

More of Him
October 2, 2016

This morning we are going to look at the most unusual person in the Bible. No, it is not Jesus. Jesus is the most special person in the Bible. But I have in mind someone who is, other than Jesus, the most unusual person in the Bible. He was unique, but there is a lesson for us in his service to God. That man is John the Baptizer. I know, he is usually referred to as John the Baptist. Christianity did not exist at that time. So there was no Baptist group. Baptist was a nickname given to him. Jews were coming to John, publicly confessing their sins. John baptized them, so they nicknamed him John the baptizer or baptist in the sense of one who baptizes.

Matthew 3:1-12 (NIV) In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

We know John was poor by his clothes and his food. He lived on the edge of society, in the desert. We don't know if his clothes, food, and location were normal for him, or if God commanded these of him. We see others given unusual circumstances by God in the Bible. The prophet Ezekiel comes to mind.

John came announcing the kingdom of God. That phrase, "kingdom of God", was a code phrase to the Jews of that day. To them these words meant the arrival of the Messiah. The Messiah, or Christ as it is translated into Greek, had been prophesied centuries before. They believed that the Messiah would lead them to political and national independence from the Romans. So people flocked to John, even though it meant traveling down to the edge of the desert.

John got so much attention that the religious authorities sent their representatives out to investigate him and his teaching. Here we see the courage of John, for he was willing to stand up to these leaders and confront them as the hypocrites they were. He called them to repentance like everyone else. He cautioned them of depending on their ethnic background

for a place in heaven. Being descendents of Abraham did not give them tickets to heaven. John's point was this: **There is a volitional element to entering the kingdom of God.** You must choose to become a part of God's rule. No one is automatically in.

People today still make this mistake. They think that they get to enter heaven because their parents are Christians or because they themselves regularly attend a church. The truth is that **Every person must make a personal decision to turn their life over to Jesus as Savior and Lord.**

Today we will see three characteristics of John. We have already seen that **John was a man of courage.** We see that in his willingness to confront the Jews with their sin and call them to be baptized for repentance. Usually Jews were not baptized. Only converts to Judaism were baptized. So he was calling them to admit their sin and be baptized almost as if they were converting to a new religion. He was calling them to a whole new commitment to God.

So John was a man of courage. He was also a man of purpose. (**John was a man of purpose.**) God had called him to a unique work. This work demanded much of John. Living out in the desert required John to sacrifice a lot in order to serve God's purposes. He sacrificed regular food and clothes. He sacrificed living near others. He sacrificed ostracism by some because of his weirdness. Eventually it cost him his life, as some in power took offence at him and had him beheaded. As far as we know he was not married and had no family. He certainly did not have a normal life.

What would you sacrifice in order to serve God? Would you sacrifice as little as a few hours of your time a week to serve God? Would you serve even less, just a few hours a month to serve God? Would you perform a task that no one else wanted to do? Would you perform a task that won you no recognition from anyone but God? Would you do something hidden from the notice of anyone else? God has such jobs that need doing.

Each autumn the Nominating Committee passes out a survey form that helps them in their work of filling service positions for the coming year. Today we will be passing out those forms. We ask you to read them, pray over them, fill them out, and return them in a couple of weeks.

We will not ask you to do too much. We will not overload you with jobs. And we will help you succeed at what you do take on.

You may have doubts about your skills for a certain task. And we may challenge you to try something you have no experience at. We have seen God sometimes surprise some of our members by showing what He can do through a willing but inexperienced servant.

Some positions require a few hours a week. We have many such positions that someone is doing right now, every week. Without these, we would not be effective in the tasks God has given to us.

Some positions require only a few hours a month. There are many of these as well. Again, without people serving in these, the life of our church would be greatly affected. Some jobs you can do on Sunday when you come. Most would require time and effort from you during the rest of the week.

All the positions play a part in what we are doing with God in this place, to build His kingdom, to mature our faith, and to meet people's spiritual needs. God is using all of these tasks in some way to change people according to His purposes. That is important. So, we ask you to pray about what to check on the sheet. Then fill it out and bring it back in a week or two.

We need to be people of purpose, on mission, like John was. And, like John, we need to be clear on what God is calling us to do. John was sure of what his mission was... and sure of what his mission was NOT. Not everyone associated with John was as informed as he was about what he was trying to accomplish.

