

Luke 3:1-17, Part 3 7-1-18  
**The Mission of John: Introduction**

We come this morning to our third and final study in the third chapter of Luke, as we look together at the man named John the Baptist. Luke 3:**1-17**

*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. 3 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; 4 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. 5 ‘Every ravine will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low; the crooked will become straight, and the rough roads smooth; 6 and all flesh will see the salvation of God.’” 7 So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 9 Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” 10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?” 11 And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.” 12 And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” 13 And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.” 14 Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And what about us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.” 15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

We have spent one week looking at the message of John and that message was “repent.” We spent another week looking at the example of John, an example of godly boldness. Today we finish our look at the life and work of John as we examine the mission of John. What was the mission of John the Baptist? What was his role on the stage of history? Interestingly, this great

man's role was to introduce Jesus to the world. His life's calling was to point to Jesus. Now, if you are a Christian, I'm sure this will interest you because you also want your life to point to Jesus don't you? I know I do. That is one of my greatest desires, that my life might direct others to the Savior. That was John's calling.

Let's look first then at how he pointed to Christ. And John did it in two ways. He was a voice and a signpost. Verse 4 says John was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. In chapter 3 of Luke, when men came to John asking if he were the Christ, he functioned as a signpost and pointed to Jesus. **16** *As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* The man of God then was a voice and a signpost, which was a pretty clever double role. We will talk more about those roles in a minute, but first let's talk about how John did not point to Christ.

John did not point to Jesus by simply witnessing with his life. Have you ever heard that line? Or the one that says, "Preach the gospel everywhere, and, if necessary, use words." But as much truth as that may contain, it can be a cop-out. It is assumed, dear friends, that your life is going to be consistent with the truth, but when Jesus says, "be my witnesses" He is talking about what comes out of your mouth. If the disciples just witnessed by their lives there would be no church today. But they **preached** and so did John. **That** is how he pointed to Christ. He said, "I'm a voice." He did not say, "I'm a life."

In addition, John did not point to Jesus by using the techniques of the world. So many seem to think that the only way to point men to Jesus is to get their attention through the things of this world. But in doing this we may call men to Christ by those very values that He scorns. John would not do that. One wonders how he got his crowds. What was the attraction? "Hey, let's go down and hear John call us names and tell us to repent." Doesn't sound real appealing. What drew the people? I can't see John putting up posters or taking out big ads in the Jerusalem Times. He didn't need to. Somehow God brought him the crowds. John the Baptist never did a miracle, but God used him to light a fire under a whole nation by his preaching.

John then, pointed to Christ by being a voice. Leonard Ravenhill says most preachers are just echoes. But John was a voice, announcing the salvation of God. John 1 shows us how John the Baptist pointed to Christ. **29-30** *The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said,*

*'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'* **34-36** *I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."*<sup>35</sup> *Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"* John preached about Christ. He said, "My mission is to prepare the way of the Lord." He pointed the people down the road to when the Lord was to come. And when the Lord came he pointed to Him and said, "Behold." At this point, you see, John was a signpost because a signpost exists for the purpose of directing your attention somewhere else. A signpost is a failure if it keeps your attention. If the sign says, "This way to Arbys" and people stop and look at the beautiful sign, then the sign has failed. The sign is supposed to get you driving to the restaurant – that is all and that is the purpose of its existence. Signs are not to draw attention to themselves. So, the most important thing about a sign is that it is accurate, visible, and clear. It doesn't matter so much if it is flashy or plain or pretty. But what a testimony it is, what a powerful witness to our Lord to have so many sign-posts pointing in His direction. And the diversity of the signs is further testimony. There are, in the church, flashy signs, like those big pointed arrows the highway department uses. There are simple signs, pretty signs, rich signs, poor signs, black signs, white signs, yellow signs, all pointing to Jesus and saying, "Behold the Lamb. Behold the Son of God."

