

Greatness
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Good morning, Lighthouse!

Wow, what an incredible spring it has been thus far; so many good things happening; so many big events.

We have now celebrated our 60th year as a Church; we have survived Satan's best attempt thus far to snuff us out and we are still reaching souls; still preaching God's good Word and still standing for that which has eternal value.

The Lord Jesus has brought us to a good place in our life as a Church. We have a great location, we have a solid core of loyal members, we have a high percentage of real saved people on our roll and although we are far from rich, we are solid financially.

We have a high percentage of men in our congregation. We have numerous and various ministries within our congregation that are all, to some degree, bearing fruit for God's Kingdom.

We are at a place that could prove to be very dangerous for our future. Things are just good enough and just sweet enough and we are just blessed enough to get satisfied and complacent and want to stay just like we are.

It is my firm belief and conviction that the Lord has great plans for Lighthouse Baptist Church.

Lighthouse is a wonderful Church; but because we are the Lord's Body here in this place; our Lord Jesus deserves that we become a great Church for His glory.

I know that many of you as well as myself already believe that Lighthouse is a great Church in many ways.

But you have to admit that we are, after all, prejudiced. Most of you came to know Jesus here and all of us have been blessed in one way or another here.

Let me lay out for you the guidelines for where we are going from here:

We have no grand visions of Lighthouse becoming a Mega-Church. I have no hope or desire to become a famous preacher. I, and I believe "we" are far less concerned about how many people fill this building on Sunday than we are about the condition of each one's soul; and that is not going to change.

Even so, we are on the brink of what could become a major increase here at Lighthouse; we have been for a while now.

However, before that happens, there needs to be a Church-wide understanding and a

Church-wide unity and a Church-wide commitment to the goals and the standards and to the purpose for which God has set us here in this wonderful place.

Lighthouse, do you want to be a truly great Church for the Lord's glory?

What is greatness, anyway? We know how men judge it and the criteria the world uses; but how does God judge greatness?

For a Church to be great it requires great leadership. Who would you say was the world's greatest Christian leader (other than Jesus, of course?) Who might we leaders pattern ourselves after that we might become the great Church that Jesus deserves?

Would it be Spurgeon? Would it be Calvin or Luther or Wesley? Would it be Stanley or Young or Warren or Osteen? Would he be anything like any of these men?

Jesus told us who was the greatest Christian leader ever and the truth is that he wasn't much like any of those who are famous today for being great Christian leaders.

Matthew 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Luke 7:28 For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

John was born the only child late in the life of an elderly priest named Zacharias and his formerly barren wife, Elisabeth, who was the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

We read his story in **Luke 1:5-17**

- 5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.
- 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.
- 7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years.
- 8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,
- 9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
- 10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.
- 11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
- 12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

- 13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.
- 14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.
- 15 For 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, even from his mother's womb.
- 16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.
- 17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

This Child John, who later became known as "The Baptist," was probably orphaned at a young age. Jewish tradition has his parents somewhere near or in their nineties when God gave them this miraculous birth.

Another Jewish tradition tells us that John's father Zacharias was murdered by the Romans when he refused to divulge the hiding place of his son when Herod ordered the slaying of all the boy babies 2 years and under.

John was raised in or around the communities surrounding the Dead Sea; likely where Elisabeth fled with him upon Herod's order to kill the children.

Luke 1:80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

It is suspected that John may have been taken in by the Essenes who often cared for orphans and were the scribes responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran in 1947.

We visited the excavated Essene compound at Qumran; an amazing place.

To visit that wilderness desert, you wouldn't think that anyone could survive there, let alone build a thriving community. One thing is sure; to grow up where John did made him a very tough young man.

John was not an ordinary man; he was, as Jesus told us, the literal reincarnation of Elijah, or *Elias* as it is pronounced in the New Testament; who was taken by the Lord without physical death.

There will never be another John the Baptist nor will anyone ever surpass his stature as a prophet and servant of God; however, a close and careful look at the life and priorities of John will tell us much about God's standard for greatness.

