesus laid him in the tomb, but on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead.

John's influence has diminished. The Lord Jesus Christ has taken His rightful place as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

But John had a mission to fulfil. The mission given to John was the greatest mission given to any man Mark 1:3:

3 John came as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. "Prepare You the way of the Lord. Make His path straight."

Luke 3:2:

2 "The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness."

Luke, in the first four verses of chapter three, takes great pains to show the time 'When the Word of God came to John'. Luke uses one Emperor, one Governor, three Tetrarchs, and two High Priests.

Not only does the list pinpoint the exact time, but it also shows to us the degenerate state of the rulers of the day. Ruled by a wicked form of government, their spiritual welfare in the hands of a degenerate priesthood. The word of God bypassed the Palace and the Temple.

And it came to one who had been preparing himself in the desert. 'The Word of God came to John. Son of Zacharias in the desert.'

The badge of office for the Man of God is not seen in the clothes that he wears. The food that he eats, or even the place that he lives. The Man of God is recognized by the word that he brings. Is it a word from God? The authority for John's mission he received from God himself.

Just look at John. A man sent from God. Filled with the Holy Ghost. After spending some time in the desert with God, he comes away with a word from God.

And just look at the results. (Mark 1v4):

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance For the remission of sins.

5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

John's preaching was not soothing. It was searching. He did not flatter men. He frightened them. John did not have three points and spend time on presentation. Full of the Holy Ghost, he had a Word from the Lord, and he preached it just as he received it.

John was the voice that called men to repent, and before anyone was prepared for the salvation that came through the Lord Jesus Christ, that repentance had to be full and complete.

I believe that it is time that we looked again at the need for repentance. This is something that John brings to our attention. Before ever we can see genuine Salvation, there has to be genuine repentance.

If we want to be witnesses and ministers of the Gospel, then first of all, like John, we have to prepare the way of the Lord, by showing men and women their need to repent. Repentance must come before Salvation.

I get very concerned, when I hear some people's idea of what the gospel is. It's time to look again at the message that we are preaching. If we want to see men and women brought out of darkness into light; if we want to see fruit that is going to remain, then we need to get back to preaching the full, old-fashioned gospel.

Men have tried all sorts of new approaches, but the Word of God has never changed, and if we are going to preach the Gospel, then we need to preach all of it.

Before ever a man can be saved, he has to know that he is lost, and until we proclaim the fact that mankind is lost, without God and without a hope in this world; until we get men to understand that, (Romans 3v23):

23 All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

And that (Romans 6v23):

23 The wages of sin is death.

The Word of God has not changed, and this death is not just a physical death, it means eternal separation from God, an eternity in hell. And because men do not preach about hell today, it does not make hell any less real.

The Bible is very clear concerning hell. Jesus himself warned (Matthew 5:30):

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

It's only when a man is convinced that his sin is going to be the cause of his separation from God, that he will be prepared to repent as the bible teaches repentance, and until a man comes to this place, it's no use talking to him about the blessings of salvation, without repentance there is no good news for anyone, because without repentance there is no salvation.

Whenever the Old Testament prophets talked about the coming Messiah, they also described a person who would appear on the scene as a forerunner to introduce or prepare the way for the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1).

With his appearance and preaching, John fulfilled this prophecy. John's message was twofold - repent of your sins and be baptised. This was an outward demonstration of just what was happening in their lives.

John's message was 'repent'. John's baptism was the sign of men's repentance, and today, I don't think that we really appreciate what the word repentance means.

The dictionary defines repentance as - 'To feel sorry for a past error or sin; and to feel such regret that we change our minds.'

Well, that's not the repentance that John preached, and that is not what the bible means by repentance. The Jews have a word for Repentance - 'Teshuba' - and it means to turn, not just from evil, but to turn to God.

The Rabbis taught that repentance was a change of mind and attitude, that resulted in a change of life and conduct. When John preached that men should bring forth fruit, that was meet for repentance, those who heard him new exactly what he meant.

To the Jew true repentance was not just a sentimental sorrow, it was a real change in the way that a person lived. True repentance begins as an act of the will but it has to be followed by a change in the way that a person lives.

After John had preached this repentance, those submitting to baptism were showing that they were prepared to turn from their sin and seek after God.

John spoke in a language that men could understand. He used illustrations that men could relate to. John's mission was only to prepare the way of the Lord. John's message was that men should repent.

John preached repentance, and when he rebuked Herod for his marriage to his brother's wife, Herod put John in prison (Luke 3:19):

19 But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done,

20 also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.

The crowning glory in the character of John was that he loved the call of God far more than he loved himself. The loyalty of few disciples has been tested as John's was.

The best of John's own disciples left him to follow Jesus. When John was cast into prison, Jesus does nothing. John sends his disciples to ask Jesus: 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'

It is so hard to follow John here. Can this be the one, who only a few months earlier stood, and with radiant certainty declared as he pointed to Jesus Christ: 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. What a contrast between that and the sorrowful cry: 'Are You the Coming One?'