Won't you be a signpost for Jesus? What does that mean practically? The same things it meant for John. You speak for Him, tell others about Him. Don't think you can't do it. You can. Just do like John and get people thinking about who Jesus really is. Give them a tract. Share a verse. Invite them to a movie. Let's turn the eyes of Pittsburgh on to the Lord. Being a signpost also means you concern yourself with his glory and not your own. You don't focus on what someone thinks of you. You only care that Jesus be praised. May Jesus Christ be praised! Psalm 115:**1** *Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.* Yes, this takes the form of the athlete giving thanks to Jesus publicly, but there are so many ways that you can tell the world. Christ Jesus is the One, the only One, who deserves your attention, who deserves the glory.

Well now, let's move on. You have seen **how** John pointed to Christ. Now let's see why John pointed to Christ. The answer is that Christ is great and John was humble. But notice – John could easily have pointed to himself. If anybody was worthy of special attention it was John. Luke 7:**28a** *I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John.* A Jesus

quote like that would look good on your resume wouldn't it? Just imagine – John could have taken that for his life verse and been all about himself. If anybody was able to point to himself it was this man. He was a spiritual superstar. Now, he didn't do any miracles. You listen to some people you think **the** evidence of God's power in a man is that he can do miracles. But Jesus said plainly that John performed no signs, no miracles. But when you consider the crowds he drew and the impact he had, one must figure that John had unrivalled oratorical brilliance. He could command the crowds and nothing is more intoxicating to one's ego than to have the masses hanging on one's every word. John might have pointed to self, but he would not.

John had something we all need, and that is a profound sense of his personal unworthiness. He expresses this in verse **16** *One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals.* And in a day of dusty roads and hot, bare feet the untying of another's sandals was the duty of the lowest slave. But John so beautifully expresses that to do even that for Jesus is a privilege. Christ is great and John is humble. John felt it a privilege to serve Christ however he could do it. John was called to introduce him to the world and that privilege must have blown him away. However, he could serve he Lord he was delighted to do it – even to suffer for Him was a great honor of which he was not worthy. Even that is a privilege.

How do you feel about serving Christ? You expect Jesus should be glad to have you on His team? You think you are doing the Lord a favor? That He should feel privileged to have you serving Him? So often, that is what is expressed. We say or think, *Yes, I'll serve you Lord and here is how and where and when. I'll do a lot but don't let me get dirty. Don't let me be ignored or get hurt.* Samuel Brengle was one of the greatest young preachers in America a hundred years ago. A big church in New York wanted him to preach there, but instead he went to England to work with the Salvation Army. His first assignment was to wake every day at 5:00 a.m. and polish the boots of his fellow-soldiers. There he was with his Ph.D cleaning shoes and glad to do it to serve Christ. He got low before the Lord. He was self-abased, but God-exalted. Brengle may have seen more conversions through his preaching than any man of his day, but he started by cleaning shoes.

I once heard a Christian from Ethiopia being asked what kind of missionaries his country needed. His response was: "We need men who are not worthy." The Lord's church everywhere needs those kinds of men. Men and women who see even the lowest form of service as the

highest privilege. Maybe you have thought, “I want to be great for God.” Are you willing to be nothing?

John was willing to be less than. He was a humble man – not a weak man, not a mild-mannered man, not at all. He understood that Christ was infinitely great and that made him point away from self to Jesus. What men thought of Jesus was most important. I wonder how John reacted to criticism? What do you think? Criticism bothers everyone but much less so a man who knows he is unworthy. Does it bother you? Like it does me? If so, we still have some growing to do don't we? In Revelation 5 there is that great scene in heaven with the sealed book. Revelation 5:**3-4** *No one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. 4 Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;* No one. Not Moses or Abraham, or David or Paul or John the Baptist. No one. Until along came Jesus. And they sang what to Jesus? “Worthy is the Lamb.” He alone is worthy and John knew it to the depths of his soul.