We know from other passages that John had disciples. A disciple is a student or apprentice, a follower and helper. We don't know whether John purposely recruited disciples because he needed the help, or simply accepted those who volunteered themselves. However, it was not John's purpose to build a great following of people around himself. John was not out to build His own school of teaching like some of the famous rabbis of the past. But his disciples did not all have this same understanding. They wanted to build John into a great leader, with a big following, as we see in John 3.

We have seen that John was a man of courage and purpose. Here we see the other major characteristic of John. **John was a man of great humility.** He demonstrated a humility that we must adopt in order to faithfully serve our Lord and Savior.

John 3:22-30 (NIV) ... Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.

... John's disciples... came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan--the one you testified about--well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ (Messiah) but am sent ahead of him.'

The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.

John's disciples complained, "That guy Jesus is stealing your thunder." They wanted John to work against Jesus, to compete with Jesus. They wanted John to think to himself, "Gee, I attract them, I get them to repent. And then they leave me to follow Jesus? That's not fair. We've got to put a stop to this." That is what John's followers wanted him to think, and say, and do. But John knew that it was not what GOD wanted.

John replied, "He must become greater, I must become less." His audience must grow, mine must dwindle. His followers increase, mine decrease. His ministry expand, mine shrink. His continue, mine cease. John had only a temp job. And he was okay with that.

You see, God did not send John to go make a name for John. God sent John to help Jesus make a name for Jesus. He sent John to prepare the people for the coming of the Christ. Some hoped that John was the Christ. But, he told them plainly he was not. Once Jesus came and began HIS ministry, John's ministry diminished and eventually ceased altogether.

John knew this going in. John knew that he would be overshadowed by the Christ he came to announce. And **John humbly accepted the job God had for him. Will you do the same?**

Will you humbly... accept the work that needs to be done for God in His church? In God's plan He has work for each of us to do. Will you accept the job God has for you? Will you humble yourself to the service of your master?

I repeat, some of those jobs are behind the scenes. Few people will see you doing them. But those jobs still need to be done. Will you humbly accept this work for Jesus? Do something to build up His name because He must increase while you must decrease.

That is true for our church too. Our church must have a humble attitude about our church in the community. Our church's job is NOT to build up the glory of Emmanuel Baptist Church. **Our church's job is to bring glory to Jesus.**

One of the reasons we have chosen to partner with other Baptist groups is to be a part of something bigger than what Emmanuel Baptist can do alone. We have chosen to be part of the Arundel Baptist Network of Baptist churches in the Anne Arundel County area. We have chosen to be a part of the Baptist Convention of Maryland and Delaware. And we have chosen to be part of the Southern Baptist Convention. In partnership with these other groups of Baptist churches we are part of a bigger work than just what we can do. We are seeking in these partnerships to bring glory to Jesus, not Emmanuel Baptist Church.

And even the things we do ourselves must be for Jesus' glory, not our own. Let us resist the temptation to serve our community for our glory. Let us serve for Jesus and let Him give glory where He wishes to do so. We are not the message.

John knew that HE wasn't the message, just the messenger. We need to remember that Emmanuel Baptist Church isn't the message. We are a messenger for Jesus.

We need a servant's attitude. When you think of yourself as a servant, you aren't concerned with personal glory. Instead, you are concerned with the glory of your master.

Booker T. Washington demonstrated a servant attitude. The renowned African American educator had become president of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Not long after that he was walking through town when a wealthy white woman stopped him. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, he smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to chop the wood. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady who had hired him.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized. "It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his humble and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

John the Baptist had such a servant attitude of humility. We must adopt such an attitude for ourselves. We must say to ourselves, "Jesus must increase and I must decrease." When we serve in our homes, our communities, our jobs, our schools, and our church with that attitude, we are keeping the proper focus on Jesus. "He must increase and I must decrease."

Jesus has done more for us than a lifetime of humble service could repay. So let us do our part, for Him, in His church, out of gratitude for our blessings.

Jesus died for us. Jesus died for you. He died in your place, to pay the penalty for all of your sins. Today, choose to believe in Jesus' death as the full payment for all of your sins. Accept Jesus as your Savior and turn your life over to Him as your Lord.

And God will change you.

God will forgive all your sins.

God will adopt you into His family.

God will give you a new heart.

God will put His Spirit in you.

You came in an enemy of God because of your sins.

You can leave a child of God because of Jesus.

Don't keep running from God.