

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

A Great Man Fearlessly Tells the Truth: John the Baptist

Matthew 3:1-12

I. What makes a person great?

A. *The Life Millennium: The 100 Most Important Events and People of the Past 1000 Years*

B. Fascinating study... not just the names, but the criteria

C. Who did they choose?

1. Thomas Edison... for his invention of the electric light in 1879, and countless other inventions
2. Christopher Columbus... for his accidental discovery of two huge continents that most Europeans did not know existed
9. Charles Darwin... for his development of the theory of evolution
15. Henry Ford... for mass-producing an affordable form of personal transportation

SUMMARY:

18 scientists, 17 statesmen & national leaders, 10 military conquerors, 10 inventors, 7 philosophers, 7 explorers, 7 writers, 5 artists, 4 theologians, 4 composers, 2 entertainers (P.T. Barnum & Walt Disney)

D. God's ways are different:

1. purposefully rejecting the great people of the world and choosing the weakest

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 ²⁶ ***Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.*** ²⁷ ***But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise***

2. God's standards for greatness are different

1 Samuel 16:7 “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

God does have standards of greatness... only a few meet them

Abraham called “God’s friend,” Moses knew God face to face; God boasted over Job’s uprightness to Satan; the angel Gabriel called Daniel a “man highly esteemed” by God; Gabriel also said to Mary that she was highly favored.

E. YET of all these Old Testament heroes, none was greater than John the Baptist

HEAR THE TESTIMONY OF THE SON OF GOD!!!

Matthew 11:11 “I tell you the truth, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist...”

John was great because he wholeheartedly obeyed God who had sent him

John was great because he was totally humble before Christ

John was great because by faith he recognized Christ both in Christ’s person and in Christ’s mission before any of it came about

John was great because as a prophet of God he told people not what they wanted to hear but what they needed to hear... even if it made them enraged

F. Today’s outline:

1. A Great Man and His Mission

- a. The Man: Great in the Eyes of the Lord
- b. The Ministry: Preach and Baptize
- c. The Message: Repent and Get Ready

- d. The Mission: Prepare the Way of the Lord
- e. The Manner: “In the spirit and power of Elijah...”
- f. The Masses: Lowered by Sin, Raised by Grace

2. Fearlessly Telling the Truth: A Sample of John’s Preaching

II. A Great Man and His Mission

A. The Man: Great in the Eyes of the Lord

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” ³ 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.’”

- 1. The son of Zechariah & Elizabeth... born in their old age
- 2. Angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah...

Luke 1:15-17 “He will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. ¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”

- 3. His coming was foretold

vs. 3 “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.’””

Malachi 3:1 “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.”

Malachi 4:5-6 “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

- 4. Jewish expectations of Elijah
 - a. Elijah’s powerful ministry... confronting idolatrous King Ahab, declaring that there would be no rain except at his command for three ½ years, raising a little boy from the dead, boldly taking on 850 false prophets of Baal & Asherah... rebuking Israel:

“How long will you go on limping between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him, if Ball is god, follow him!”

- b. Elijah’s miraculous ascension into heaven in a chariot of fire... Elijah, one of only two men in all history who never died
 - c. Malachi’s prophecy that he would return someday sparked great interest; Jews believed the end of the world would occur when Elijah returned
 - d. At Passover, orthodox Jews place a chair and a cup for Elijah, to show their trust in the promise that someday Elijah will come back before the Messiah
 - e. Malachi’s prophecy 450 B.C. the last prophetic word to Israel before John appeared
5. John’s appearance: the desert of Judea
- a. Luke 1:80 says John grew up and lived in the desert until he made his public appearance to Israel
 - b. desert a desolate place... isolation, wild animals & poisonous snakes; very little vegetation; scorching hot days, frigid cold nights
 - c. such an upbringing stripped him of social graces... he was not a gentle man, nor would he ever tickle anyone’s ears... his words poured like fire and produced one of two things: **repentance or bitter opposition**

B. The Ministry: Preach & Baptize

- 1. John suddenly began to preach
 - a. Greek word implies a sudden appearance
 - b. **preach** is the word used of a herald announcing a coming king
- 2. Baptism: humbling for sin, then cleansing by grace (more later)

C. The Message: Repent and Get Ready

vs. 2 “saying ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near...’”

