

FBC POWELL, 2-26-17 PM
"Lessons From the Life of John the Baptist"
Luke 3:1-17
7 in Series, "The Gospel According to Luke"

"From out of the wilderness had come striding a spiritual giant of a man. His dress, diet, deportment, and demands made his hearers think of Elijah. His voice thundered until the windows of conscience rattled in everyone's soul. His eyes flashed like lightning, seeming to read the secrets of everyone's heart. Multitudes heard about this new prophet and flocked to hear him. The religious establishment investigated him, disliked him, feared him, rejected him, and was denounced by him. Herod on his throne was afraid of him. John the Baptist was his name—the son of a priest, married to the daughter of a priest. His birth had been foretold. He had been raised strictly with a view to his becoming a priest. He had also been raised as a Nazirite, with a view to his becoming a prophet. There were already priests after the order of Aaron—enough and to spare. Few and far between were prophets after the order of Elijah. What Israel needed was not another priest. What Israel needed was a prophet. John, by birth, training, disposition, conviction, and choice was raised up by God to be that prophet, the last of a long, illustrious line."
—John Phillips

Matthew 11:11a "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!"

I. Major on Repentance (vv. 1-6)

John 1:23 "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

"Prince or ploughman, priest or publican, soldier or scribe, Pharisee or Sadducee, harlot or housewife, rabbi or robber, rich or poor, bond or free, Judean or Galilean—the message was the same: REPENT!"
—John Phillips

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

"We must know our sins, mourn over them, forsake them, abhor them, or else we shall never enter the kingdom of heaven. There is nothing meritorious in this. It forms no part whatever of the price of our redemption. Our salvation is all of grace, from first to last. But the great fact still remains that saved souls are always penitent souls, and that saving faith in Christ, and true repentance toward God, are never found asunder. This is a mighty truth, one that ought never to be forgotten."
—Dr. J. C. Ryle

2 Timothy 2:25-26 (NIV) "Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will **grant them repentance** leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."

John 16:8 "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

II. Speak the Truth Even When It Is Unpopular (vv. 7-20)

“Well would it be for [Christ’s church] if it possessed more plain-speaking ministers like John the Baptist. A morbid dislike of strong language, an excessive fear of giving offense, a constant flinching from directness and plain speaking, are, unhappily, too much the characteristics of the modern Christian pulpit. Personality and uncharitable language are no doubt always to be depreciated. But there is no [love] in flattering unconverted people by abstaining from any mention of their vices, or applying smooth epithets to damnable sins. There are two texts which are too much forgotten by Christian preachers. In one it is written, ‘Woe to you when all men speak well of you.’ In the other it is written, ‘If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ’ (Luke 6:26; Galatians 1:10).”
—Dr. J. C. Ryle

A. The Proof of Genuineness (vv. 8-9)

Acts 26:20b “...repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”

Genesis 15:6 “Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

1 John 3:7 “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”

B. The Practical Response (vv. 10-14)

C. Receive the True Messiah (vv. 15-17)

1. Baptism With the Holy Spirit (v. 16a)

1 Corinthians 12:13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

2. The Baptism With Fire (vv. 16b, 17)

Acts 2:3 (NKJV) “Then there appeared to them divided tongues, **as of fire**, and *one* sat upon each of them.”

Matthew 11:11a “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!”

First Baptist Church Powell 02 26 17 PM

Sermon 7: Lessons from the Life of John the Baptist

Series: The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 3:1-17

One of the most effective, tools that the Lord has used in my life, is the biographies of people who really made a difference. I have been motivated by biographies of *secular* people like General “Stormin’ Norman” Schwarzkopf, who was the commanding general in the Gulf War. Here are a couple of quotes from this great General. When France refused to be actively involved in dealing with Saddam Hussein, General Schwarzkopf said, “Going to war without France is like going hunting without an accordion.” On a more serious note, General Schwarzkopf said, “Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without the strategy.” Another favorite of mine that is related to leadership is, “When placed in command, take charge.” [All of the above information is taken from *Brainy Quotes*]

In the *secular* realm, I have also been influenced by Teddy Roosevelt, George Washington, and William Wilberforce. A greater influence on my life has been great men of God who experienced God working through them to bring glory to Himself and to bring multitudes to Christ for salvation. I think of Hudson Taylor, C. T. Studd, David Livingstone, and Charles Spurgeon plus a multitude of others. But the greatest influence of all has been the heroes of the Bible. One of the greatest heroes of the Bible that not many people know a lot about is John the Baptist. I really like John Phillips’ summary of John the Baptist’s life and its impact:

From out of the wilderness had come striding a spiritual giant of a man. His dress, diet, deportment, and demands made his hearers think of Elijah. His voice thundered until the windows of conscience rattled in everyone’s soul. His eyes flashed like lightning, seeming to read the secrets of everyone’s heart. Multitudes heard about this new prophet and flocked to hear him. The religious establishment investigated him, disliked him, feared him, rejected him, and was denounced by him. Herod on his throne was afraid of him. John the Baptist was his name – the son of a priest, married to the daughter of a priest. His birth had been foretold. He had been raised strictly with a view to his becoming a priest. He had also been raised as a Nazirite, with a view to his becoming a prophet. There were already priests after the order of Aaron – enough and to spare. Few and far between were prophets after the order of Elijah. What Israel needed was not another priest. What Israel needed was a prophet. John, by birth, training, disposition, conviction, and choice, was raised up by God to be that prophet, the last of a long, illustrious line.

[John Phillips, Exploring the Gospels – John, page 35]

Remember what Jesus Himself said about John in Matthew 11:11a: “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!”

What I want to do in this message is to focus on a twofold description of John’s life and see him as an example of success from God’s perspective (the only perspective that counts). Each of us will be able to relate to whether male or female, old or young, or whatever our situation may be.

I. Major on Repentance (vv. 1-6)

It was through John’s obedient ministry, as the forerunner, that the way was made ready for the arrival of the Son of God, the Savior, Jesus the promised Messiah. When John appeared on the scene, there had been no prophetic voice in Israel for 400 years. Verses 1-2 give us a summary of the wicked influencers

when John came on the scene. This “Who’s Who” of John’s day was a motley crew! Most every name mentioned in verses 1-2 were known for their wickedness and evil. The times were indeed dark. Luke lists seven men including a Roman Emperor, a governor, three tetrarchs (rulers over a fourth part of an area), and two Jewish High Priests. God’s message was not sent through any of these “Who’s Who” people; it was sent through a man who was totally obedient to God’s call on his life – John the Baptist.

When John the Baptist was asked who he was, he answered in John 1:23: “I AM A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.” John describes himself as a “voice.” There is an intended contrast here: Jesus is the Word (John 1:1); John is just a voice. Search all you want but you will never find a hint of sinful pride in this man called John the Baptist. He is not the Messiah; he is not the prophet spoken of by Moses; He is just a voice – a voice crying in the wilderness. John spoke in a literal wilderness, but the spiritual application speaks of the spiritual barrenness of the day. What is the meaning of what the voice is proclaiming?

Look again at Luke 3:4-6: “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every ravine will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low; the crooked will become straight, and the rough roads smooth; and all flesh will see the salvation of God.’” This passage refers to the custom of sending out a herald (one who announces important news) before the king came to a city or area in his kingdom. The herald announced the king’s coming and then he supervised the preparation for the king. He dealt with things that could be offensive to the king. There would be the disposing of litter, the filling of holes in the road, the straightening of roads and, in general, just removing any hindrances to the king’s travel. What the herald did, in a literal way, John the Baptist did spiritually. His message concerning the preparation for the coming Messiah was “repent.” He was telling them to clean the litter of sin from their heart and make their paths the straight paths of obedience. He was crying out to remove any hindrances to the King’s rule in His kingdom.

What was this baptism spoken about in verse 3? Baptism was nothing new to the Jews. In order for a Gentile proselyte to become a Jew, a baptism was required. But John was baptizing Jews! This was unusual. The primary difference between John’s baptism and Christian baptism is this: John’s baptism looked forward to the coming Messiah. Christian baptism looks back to what happened at salvation. Today, on this side of the cross, baptism is a picture of our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The old man died with Christ on the cross, and was raised with Christ, as a new creation, to walk in a newness of life, with Christ living out His resurrection life through us.