But John the Baptist did not waste time deploring his weakness. He had a stronger passion – he had a zeal for the glory of Christ. That is why he pointed to Jesus. Look at John 3:**26** *They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.”* These guys come and say, “Hey, that new preacher down the road is getting bigger crowds than you, John.” He didn't get defensive or upset. Instead, he said, “That's good.” 3:**27-29** *John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.”* John is the best man you see. He is the preparer, the one going before the Lord. But the best man is not to steal the show. His concern is the happiness of the groom. John says, “You say Jesus is getting the attention? That's great! That's the way it ought to be!” And then the man of God makes that fantastic statement John 3:**31** *He must increase, but I must decrease.* This is the favorite verse of Christian dieters. Oh what a glorious statement it is! John delights in his own eclipse. The great Light has come and the lesser light is glad in it. The man of God rejoices when the glory belongs to Christ.

Some time back I saw a broadcast of the PTL club, the old Jim Bakker program that ran until 1989 and used to bring in 70 million dollars a year in gifts. At one time they were spending 1.5 million dollars to build a wax museum to honor the “great” Christians throughout history. And the first wax figure was to be John the Baptist, even though we don’t know what he looked like. I think John would rather Herod chop off his head than have it fixed up in wax and put on display. John Calvin was so concerned about being treated like a celebrity that he demanded to have no marker at his grave. No one knows where Calvin is buried. In Acts 14, when Paul healed a man some Lysonians started to worship him and it says Paul and Barnabas were so upset by this they tore their robes and cried out, “Don’t do this! We are just men like yourselves!” I see in them and in John the attitude expressed so well by AW Tozer who writes:

*A man may be considered spiritual when he wants to see the honor of God advanced through his life even if it means that he himself must suffer temporary dishonor or loss. Such a man prays, “Hallowed by Thy name” and silently adds, “at any cost to me, Lord.” He lives for God’s honor by a kind of spiritual reflex. Every choice involving the glory of God is for him already made before it presents itself. He does not need to debate the matter with his own heart. There is nothing to debate. The glory of God is necessary for him; he gasps for it as a suffocating man gasps for air.*

Paul said his hope was that Christ would be exalted in his body whether by life or by death. I’m told that in the ordination exams for Presbyterian pastors a century or two back they would regularly ask the man being examined, “Are you willing to be damned for the glory of God?” Think on that will you? I hear one young fellow, after a rigorous oral exam replied, “Yes, and in fact, I am willing for the whole Presbytery to be damned for the glory of God.”

Well, zeal for God’s glory is certainly evident in the life of our man John. John 3:31 *He must increase, but I must decrease.* I hope you are growing to care preeminently for Christ’s honor. Why did John point to Christ? He had a sense of unworthiness and a zeal for God’s glory which came from being filled with the Holy Spirit. Remember, it was said that John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb. The work of the Spirit according to Jesus, is like the work of John, to point people to Jesus. Jesus, speaking of the coming Spirit said in John 16:14a *He will glorify Me.* Ponder that. As the Holy Spirit takes control of your life, what will you do? More and more you will point to Jesus and you will glorify Him.

So, we’ve seen **how** John pointed to Christ and **why**. But before we close the book on John, consider our brother’s reward. He was thrown in prison and eventually beheaded, which all goes to prove that if you do what is right and have faith you will be healthy and wealthy and

“have the desire of your heart.” No way! The greatest man born of woman died a prisoner. Is that the reward of righteousness? Is that what you get for putting Jesus first? Sometimes it is. But there were also some other rewards that John received. John wanted most for Christ to be glorified and honored. John saw the beginning of that and will live to see every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. For John that will be glory.

John the Baptist also was rewarded with great influence and power in his nation, for a time. John could be trusted with power because he gave it all to Christ. But another great reward that John received was simply the commendation of his Master. James 4:**10** *Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.* The man who saw himself as unworthy of the lowest was granted the highest. God says, “He who honors me I will honor.” John pointed to Christ. And Christ pointed to him and paid John the Baptist the greatest compliment ever recorded. Luke 7:**28a** *I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John.* To the servant of Christ there can be nothing sweeter than the Master’s pleasure, than to hear his voice saying to us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Oh may it be so with us. Let’s pray and prepare our hearts for the Lord’s Supper which like John points us all to Jesus and says, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”