- 1. Repent = change your thinking about something
 - a. means more than mere regret or sorrow over sin
 - b. it means to turn around, to change directions in your mind

John Broadus: "Wherever this Greek word is used in the New testament, the reference is to changing the mind and the purpose from sin to holiness."

- c. it always begins with sorrow over past sins, but it never stops there
 - d. true repentance always leads to fruit... a changed life, as John will tell us
2. "The kingdom of heaven is near"
- a. powerful image... a near kingdom means a coming king
 - b. the theme of the entire Gospel of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven (he uses it 32 times... other gospel writers use "Kingdom of God")
 - c. the realm where God rules and is revered as sovereign Lord
 - d. no one is born into it, but all must enter it at some point
 - e. the Jews had waited all that time for the King to come... now John was saying "He's very near... so you better get ready!!!"
3. Get ready by repenting... get right with God... stop doing wrong, learn to do right
4. Kingdom of heaven has an outer and an inner aspect
- a. outer is visible, including everyone who professes to acknowledge God
 - b. inner is true, spiritual core... those who are truly broken over sin, who live in internal walk with God which produces fruit outwardly

D. The Mission: Prepare the Way of the Lord

1. Fuller understanding comes from the whole Isaiah passage

Isaiah 40:3-5 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken

2. John came to raise the valleys and level the mountains
- a. high places in Isaiah symbolize people's arrogance before God
 - b. low places symbolize the crushed spirits of people who feel they've been abandoned by God

c. The valleys were the simple people who came for baptism... they knew they were sinners and confessed their sins to be baptized

d. HOW did John level the high places? With the fire of his preaching

E. The Manner: "In the spirit and power of Elijah..." (vs. 4)

1. John's father Zechariah told that John would carry himself in the power & spirit of Elijah

2. The identification was made all the clearer by John's clothes and his style of preaching

a. John's clothes... like Elijah's

2 Kings 1:8 "They replied, 'He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist.' The king said, 'That was Elijah the Tishbite.'"

When Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire, his servant Elisha inherited his cloak and wore it as a symbol that he carried on with a double portion of Elijah's spirit... BUT John the Baptist wore his very clothes!!!

vs. 4 "John's clothes were made of camel's hair and he had a leather belt around his waist."

He also ate food of the desert... locusts and wild honey!! Just like Elijah, who had been feed in the desert by ravens, John got everything he needed from the desert...

b. John's powerful preaching... just like Elijah's

Jesus commented on John's clothing as a symbol of his power in ministry:

Matthew 11:7-8 "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet."

John was no "reed swayed by the wind"!!! He was a powerful rod which smashed down the arrogance of smug religious leaders... he was also able by his power to give hope to those broken and repentant enough to be baptized... and many did

F. The Masses:

Vs. 5 “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.”

1. These are the broken ones... John’s plain & fiery preaching broke their hearts
2. They admitted their sins openly... a sign of their repentance
3. John’s radical baptism
 - usually just filthy Gentile converts... but John baptized Jews!!!
4. John’s popularity... everyone wanted to see him! Last prophet had come 450 years before!

AMONG THE INTERESTED SPECTATORS WERE THE PHARISEES & SADDUCCEES

- A. Two of the three major religious parties of his day... Essenes were the third
- B. **Sadducees** the religious liberals of the day... scoffed somewhat at the Law of Moses, did not believe in angels, the resurrection of the dead, or anything supernatural... openly made deals with the Romans so they could keep their power; lived for the moment and totally relied on their own efforts; they tended to be extremely wealthy... emphasized human free will to the extreme
- C. **Pharisees** clung minutely to the Law of Moses, legalistically adhering to their traditions of interpretations; they were self-righteous and looked down on others who didn’t keep their regulations... they lived separated from the mass of sinners
- D. In some ways COULDN’T HAVE BEEN MORE DIFFERENT... yet they had one thing in common: total focus on achievements in this world; trust and reliance on own accomplishments; no sense of brokenness and grief over sin; common to both was a hypocritical dead externalism which cared nothing for the true inner life of God

II. Fearlessly Telling the Truth: A Sample of John’s Preaching (vs. 7-12)

1. No “tickling of ears”!! A shocking opening

⁷ 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?”