Verse 3 tells us that John’s baptism was tied in to a public declaration “of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” How did John prepare the way for Jesus? It was through his message of repentance. John was pretty much a one subject preacher. His subject was, “repent”! John Phillips described John’s emphasis on repentance this way: “Prince or ploughman, priest or publican, soldier or scribe, Pharisee or Sadducee, harlot or housewife, rabbi or robber, rich or poor, bond or free, Judean or Galilean – the message was the same: REPENT!” [John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke*, page 85]

The word “repent” means to have a sorrow and mourning over sin that results in a changed mind about that sin and a turning away from the sin. It is more than just feeling sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10: “I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

Let’s take a deeper look at repentance – a word that is for the most part totally misunderstood both outside and inside the church. Repentance is a *radical* transformation of the entire person; it is a *radical* turnaround involving mind and action. It always results in bearing “fruits in keeping with repentance” (v. 8). True repentance involves a *radical* turning from sin to holiness. The Jews (especially the leaders) must have been shocked by John’s message. Their trust was in their connection to Abraham. John said that is irrelevant; you must repent! God wasn’t interested in their human heritage; He was interested in their spiritual life and their personal holiness. One of the adjectives I use repeatedly in connection with repentance is *radical*. That’s what is missing in most so called “repentance” today. We want to repent *moderately*. Many try to simply cut back some on sinful behavior and be gradually weaned from it. The

Biblical pattern is a *radical* turning that Jesus illustrated in by plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand (Mark 9:43-47). Repentance may mean leaving a job and moving to another town to get away from a tempting situation. It may mean disconnecting the internet. It may mean getting rid of the TV. Sin is so devastating that we must be *radical* in our repentance.

Make no mistake, without repentance no soul has ever been saved – not even one! J. C. Ryle has a great word about repentance.

We must know our sins, mourn over them, forsake them, abhor them, or else we shall never enter the kingdom of heaven. There is nothing meritorious in this. It forms no part whatever of the price of our redemption. Our salvation is all of grace, from first to last. But the great fact still remains that saved souls are always penitent souls, and that saving faith in Christ, and true repentance toward God, are never found asunder. This is a mighty truth, one that ought never to be forgotten.

[Dr. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, Volume 2, page 87]

The fact is that even repentance is a manifestation of God's grace. It is the grace of God that opens our eyes to see the sinfulness of our sin and moves us to repentance. That is why 2 Timothy 2:25-26 (NIV) says, "Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will *grant them repentance* leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." It is God the Holy Spirit who must convict of the sin that needs to be repented of! John 16:8: "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." Repentance is the primary evidence of the grace of God at work in our lives. Saving faith and genuine repentance are always found together.

Let's examine more deeply the connection between repentance and the baptism that John was carrying out. Baptism was the outward testimony of sincere repentance. As the obedient herald, a spokesman for the Lord, John was saying, "Make ready the way of the Lord, not by making the paths straight, but by making your lives straight through life transforming repentance." The baptism illustrated, and gave testimony of the repentance that had taken place. John was totally obedient to proclaim the message that God had given him. He was not concerned whether he was personally liked and accepted. He was not seeking the approval of man; he was obedient with the message and the task that God had given him.

II. Speak the Truth Even When It Is Unpopular (vv. 7-17)

John had an amazing holy boldness! With x-ray like insight, John saw hypocrisy and attacked it head-on! John was not influenced by the potential of popularity or wealth. He really doesn't seem to be at all affected by those who might be offended by his words. He was the epitome of "holy boldness." He wouldn't have lasted very long in many pulpits in America. It seems that many of the people in verse 7 were just coming to John to impress others. Why did John call them a "brood of vipers"? The word "brood" means offspring. The vipers he was speaking of were small, but very poisonous, desert snakes. When they were still, they looked very much like a branch or a stick. They were often picked up unintentionally as Paul did when he was shipwrecked on Malta (Acts 28:3). To paraphrase what John said, "You are children of snakes. You are deceivers trying to escape God's coming wrath without really repenting." Wow! John wasn't very *seeker friendly*!

