

Tempered by Trials

Sermon # 9

John The Baptist: Learning to Step Out of the Way

The original “man of mystery” title belongs not to Austin Powers but to John the Baptist. John the Baptist was great man yet one shrouded in mystery. Jesus said of him in Matthew 11:7-11, *“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (8) But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. (9) But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. (10) For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ (11) “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*

Charles Swindoll concisely states John’s three responsibilities; *“to clear the way for the Lord, to prepare the way for the Lord and to get out of the way of the Lord.”* [Charles Swindoll. John the Baptizer. (Bible Study Guide) (Anaheim, Calif: Insight for Living, 1991) p. 3]

First, He Was A Man With A Mission

He Had A Unique Birth (Luke 1:13-15a) *“But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. (14) And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. (15) For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.”*

He Had A Unique Ministry (Isa. 40:3-5) *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. (4) Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; (5) The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

(Mal 3:1) *“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.”*

He Had A Unique Enabling (Luke 1:15) *“... He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.”*

He Had Was Uniquely Prepared (Lu1:80) *“So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.”*

Secondly, He Was A Man Who Pointed Others To Jesus

As an adult, John lived in the wilderness, dressed in animal hides, and ate what he could scavenge from the land (Matt. 3:4). He then appeared near the river Jordan and began to preach. His ministry had two main themes: the promised Messiah was about to appear, and his listeners must repent and change their ways to be ready for Him.

What an army of priest had not been able to accomplish in 400 years – one man, sent by God did in six months.

(Luke 3:2-3, 7-8, 15-18) "... the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. (3) And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, (7) Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' 'For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. (15) Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, (16) John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (17) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." (18) And with many other exhortations he preached to the people."

He preached against the legalism of the Pharisees and their 600 plus life of rules. He preached against the liberal Sadducee's, who didn't believe in eternity, or the supernatural or the resurrection. He looked them in the eye and called them "snakes." Hardly a people pleaser.

Third, He Was A Man Who Was Big Enough To Step Aside

John baptized many people and they thronged to hear him. But John constantly sought to downplay his own significance.

(Matt 3: 11-12) "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

John was God's man with God's message and they came to him one day and said "Just exactly who are you." (John 1:19-23) "Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" (20) He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (21) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you Isaiah the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." (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?" (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."

John baptizes Jesus (Matt 3:13-15) "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. (14) And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (15) But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him."

John's testimony concerning Jesus (John 1:29-30) "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (30) This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

From the point onward the crowds that had been following John began to diminish. Instead of seeking out the man from the desert they were now turning to the Man from Galilee.

John however, could not have been happier. (John 3:29-30) "He who was the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom who stand and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy mine is fulfilled. (30) He must increase but I must decrease." John says "My joy is complete!" John's whole purpose in life was to introduce others to Jesus. He was simply a living signpost pointing the way to Jesus.

Fourth, He Was A Man Who Was Greater Than His Doubts

I am sure that all of us here have doubted, stumbled at the way God's plans seem to be unfolding in your life. You and I have questioned His leadings and his dealings in our lives. There are times when what is happening in our lives is just a mystery to us and have felt that the Lord has let us down or at the very least that he hasn't worked things out the way we would have desired.

John knew who Jesus was but in prison, doubt began to worm its way into his heart. The reports that John's disciples brought about Jesus did not always jive with John's expectations of how he was to work. The reports were perplexing and unsettling to John's mind.

(Matt 11:2-6) "And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples (3) and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (4) Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: (5) The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. (6) And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

In effect Jesus says to John. "John you may not understand, why I do the things I do. And you may not understand or agree with my timing, but John you can trust me."

Are you discouraged in your service to the Lord? Are you downhearted? Then Look no further than the example of John.

John performed no miracles, but throughout his life he faithfully followed the path God had chosen for him and in the end Jesus commended his life as he did not other. In Matthew 11:11, he said, *“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist...”*

Sometimes we debate the question of who was greater: Abraham, Moses, or David. Jesus declares that John is greater than anyone in the past. No one topped John the Baptist.

“Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” When the Lord Jesus came, He began calling out a group of people who are even greater than John the Baptist. How can they be greater? Because they are in Christ and clothed with His righteousness.

Josephus records that Herod arrested and executed John because he feared his popularity might lead to a revolt. The Gospels reveal it was because John spoke out against Herod’s immoral marriage to Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip (Mark 6:17–19).