

The Gospel of John - #3 - 10/18/2020 - "The Whole Truth and Nothing But!" John 1: 6-8

"There was a *MAN* sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not that light, but came to bear witness about that light."

Introduction: IL Key figures in American history: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Helen Keller, Lewis and Clark, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, D.L. Moody and Billy Graham.

The greatest figure in world history, according to Jesus Christ, was John the Baptist! We'll look at his life and ministry and approach this broad subject with seven key questions. There are 85 references to John in the New Testament and in 23 of those he is specifically called "the Baptist". Let's check out these questions and come to some answers about this great man...

Why insert a man into the Prologue about the Creator, the Eternal Son of God? Starting in today's text we see very clearly that John was just a man, not THE God man, Jesus Christ. 1 Timothy 2: 5 says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, THE man Christ Jesus." This prologue (first words) tells us about the Word of God, the Eternal God who created all things as we read in verses 1-5. Then there is this reference to a mere man sent from God, and then a return to the Word of God, Jesus in verses 9-13. The point, in my view, is that when the Apostle John talks about Jesus he speaks of Him in His divine roles of Light and Life. Light speaks to understanding truth where life deals with living out truth and this man John, the Baptist, epitomizes both! He is a created man who served and heralded the Creator God. He was a witness of the Light where Jesus was and is the Light. John came to bear witness of the light, Jesus was with the Father in all of eternity past and will be for all of eternity future. John was "sent" - the word comes from the Greek word 'apostello' which is where we get the word 'apostle' or 'sent one'. John's brief life on this planet proved that Jesus was the Creator and had and has a purpose for every person born in this world. What he accomplished through God's power was significant to be sure! Your life and mine can be significant too as we bear witness to the Light and tell others about the Creator who loves them, died for them and rose again on their behalf! What can we learn from the many New Testament references to John, the "baptizer"? Who is he really?

Who is this man that the Apostle John writes about? We read about his birth especially in Luke 1 and about his ministry in Matthew 3. Let me summarize both his entrance onto the pages of Scripture and history. He was born into a priestly family. His father Zechariah was a priest, and his mother Elizabeth was born into the line of Aaron who was Israel's first and most notable priest. His birth came in answer to prayer by his devout parents over many years. Elizabeth was barren and had not been able to give birth UNTIL...an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah and told him that he and his wife would have a son and should call him John. Zechariah had a hard time believing this news and the angel told him he would be unable to speak until the baby came. When the baby was born and the news spread, many onlookers asked Zechariah and Elizabeth what they would name the baby. Elizabeth said- John. The people knew no one in that

family line had ever been named John, so they pressed Zechariah for an answer. He asked for a tablet and he wrote John- it means “the gift of God” or “God’s gracious gift”. Significant is the meaning of Zechariah’s name- “God remembers” and the name Elizabeth, “God promises”! God’s promise to them was fulfilled and the Baptizer was born, just months before Elizabeth’s cousin, Mary, would bring a son into the world- not just any son but THE Son of God- Jesus! John would have likely begun his ministry in either 25 AD or 26 AD and ended up living to about age 30. It is likely that Zechariah and Elizabeth died when John was a teenager. Luke 1: 80 says, “And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance in Israel.” His father, Zechariah, believed and prophesied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that John would “give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” (Luke 1: 79) The angel had told John’s parents that he would move out for God in “the spirit and power of Elijah”. Malachi 4: 5 and 6 prophesied that very thing- “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” Jesus made that prophecy of a New Testament Elijah’s coming, ministry and death clear in Matthew 17: 12 and 13- “I tell you that Elijah has already come and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that He was speaking to them of John the Baptist.” Yes, John, above everything else that can be said of him, was a floodlight of truth to the nation of Israel and a witness urging people to receive Jesus as Lord! And in line with his great responsibility, he lived a life above reproach before a wicked generation! So can we! Listen to John’s father, Zechariah, as he prophesies about John’s calling to serve the Lord- Luke 1: 68-76 (Read).

