

May 8th, 2022

John, the First Witness for Christ

Luke 3:15-20

Read Luke 3:15-17... The people were expecting the Messiah to come, and they wondered if John was Him, but John made it clear he was not the Messiah (**John 1:19-20**), "This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' And he confessed, ...'I am not the Christ.'"

John was not the Christ, however, the people believed him to be a prophet (**Luke 20:1-6**), "On one of the days while He [Jesus] was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him, and they spoke, saying to Him, 'Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'I will also ask you a question, and you tell Me: Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men? They reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men, 'all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet."

John (**Luke 3:16**) came to baptize in water, calling the people to repent; but the One who was coming from God, the Messiah, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Water symbolizes a desire for a clean conscience, i.e., to acknowledge your sins, to publicly state you have sinned against God and are seeking God's forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit symbolizes spiritual birth into God's family, as a genuine believer who is marked and protected by God's Spirit.

Fire symbolizes judgment, for those who reject Christ do not have the Holy Spirit in them, and so they are condemned to the Lake of Fire.

The OT was clear that God was going to send His Spirit (**Ezekiel 36:27**), "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances," (**Ezekiel 37:14**), "'I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it,' declares the Lord."

See again Luke 3:17... [bible-ref.com] The metaphor used here involves the process of separating usable grain from inedible husks and stems. The first step is threshing, to knock grain loose from stalks. Next is winnowing. A farmer would use a pitchfork or similar tool to throw threshed grain into the air. This would allow wind to blow the light chaff to the side, while the good grain would fall back into the pile. [The good grain would be kept, while the] Inedible or useless material would be collected and burned (**Matthew 25:30-31**).

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Both the Old and the New Testaments use fire as an illustration of divine judgement (cf. **Isaiah 29:6; 30:33; Ezekiel 38:22; Matthew 7:19; John 15:6; Hebrews 10:27; 2Peter 3:7; Revelation 19:20; 20:10**).

The wheat (**Luke 3:17**) is symbolic of true believers, while the chaff, to be burned up, with unquenchable fire, are those who reject Christ.

Read Luke 3:18-20... John preached for many months in the wilderness of Judea, near the Jordan River, calling the people to repent of their sins, for the Messiah, who alone could save them, was coming.

John's message was not confined to those who came to the Jordan River, Herod evidently heard that John was calling people to repent of sin, or suffer the penalty of hell; this clearly offended Herod, who had John arrested and put into prison.

John's message and ministry overlapped with that of Jesus, for time, as both the disciples of Christ and the disciples of John were baptizing people. But we need to go to John's Gospel to get more information concerning that time period.

Read John 3:22-30... John the Baptist's ministry gives way to the ministry of Jesus. After Jesus' baptism and time of testing in the wilderness, He spends time alone with His disciples, before He begins His public preaching ministry.

Matthew tells us (**4:1**), "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil," and after these things [sometime later] (**Matthew 4:12**), "When Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee," and (**Matthew 4:17**), "From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Look again at **John 3:22...** Jesus left Jerusalem and went to Judea, "where He spent some time [*a considerable amount of time*] with His disciples, baptizing." **John 4:2** clarifies that, "Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were." Jesus did not baptize anyone!

During this time, John the Baptist went north to Samaria, baptizing at a place called Aenon [*lit. springs*]; (**John 3:23**), "because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized."

Jesus' ministry was increasing, yet many were still going to John to be baptized. Notice (**John 3:24**), this was before John was put into prison. Why did John the apostle record that information?

Well, perhaps because the Synoptic Gospel accounts (**Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19-20**) begin their narrative of Jesus' public ministry after John the Baptist had been arrested and placed in prison; whereas, John the apostle, in his gospel account, makes it quite clear that Jesus began His ministry before John was arrested.

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When John wrote his gospel, the Synoptics had been circulating for many years, so in order not to cause confusion or seem to be in contradiction with what the other gospel accounts recorded, John simply clarifies that Jesus actually began His ministry while John the Baptist was still alive and baptizing in Samaria.

John the Baptist never wavered in his subservient role to Christ. In **John 3:28**, we are reminded how John told his followers, 'I am not the Christ, 'but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him, 'and in **John 3:29**, John the Baptist images himself as *the friend [i.e., the best man]* of the bridegroom [*who is Christ*].