What were the things that made John "great in the sight of the Lord?" Here are a few that we want to make sure we incorporate in our own style of leadership here at Lighthouse:

I. John took his orders from the Lord. (This is, after all, the primary reason we are an Independent Baptist Church.)

Luke 3:1-8

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene,

2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth;

6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father:

for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

A. John did not move until first he received the Word from God.

1. **Luke 3:2** Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, **the word of God came unto John** the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

2. Doing that which God did not tell us to do or jumping ahead of God's timing can often be just as destructive as not doing what He commands us all:

3. The ministry of John was timed in perfect coordination with the revealing of the Lord Jesus.

B. John preached the message of God, not the message of John!

1. **Luke 3:3-6**

3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, **preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;**

4 **As it is written in the book** of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth;

6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

2. The religious leaders of the day thought this new baptism thing was invented by John.

3. But John was only following orders:

John 1:29-34

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

33 And I knew him not: but **he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.**

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

II. John allowed nothing but the Lord to influence him.

A. John was not influenced by the multitudes.

1. As the crowds begin to grow, most preachers begin to temper and tone down their message so as to not run anyone off.

2. Here is John's toned down message to the multitudes:

Luke 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

3. Whether it was to ten or to a thousand, John's message remained the same.

B. John was not influenced by men of power and position.

1. When the men of power came; the message stayed the same.

Matthew 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

2. Even when President Herod demanded an audience, John still obeyed God:

a. **2Timothy 4:1-2**

1 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

b. **Luke 3:19-20**

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

20 Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.

3. Even at the cost of prison and intimately his beheading, John would not compromise his message.

C. John would not compromise his message even for his love for his disciples.

1. I believe that John deeply loved God's people.

2. This is the guy that turned the hearts of the fathers unto their children.

3. This is the guy who patiently shared his wisdom with the disobedient.

4. This is the patient teacher who prepared hundreds if not thousands of people to receive Jesus.

5. One of the hardest things I do is when I have to be tough on those I have literally given my life to in the Lord.

6. Only the truth will fix what is broken in your life; even if it hurts at the time.

III. John was absolutely committed to his purpose.

A. *That purpose was, according to Luke 1:17 "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord".*

1. **Luke 7:24-28**

- 24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, **What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?**
- 25 **But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.**
- 26 **But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.**
- 27 This is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.
- 28 For I say unto you, **Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist:** but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

2. Most people; most preachers, have no idea of what was indeed accomplished by John the Baptist.

B. John was a Church man.

1. Even though John marked the end of one dispensation in the scriptures as the last of the Old Testament types of prophets;

Matthew 11:13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.;

2. Even though John did not ever pastor a Church;

3. Even though John was never even a member of a Church;

C. John was the authority from God who baptized every member and the pastor, Jesus Himself, of the very first Church.

1. You can go on almost any Church website and read “We believe the Church began on the day of Pentecost.”

2. The Church did not begin on Pentecost; it began three years earlier on a mountain top recorded in **Luke 6:12-13**: and it was formed from material prepared by John the Baptist:

12 And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; (every one of which was baptized by John).

3. How do I know that this was the beginning of the Church? Because the Bible says so:

1Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles,...

4. In Acts Chapter One, a day or so before Pentecost, when the already existing Church was empowered to take the gospel to the end of the world; the already existing Church conducted a business meeting in which they filled the office vacated by the traitor/apostle Judas. Only one baptized by John could be considered as a candidate.

Acts 1:21-22

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

In Conclusion: There is so much we could say about John:

He was the original “come as you are” preacher with his coarse fabric clothing of woven camels hair and leather belt.

I expect his speech may have been somewhat rough; we know his message was!

He was misunderstood; even today, very few understand the “baptism of repentance”.

Acts 19:4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

Change your mind about what you are depending on: not your keeping of the law; not your heritage as Abraham's children; not your being a good person; not your religious identity...trust Jesus; depend only on Him to save you!

Then go and live like those who do!

John fulfilled his course; that course has not changed.

Our job, like John, is to make disciples; to go and teach people about Jesus.

When they repent (when they change their minds and trust Him and Him alone to save them) we are then to baptize them and make them part of the Body.

John's disciples went on to become disciples of Jesus. This is the goal of every real Christian teacher.

How about it, Lighthouse? Do you want to be great in the sight of the Lord?

Someone is probably thinking, “So you think you are great in the sight of the Lord?”

Our answer is no, but we know the direction we must be going and we are going to keep working on it!

How about you, what are your goals; what do you care about; what is most important to you about the Church where you and your family are planted?