- a. John had no desire to soothe these people’s ears
- b. this kind of sinner the hardest to bring to repentance... shock tactics needed
- c. “brood of vipers” implies a nest of wriggling snakes... symbols of wicked evil doers

d. shocking because the Pharisees & Sadducees were immensely self-confident & satisfied

Luther: primary duty of a faithful preacher of the word is to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable... the Pharisees & Sadducees were comfortable in their sin, and seeking no answers; John needed to shock them awake

2. The danger: the coming wrath of God

vs. 7 *Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?*

- a. immense danger in the coming wrath of God
 - i) unpopular topic then as now... but no less real
 - ii) God doesn't just dislike sin... it makes Him angry

Psalm 7:11 "God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day."

- iii) Jesus clearly said it was the thing we should fear the most

Matthew 10:28 "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

- b. someday (sooner now than when John lived) the wrath of God will come on sinners
- c. nothing in the Sadducees & Pharisees' manner showed that they were ready for that day

3. God's solution: true repentance which always bears fruit

vs. 8 *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*

- a. sin leaves everyone of us in need of God's grace & mercy
- b. God called on Israel to a true repentance
- c. true repentance ALWAYS bears fruit... changed lives

People often ask "What about habitual sin?" Some sin pattern I just can't seem to get out of? God's answer is simple... bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; don't confess sins God without determining to turn from them

4. The Pharisees & Sadducees solution: worldly self-confident achievement

5. The false comfort removed

vs. 9 *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.*

- a. “We are God’s chosen people... He’ll never cast us off!!”
- b. No need for genuine repentance
- c. FALSE CONFIDENCE!!! The most dangerous trick of the devil

6. The warning intensified: “The ax is already at the root of the trees...”

vs. 10 *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.*

7. The true gospel preached: 1) A great Savior; 2) two possible baptisms; 3) a final separation; 4) two possible destinies

¹¹ *“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. ¹² 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.”*

- a. a great Savior... one more powerful than I am, whose sandals I am not fit to carry
- b. two possible baptisms: Holy Spirit and fire
 - i) total immersion... dipping down under
 - ii) fire not positive.. look at verse 10 & 12
 - iii) Jesus will totally immerse everyone in the world either in Holy Spirit or fire
- c. a final separation: the winnowing fork
 - i) wheat from chaff ii) wheat from weeds iii) good fish from bad iv) sheep from goats v) fruitful branches from unfruitful
- d. two possible destinies: heaven or hell
 - i) his barn = heaven

-face to face fellowship with God

-safety away from the trials and difficulties of this world

ii) unquenchable fire = hell

FIRE constantly associated with wrath of God against sin

-Sodom and Gomorrah burned with fire and brimstone

-Jesus also spoke often of the fire of hell... 8 times in Matthew's gospel alone

Matthew 5:22 "Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Matthew 25:41 "Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

-this fire burns forever and ever and cannot be quenched

III. Modern Application: What Are **You** Trusting In??

If John were here today, what would he say to us Southern Baptists?

- A. Same crucial issue faces us... are we "bringing forth fruit in keeping with repentance?"
- B. Are there patterns of sin in our lives that we make no effort to address
- C. Are we smug and self-satisfied, trusting in some worldly achievement to free us from the wrath of God?
- D. Concern over Southern Baptists:
 1. frequently membership rolls fattened with thousands of people who never attend anything
 2. a friend tried to weed these out with a year campaign of letters... motivating them to begin walking with God again; told them he would weed out those no longer interested
 3. they never responded to the letters or phone calls, but when he tried to reduce the rolls, some screamed about it
 4. FALSE CONFIDENCE... ANCESTRY, A RESUME, SPIRITUAL ACHIEVEMENTS
- E. Only genuine repentance and faith in Christ saves us from the wrath of God and eternal fire
 1. genuine faith ALWAYS produces fruit

2. sorrow for sin, striving to put it to death, love of Christ, consistent desire to obey Him