

CP 8/22/65  
Pm.

## THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Part I)

Scripture: Matt. 3:1-12; cf. Luke 1:80; 3:1-18.

Intro: Much could be said about the time of John's ministry as a commentary on Luke 3:1, 2. But it is sufficient to point out that for Israel it was a time of captivity under the rule of wicked, cruel men, where there was constant political intrigue. With regard to the priesthood, there were two (contary to the Law), and the whole religious order of Israel was permeated with corruption.

The time was ripe for John's ministry, but there was nothing about his circumstances that would be an encouragement to him

Luke 1:80 informs us that John lived in the wilderness. He remained there until "the word of God came unto" him "in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2b). Then he began to preach.

The silence of 400 years was broken, and broken by a man who had no superior up to that time. Cf. Matt. 11:11a.

What were the outstanding features of His ministry?

### I. His message (Matt. 3:1-3).

- A. The heart of it: "REPENT". In a day when apparently no voices were being heard to challenge the sin of men, suddenly John appears in the wilderness (or desert) demanding that there be changes--changes in thinking, and changes in living.
- B. The reason for the message. There are two mentioned in our text.
  - 1. "For the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That which men were not even expecting was about to take place. God was preparing to present His King.
  - 2. "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, Prepare . . ." John's message was to prepare the hearts of men for the advent of Christ. Only unrepentant hearts can hinder Him in His work.

### II. His custom (Matt. 3:4). He was like Elijah in this respect

It was not only simplicity, but actually poverty--self-chosen poverty. His food was the food of the poor, and so was his dress.

The seclusion of the wilderness kept him from the contaminations of the day, and it also enabled him to see his own generation as he needed to. Evidently John had even renounced his place in the priesthood in order to fulfill this prophetic ministry.

His preaching (and without miracles) was not only a fulfillment of prophecy, but it was the result of settled reflections regarding his day.

How often things keep us from seeing what we need to see!

### III. His effectiveness (Matt. 3:5, 6).

The results were nothing short of phenomenal. And note: He did not go in to them; they came out to him.

Even years afterward, results were still evident. Cf. Acts 18:24, 25; Acts 19:1-6.

### IV. Insight (3:7-12).

others asked (Luke 3)  
What shall we do - but not the Pharisees.

A. Regarding man's tendency to depend on externals (vv. 7-9).

B. Regarding ~~about~~ himself in relation to Christ. (v. 11).

How easily this is forgotten

B. Regarding the certainty of divine judgment (vv. 10, 12)

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST  
(Part II)

Scripture: John 1:6-8, 15-18, 19-28, 29-34, 35-42.

Intro: There are two interesting phases to the ministry of John the Baptist. They are related, and yet they are distinct.

- (1) There was his ministry to Israel, with a message of repentance in preparation for the coming kingdom. This is the emphasis in the Gospel of Matthew.
- (2) There was his ministry concerning Christ. This is the emphasis in the Gospel of John.

The emphasis in the Gospel of Matthew is stated in Matthew 3:1, 2; the emphasis in the Gospel of John is stated in John 1:6-8.

It is concerning this second phase of his ministry that I would like to speak tonight: his ministry concerning Christ.

I. The nature of his ministry (John 1:6-8).

He was a witness of the light, and, as such, he had been sent from God.

At the same time the Apostle John would make it perfectly clear that John the Baptist was not that light.

A twofold purpose in John's ministry is stated here. Both are mentioned in v. 7, and introduced by the Greek word, *iva*. The first is mentioned again in v. 8, and again introduced by *iva*. They are:

- (1) That he might witness concerning the Light.
- (2) That all men (who heard him) might through him (i.e., John the Baptist) believe.

His ministry was very definitely an evangelistic ministry.

It would seem that the manner in which John fulfilled the first, i.e., witnessing concerning the Light, would determine his success in seeing the second purpose accomplished.

How he witnessed of Christ is told later in the chapter. For this we must move on to vv. 15-18 where we have

II. The witness of John the Baptist (1:15-18).

There were three ways in which he witnessed to the superiority of Jesus Christ. (We must keep in mind that these are keys to John's amazing success in causing men to believe.)

- A. The superiority of Christ over the forerunner himself (1:15).

Note how vv. 19-28 support this first point.

We have learned from Matthew how tremendously John's ministry had moved Israel. Cf. Matt. 3: 5, 6.

Nothing comparable had ever happened in Israel, and nothing much at all had taken place in 400 years.

Israelites were beginning to suspect that he might be the Messiah (Luke 3:15).

Even the Lord Jesus had said that "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11).

He even called John "a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35). However, the word used for light here is not the same word that is translated "Light" in John 1:7, 8. The Lord Jesus is called  $\phi\omega\varsigma$ , which is the light of the sun, or of the day. John the Baptist is called  $\lambda\upsilon\chi\nu\omicron\varsigma$ , which is a hand-lamp, fed with oil. Trench states the contrast by referring to

that Eternal Light, which, as it was never kindled, so should never be quenched, and the Baptist, a lamp kindled by the hands of Another, in whose brightness men might for a season rejoice, and which must then be extinguished (Synonyms, p. 166).

So, in spite of all the grand things that can be said about John, he was only a lamp in comparison with the light of the sun--and the important thing was that he confessed it.

"He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for He was before me." Christ came after him in time, but He immediately was "preferred", i.e., superior in rank, because He was before John in that He existed prior to His incarnation. Cf. vv. 27, 30. Cf. "mightier than I" in Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7.

John's witness was blessed because he did not stand in the way of his message. He pointed men to Christ.

B. The superiority of Christ over Moses (1:16, 17).

What a shock this was to Israel! Hardly anything could have been more unpopular to the masses of the people!