John was for a brief spell under a cloud. It involved doubt, for some days at least, John's mind was overcast, his faith lost its foothold. He sent to Jesus saying 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'

What was it that caused John's lapse of faith? It could have been depression? John having spent all his adult life living free in the wilderness, now found himself bound with fetters in a narrow cell, unable to move without the clanking of the chains that were binding him.

It could have been disappointment? Did John expect that Jesus in some way would deliver him? Surely He would not let His faithful follower lie in despair in that dark dungeon?

But weeks grew into months and still no help came. It might have been that John only had a partial view of Jesus? Things were not happening as John thought that they

should. And we should not be too hard on John here, because this is a pitfall that we all fall into at times.

We sometimes have a fixed idea of God, partly from what we think He ought be, partly from some distorted ideas of what others tell us. Then when God does not fit our conception of what we think He should be, then we begin to doubt.

Jesus answered John's disciples and said this to them:

'Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard; that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.'

Jesus could have said: 'I am He that was to come, there is no need to look for another.'

Surely, if Jesus was able to do so much; He had the power that could heal the sick, the lame and the blind. The power that could raise the dead, and cast out demons. Surely that was power sufficient to deliver John from prison.

I believe it was because John was a gracious soul, the greatest born of women, his nature was capable of the best results.

Think about this. John could be kept waiting, while others went away blessed. Only three months remained of John's life, and in these the discipline of patience and doubt had to do their perfect work.

Do you notice, while the disciples of John were standing there, Jesus said nothing in his praise, but as soon as they had departed, the floodgates of His heart were thrown wide open and He began to speak to the multitudes concerning His faithful servant John.

There is something very beautiful about the timing of this commendation that Jesus makes. It was when John was at his lowest ebb, John had fallen far below his usual level. When John was at his lowest point Jesus makes this profound statement:

Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:

What I have tried to do is show the life of Baptist from the beginning, from the time we read Luke 3v2:

2 The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

To Matthew 14v10, where we read of Herod:

10 So he sent and had John beheaded in prison.

11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.

12 Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

13 When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself.

I believe that the reason Jesus went to a deserted place by Himself is that He might grieve the loss of someone who was special to Him.

We don't know how much time in the earlier years Jesus and John might have spent together, as cousins often do, first just playing together and then as they matured, sharing growing up thoughts together.

We do know that Jesus has already demonstrated by His coming to John to be baptised, and then later by His comments how highly He regarded John.

The reason for John's life was simply to prepare men and point to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John pointed people to Jesus; John's mission was to reveal the Messiah to Israel, not to build his own ministry.

John the Baptist's total ministry only lasted about eighteen months. Once he had prepared the way for Jesus and revealed Him to Israel, his job had been completed. This was the reason that he had come. He had fulfilled the task.

There is something missing as you may have noticed about this outline of the life of John the Baptist. The most important part John played in the Life of Jesus. When Jesus came to be baptised by John the Baptist, there is a good reason for this.

In the next session I want to look at two very important incidents in the life of Jesus. His Baptism and the Temptation that followed.

In this session I just wanted us to get some idea of just what his life of John the Baptist was like and the part he played in the great plan of God's Salvation.

So, just what have we learned concerning the life of John the Baptist? Well, John was:

A man sent from God, on a mission for God, with a message from God. John faithfully and fearlessly fulfilled his mission.

The angel had prophesied of John: 'He will be great in the sight of the Lord', and John proved to be just as great as the angel had said.

In his preparation, nothing that the world had to offer attracted John. His life was one of total separation to God. As a man, John was great in the sight of the Lord.

Filled with the Holy Ghost from birth, the way that John rebuked men for their sin, it mattered not to John who they were - kings, religious leaders or great crowds, John faithfully and fearlessly delivered the word of God. As a minister of God's word, John was great in the sight of the Lord.

When telling the crowds of the coming Messiah, John makes this statement:

'I indeed baptise you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.'

In his humility, John was great in the sight of the Lord.

Nowhere do we see the greatness of John displayed better than when he knew that his ministry was finished. In just a couple of sentences we see this great man at his absolute greatest. John 3 v 29-30. This is John speaking:

Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all.'

As Jesus takes over the work that John had begun. What a fitting tribute he pays to John:

'Of those born of women, there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist.'

Well, I think that was a life well worth looking at. John the Baptist's greatness is not because of the length of his life and ministry, nor how much of the Bible's text was written about him. Neither was this man's greatness just because of the nature and timing of his ministry.

Rather it is because of the humility and faithfulness with which he fulfilled the role God had given him.

Someone has wisely said that the best person you'll ever be is not trying to be someone else, but just being the best possible version of yourself. This is what John did so well. He seemed to be one whose heartfelt desire was to be nothing more or less than what God wanted him to be.