At the risk of overdoing it, allow me to quote Dr. J. C. Ryle writing from the late 1800's. If what he says is true (and I certainly believe that it is) how much worse it is today! "

Well would it be for the Church of Christ [Christ's church] if it possessed more plain-speaking ministers like John the Baptist. A morbid dislike of strong language, an excessive fear of giving offense, a constant flinching from directness and plain speaking, are, unhappily, too much the characteristics of the modern Christian pulpit. Personality and uncharitable language are no doubt always to be depreciated. But there is no charity [love] in flattering unconverted people by

abstaining from any mention of their vices, or applying smooth epithets to damnable sins. There are two texts which are too much forgotten by Christian preachers. In one it is written, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you.” In the other it is written, “If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.” [Dr. J. C. Ryle, page 89]

A. The Proof of Genuineness (vv. 8-9)

The proof of genuine repentance is in the fruits. True repentance ushers in a changed life. If there is no life transformation, there is no genuine repentance. Just as James 2:17 says that faith without works is dead, even so repentance without fruit is dead or phony. The Apostle Paul said basically the same thing in Acts 26:20b: “...repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”

What John did next must have infuriated these leaders. Their hope for salvation was in the fact that they were descendants of Abraham. John said “Forget that!” They were relying on Abraham’s merits. In truth Abraham didn’t even have any merits for himself. He was saved by faith. Genesis 15:6: “Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

Abraham was saved on Christ’s merits (though He had not yet died in time). John’s statement about God’s ability to turn the rocks into descendants of Abraham, if He chose, is saying that there is nothing saving in being a descendent of Abraham. The descendants of Abraham have no merit before God because of their genetics. Verse 9 is speaking of God’s coming judgment. At the end of every harvest season, the farmer would go through his vineyard or orchard looking for the trees that bore no fruit and he would chop them down and throw them into the fire. The point is that if there is no fruit of repentance, no transformed life, there is coming a judgment and hell. *Salvation is not verified by a past act but by a present fruit.* 1 John 3:7: “Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous”

B. The Practical Response (vv. 10-14)

John’s Holy Spirit empowered blunt language, startled the people, and in verse 10b the sincere ones asked him out of what seems like genuine concern – “Then what shall we do?” John’s answer is a call to allow the ethics of a changed life separate you from the phonies. He is telling the people here how people who have genuinely repented and believed behave. Don’t ever think that God is not concerned with our works – with an ethical life. What He describes here is the way repentant, trusting people live out their lives. In verse 10, He says that those who have truly repented will bear fruits in keeping with repentance (v. 8a). Those who have more than they need should give to those who lack basic needs (v. 11). Those who collected taxes for the Roman government should collect no more than was owed (vv. 12-13). In verse 14 some soldiers asked Him what they should do. He doesn’t tell them to get out of the military. He tells them to avoid using their position to take advantage of others and to be content with the wages they were given. Like the tax collectors, soldiers often took advantage of people to gain more money. Jesus says that truly repentant people should stop the dishonest actions and be content with what they have. Notice that Jesus doesn’t tell the tax collectors to quit their job. It is a legitimate right of government to collect taxes. Repentant tax collectors must only collect what is required. He doesn’t tell soldiers to get out of the military; He tells them to not take advantage of others.

C. Receive the True Messiah (vv. 15-17)

For many centuries, the Jewish people had longed for the promised Messiah. Verse 15 describes the people as being “in a state of expectation.” John quickly informs them that he is not the Messiah. In verse 16 John clearly shows these expectant people what the true Messiah would do that John could not do. John was bold, but he was also humble. The lowliest position was a servant and the lowest thing a servant did was to take off his master’s sandals and wash his feet. John says that he is not worthy to do the lowest act imaginable to the King. John then contrasts his baptism with that of the King. John’s baptism was an outward profession of a genuine inward repentance that prepared people for the King’s coming. Jesus’ baptism was twofold:

1. Baptism with the Holy Spirit (v. 16a)

This baptism with the Holy Spirit John spoke about was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2). Even today, every person who comes by faith to Christ is baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

2. The Baptism with Fire (vv. 16b, 17)

This is not speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The sign that the Holy Spirit had come was not tongues of fire. The text actually says in Acts 2:3 (NKJV): “Then there appeared to them divided tongues, *as of fire*, and *one* sat upon each of them.” Fire nearly always represents judgment and punishment. As John looked into the future, there was no separation of the first and second coming of Christ. An example would be two mountain peaks in the distance looking like they are together when they are in reality separated by many miles. At His second coming, He baptizes with fire. The contrast is that the believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit and the nonbelievers are baptized with God’s judgment.

Verse 17 is saying that the King will accurately separate between the real and the phonies just as a farmer separates between the wheat and the chaff.

Conclusion

Whole books can (and have) been written about the greatness of John the Baptist. A part of that greatness that I would like to have given more time to is his humility. He would strongly object to the word “greatness” being associated with him. But after all it was Jesus who said in Matthew 11:11a: “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!”