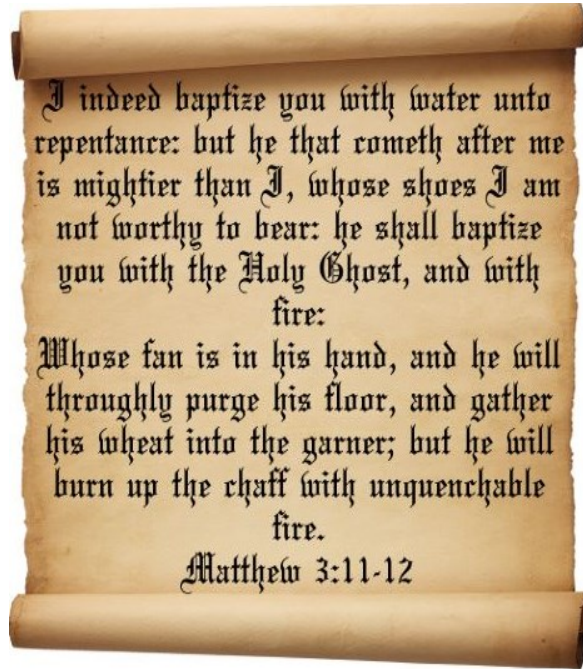


# John the Baptist

“They Were Told”



*“He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” John 1:23*

For some reason, I often think of John the Baptist as an older gentleman, but he was young when he was beheaded. John was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth just six months before Christ was born. Even before his birth Zechariah was told by the angel Gabriel that his son would be named John, and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit and turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord. John was told that his job was to prepare people for the Lord’s coming. What an assignment!

We are told that John was quite an individual. His birth was the beginning of the unusual circumstances that surrounded him. His father, Zechariah, was told that his wife, Elizabeth was going to have a child and his name would be John. The angel Gabriel also told him that John’s job was to prepare a way for the Lord. Zechariah was old and did not think that his wife could possibly have a child. She was beyond child bearing years so he challenged the angel and was unable to speak until the child was born. (Luke 1:11-19)

He wore camel’s hair and a leather girdle, somewhat like a forerunner of his from the Old Testament, Elijah. He ate locusts and wild honey and preached in the desert! John the Baptist told people that the time for the Christ to come was imminent. As Jesus was talking with the people one day while John was in prison, they asked him about John and Christ said of him *“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.”* Matthew 11:11.

This is difficult to understand when read in its entirety. Christ was also born of woman, but not of earthly man. Then he goes on to say that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. John the Baptist was the servant, but I have no doubt that when he was beheaded, he immediately heard his Master say *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”*

*“When Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan and was baptized by John the Baptist, he did so not because he was in need of repentance, or conversion; he did it to be among people who need forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins.”*

Pope Francis

The phrase and duty of John to prepare the way for the Lord was made into a song in the musical “Godspell” that has become perhaps the best known and haunting songs from that musical, with just a few words “Prepare ye, the way of the Lord” .

John was well aware of his role in the coming of Christ and gave him all the praise. He told the people that he was not even important enough to loosen the sandals of the one that was coming. He told them that he would baptize them with water, but the one that was coming would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. At that time, the people had not even heard of the Holy Spirit.

One day as John was baptizing people Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee went to be baptized. What an honor for John. As Christ was coming out of the water, we are told that the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and God said *“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”* Mark 1:11

John never gave up. He had a job to do and he did it. Herod was afraid of him. After all, he told Herod that he had done wrong by taking his brother's wife. And yet, as we read, we understand that Herod knew John was telling the truth, but Herod had put himself in a tough position.

Herod and Herodias knew they had done wrong. One evening after a banquet, Herodias' daughter danced for the guests. They were very pleased with her dancing and Herod promised her anything she wanted, up to half of his kingdom! She ran to ask her mother what she should ask for, and her mother told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod had a choice, but he would not go back on his word to the girl so he asked for the head of John the Baptist and it was delivered to him. We are told by some authorities that after this Herod and Herodias were dismissed and sent away for the rest of their lives. Some of the people who had been following John buried his body, and then went and told Jesus all that had happened. Jesus responded to the news of John's death by saying, *"John was a lamp that burned and gave light."* John 5:35

When we come to realize that God has given us a specific purpose for our lives, we can move forward with confidence, fully trusting the One who called us. Like John the Baptist, we don't have to fear living with a radical focus on our God-given mission. We are not called to do the work of John the Baptist, or are we? We are called to witness to the love and grace of our Lord, give light. Some people are sent to the mission field, others to our own neighbors and family.

There can be no greater joy or fulfillment in this life than to know God's pleasure and His reward awaits us in heaven.

The life of John the Baptist is a paradox and a wonderful story of God's love with a person that didn't mix with everyone. He wasn't a part of the social set from what we read, but he was one of God's chosen for a very certain job. Just a couple verses in the Bible that are the words of Jesus can be a real contradiction to us.

*Jesus honored the prophet with these words: "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist"*  
Matthew 11:11

John himself did not think he was worthy to peptize Jesus or even carry His sandals. John told Christ *"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* John the Baptist didn't live long enough to see many of the works of Christ on earth or see his crucifixion or glorious resurrection. He had been sent to do a mission. We would think that was sufficient for him to be someone great. Yet Jesus goes on to say:

*"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."* Matthew 3:14

Prayer: Lord God, You have given us so much, and yet we don't seem to comprehend. You have given us the gift of eternal life with You, but we often dismiss it as just something that we deserve. Help us to carry out Your mission on this earth knowing that if we are true to You, You will be with us every step of the way and never forsake us even to the day we hear You say "Well done, my faithful servant." Amen.

1. John the Baptist was actually a second cousin to Christ. Would this make a difference in your believing the message he was telling?
2. Do we have an obligation to "Prepare ye, the way of the Lord"?
3. Is there a time when we should break an earthly promise when we know it is wrong? How?
4. How is our purpose today related to that of John the Baptist?
5. What are the paradoxes we see in our life today?

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