Note that when John said, "And of His fulness have all we received," that he was including himself as one of the receivers.

Jesus Christ had done something for John the Baptist which Moses had never been able to do.

What did Moses do for Israel?

His name is always linked with the Law. "For the law was given by Moses."

But does the Law change men, or make them better?

Listen to the Apostle Paul:

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:19, 20).

The Law tells me what sin is, and pronounces me guilty, but it does not do anything about my sin!

Here is where Jesus Christ is superior to Moses:

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The Law of Moses never removed one sin, but Christ is able to take away the sin of the entire world.

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

But there is another area in which Christ is superior.

C. The superiority of Christ as the revelation of the Father (1:18).

John was the last and the greatest of the Old Testa-

ment prophets, but his ministry of revealing God to men faced the same limitations as other OT prophets. It is described by the writer of the book of Hebrews at its very beginning.

All preceding revelations of God, as marvelous as they were, were incomplete. They all left some things unsaid, or unseen.

It was not until the Lord Jesus Christ came that He was "declared", manifested, fully revealed.

He told His disciples later, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

In His prayer in John 17 He told the Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," and, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world."

Concl: Is it any wonder that, when our Lord began to minister publicly, ~~that~~ John was removed from the scene?

The greatest of the prophets, a man who preached but performed no miracles, and yet completely overshadowed by the Lord Jesus.

And who can deny that it was his willingness to take this place of insignificance, bringing all other OT saints with him, that enabled God to use him so mightily in turning the hearts of men to the Saviour.

What a message this is for us in our ministries today!

# John the Baptist - His ministry (Part III)

- Text: John 3: 22-36.

Intro: As Ryle says, this passage  
"contains the last testimony  
of John the Baptist concerning  
our Lord Jesus Christ" (IE, 170).  
Brown calls it also the "nettest"  
(JFB, I, 366).

Ryle adds,

"More honourable things are nowhere written concerning Jesus, than these verses recorded as spoken by John the Baptist.

"Let us endeavour in life and death, to hold the same views of the Lord Jesus, to which John here gives expression. We can never make too much of Christ. Our thoughts about the Church, the ministry, and the sacraments, may easily become too high and extravagant. We can never have too high thoughts about Christ, can never love Him too much, trust Him too implicitly, lay too much weight upon Him, and speak too highly in His praise. He is worthy of all the honour that we can give Him. He will be all in heaven. Let us see to it, that He is all in our hearts on earth" (Op. cit., pp. 173, 174).

And also—

"That faithful man of God was the same at the end of his ministry that he was at the beginning, —the same in his views of self, —the same in his views of Christ" (Op. cit., pp. 170, 171).

The chronology of John's ministry is practically impossible to establish. But we know that his imprisonment and death seems to have coincided with the begin. of our Lord's ministry.

Cf. Mt. 4:12, 17.

John the Baptist  
(Part III)

(2)

At least one writer (Theophylact) believes that in the providence of God the death of John was permitted to prohibit any distraction in people's minds between John and the Lord Jesus.

Cf. Mt. 14:1, 2. Also Mark 6:20.

All of these things make the final words of John stand out in even greater perspective.

I. Note that John the Baptist is not  
"a reed shaken in the wind" (Jn. 3:25, 26; Cf. Mt. 11:7)

Many winds blew on John

(1) The religious prejudice of the Jews who claimed to be the children of Abraham.

(2) The religious ~~point~~ of the Pharisees + Sadducees who came to be baptized.

(3) The civil prestige of Herod who was living in sin.

But none was more subtle than the wind of flattery which plagued him all during his ministry.

Here it is again.



John the Baptist  
(Part III) (3)

II. The truths which held John in the time of testing.

- A. The knowledge of God - that He is absolutely sovereign (Jn. 3:27).

B. The ~~knowledge~~ of himself in relation to Christ (John 3:28-31).

1. Though some thought he was the Christ, he knew he was only the forerunner to prepare others for his coming (v. 28).

2. Christ was the bridegroom, he was the friend of the bridegroom. (note: not stated as friend of the bride.)

3. Christ was from heaven; he was of the earth (v. 31).

How early John's ministry must have appeared to himself at times!

- Therefore, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (v. 30).

- c. The knowledge of the relationship between Christ and God (John 1: 32-36).
1. The uniqueness (32-35)
    - A. God sent Him with a message
    - B. God "give<sup>d</sup>" (pres. tense) Him the Spirit (34)
    - C. God as the Father loves Him + has ordained His sovereignty (35)

2. The ~~purpose~~ <sup>result</sup> (36).

John's disciples said,  
"All men come to him" (v. 26).

John said,  
"No man receiveth His testimony" (v. 32).

The first was by men jealous for a man's glory; the second was by a man jealous for God's glory and the blessing of men.

3. The issue (John 3: 36).

As in the case of the Lord Jesus how it must have grieved John that his disciples really perceived so little of the real issue.

John saw men under the wrath of God. Note, v. 14, "condemned already".

He could not deliver them.

But he knew that Christ could.

See next pg.

Concl:

Three words show the progress of John's ministry:

① "Repent" - Mt. 3:2.

② "Behold" - Jn. 1:29.

③ "Believe" - Jn. 3:36, actually, "He that believes."

In v. 36 there are two different words used for believe:

Continued from preceding

(1) ΠΙΣΤΕΥΩ - to believe, trust

(2) ΑΠΕΙΘΕΩ - to refuse to be persuaded, to withhold belief. This is the only time it is used in the Gospel of John. So believe is <sup>the</sup> obedience required for salvation. Cf. Rom. 2:8,9.