What makes him unique in the Gospels? First of all, he was the last in a long line of prophets in the Old Testament era. The word ‘prophet’ means literally to ‘boil or bubble over’ and reminds us that true prophets are burdened to deliver the message they have from God! John must have heard many times growing up that he was to be a new version of the prophet Elijah and Elijah must have become his spiritual hero, besides his righteous, godly parents. He may have kept in mind the motto, What would Elijah do? WWED? John was the last prophet from that era, and he came along after 400 years of prophetic silence in Israel, now with a message to prepare one’s heart for Jesus to take control, individually and nationally. His task was to shine the light where darkness prevailed because, as we learned last week, darkness cannot overcome the light! Secondly, John was a Nazirite. The vow of a Nazirite was featured in Numbers 6 in Old Testament law. As far as the Bible record goes, there were only three men who were life-long Nazirites- Samuel, Samson and John. Samuel and John were godly prophets, Samson was a judge in Israel but he failed to keep his vows. The word “nazirite” in Hebrew means, “separated” or “consecrated”. It was a vow that could be taken voluntarily by men or women, for a short term or even for life, and it involved some “do nots” like “do not drink wine or eat grapes or even raisins” and “do not cut your hair during the time of your vow” and “do not touch a dead body, human or animal, even if your parent dies near you”. We have similar words of challenge

in 2 Corinthians 6: 17, 18- “Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing. Then I will welcome you and be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” Thirdly, John was filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he was developing in the womb. No other person in history has been filled with the Spirit from the womb! Fourthly and finally, he was a “baptizer”. His baptism of crowds in the Jordan River was a special identification as someone who was taking confession or repentance seriously. The word ‘baptism’ means ‘identification’ so in our cases today in the church it indicates identification as a child of God by faith whose sins have been washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ! That leads us to question #4...

What was his message? John’s message was clear- repent of your sins and prepare your heart to receive Jesus as your Savior! Repentance is one side of a coin that has faith on the other side. Baptism for John meant that a person had a heart ready to receive Jesus as their Master. For us today it means that we HAVE received Jesus as Savior and want others to know it! In John’s day it meant that a potential follower of Jesus was confessing their sins and determining to hear, accept and follow the words of Christ. Proverbs 28: 13- “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy!” Salvation comes in any age when we turn FROM sin TO God and thank Him for His grace and mercy to a lost sinner! Baptism does not forgive sin- only God’s grace can do that. We can think of the baptism of Christ by John in the Jordan. John was reluctant to baptize Jesus. He knew he needed to be baptized by the Lord. But Jesus explained that His baptism by John would be for the purpose of identification with sinners as their only resource for mercy. He wanted to be baptized to say, in effect, “I am identifying with you as your Sinless, Perfect Savior from sin. Come unto ME!” Before and after the baptism of Jesus, John was busy expressing HIS reason for being God’s messenger and his purpose to point people to Jesus because he cared about his countrymen! We need to analyze how much we care about our neighbors and friends and family. We need to lovingly share truth with them that will point them as well to Jesus and to urge them to identify themselves by faith as one of His children!

How effective was his ministry, according to Jesus? Let me just read what Jesus said about John- about his influence on that first century world- Matthew 11: 11 and 14- “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come!” The Apostle John attests to that when he writes in our text this morning, he ‘came to bear witness about that light’. The two words “bear witness” are written in the past tense in Greek and the point is that John effectively BORE witness, and his work was done the day he was beheaded by King Herod after a not-too-brief stint in the prison at Machereus. But John was bold, unafraid of the authority of an earthly king, because he was under the direction of the Heavenly King of kings!

How did John the Baptist view his own role? Good question for us to consider! I believe his words here in the middle of chapter one are powerful! John 1: 19-34 (Read the text without commentary). This John is more than a Baptizer! He is a witness for Jesus, a humble messenger

of truth, a servant of the Creator God who shows, without blocking the view, that Jesus is more than a mere man. He said, about himself and Jesus in John 3: 25-30 that he was not the Christ but was sent to represent Him. He referred to Christ as the Bridegroom and then spoke of himself as the “friend” of the Groom, like the best man who stands and hears Him and rejoices greatly in His voice. He felt that serving Jesus was all the privilege and joy he needed. And then he said those moving words, “HE must increase, and I must decrease!” That leads us to our final question...

What is there here for me to learn today? We too must decrease in our evaluation of our significance. Instead we need to exalt Jesus more and more in our lifestyle, our words, our attitudes and our worship! Using mere humans like John and you and me is God’s way of beaming the light to a dark world. God could have sent angels or wrote messages in the clouds around the planet, but instead He works through people to evangelize other people. But we must be humble. John illustrates that God uses people and their daily lives and in particular their voices with HIS words to declare the Good News to lost men and women and children! As we worship Him and witness of Him and in the process we reflect His glory as the light of life! We, God’s people, need to take seriously and joyfully the command in John 20: 21- “As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending YOU!” In Acts 1: 8 we are told, by the Risen Savior Himself- “You shall be MY witnesses!” Let’s take up the challenge. And along the way let’s reflect on the truth of Jesus that He said in connection with John- “The one who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he!” YOU and I can do amazing things for God in humility and obedience and faithfulness for a lifetime!