Note: Before a Jewish wedding, the best man has many responsibilities concerning the details of the wedding, one of those was to bring the bride to the bridegroom, so the ceremony could begin; but once the bride and groom are brought together, the best man's work is done and all the attention moves to the bridegroom.

There was never competition between John and Jesus, in fact, proclaiming Christ's coming, and directing the crowds to Him, was John's greatest joy; in **John 3:30** John the Baptist says, "He [*Jesus*] must become greater; I must become less."

John's purpose was to declare Israel's sin against God, and their need to repent and seek forgiveness through Jesus, God's Messiah [Savior].

Back to Luke 3:19-20... John the Baptist's teaching, evidently reached Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, who took personal offense at John's condemnation of sin. We are told that Herod was reprimanded by John, the verb here means a continuous, again and again, rebuke.

Herod Antipas, like his father (Herod the Great, who died in 4 B.C.) was a sinful man who showed no regard for God's judgement or authority.

It would appear that John's rebuke targeting the illicit and sinful affair between Herod Antipas and his brother Philip's wife, Herodias.

John the Baptist's continual rebuke of Herod's sin, along with the increasing popularity of John's ministry, brought him into direct conflict with Herod, leading to John's incarceration.

Luke ends the story of John the Baptist here, so we'll go to Mark's account to get the rest of the story.

Read Mark 6:17-29... Herod liked to listen to John and considered him to be a holy man, but John condemned Herod's relationship to Herodias (who was actually Herod's niece, and was married to Herod's brother, Philip). Most likely, Herod convinced Herodias to leave her rather weak and nondescript husband, in order to be his wife, and enjoy much more power and prestige.

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OT Law prohibited any sexual relationship with a blood relative [that is incest], but Herodias and Herod were also committing adultery, because Herodias's divorce from Philip was unlawful, and therefore, her marriage to Herod, was both sinful and unlawful.

John called it what it was, and Herodias wanted him put to death, to shut him up. But because Herod kept John in prison, Herodias couldn't get to him.

Then came the big celebration for Herod's birthday, with all the influential people of the region attending. Herodias's daughter (Salome), came in to entertain the guests by dancing; she was evidently very beautiful and seductive, and she greatly pleased the guests, so that Herod, wanting to look good, offered her whatever she wanted, up to half of his kingdom.

Salome went to her mother Herodias, to inquire what she should ask for from Herod, and Herodias said, "The head of John the Baptist," so Salome made her request, and Herod reluctantly complied, because he had sworn an oath in front of all his guests, and had to keep it.

And so, John was beheaded, and John's disciples, when they heard of his death, came and took away his body to lay it in a grave.

John's ministry was very short, but John serves as an example of greatness (**Luke 1:15-17**), "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

No wonder Jesus said (**Matthew 11:11**), "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."

John's life reflects characteristics of Biblical greatness: He was a powerful man, yet he served humbly (cf. **Matthew 3:4-6, 11, 13-15**). He displayed courage and was uncompromising in both his message and his life (cf. **Matthew 3:1-2, 7-10**).

In **John 1:29**, when John saw Jesus coming toward him at the Jordan River, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! The greatest work of John was to direct lost sinners to the Savior, Jesus Christ: the only Way to God, the only Truth of God, and the only Life with God. Proclaiming God's truth cost John his life on earth, but he gained eternal life in heaven.

The greatest thing any Christian can do is to proclaim the sovereign truth that God's Son came to die for our sins, and to provide eternal life for everyone who will repent, believe in, and follow Him.

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1John 5:11-13, "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

Do you know that you have eternal life?

2Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

2Corinthians 13:5, "Test [yourself] to see if you are in the faith; examine [yourself]! Or do you not recognize this about [yourself], that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"

Romans 10:9-10, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." **13**, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord [for the forgiveness of sin] will be saved," (**Acts 4:12**), "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved," [only Jesus Christ, God's Son, Who is both Lord and Savior].

Still not sure about your salvation?

Admit you are a sinner: we all are.

Ask God to forgive you: He turns no one away.

Believe in Jesus for salvation: He alone can save you.

Confess Christ as Lord: He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge over all things.

Demonstrate your new life in Christ in this way:

Pray to God and **read** the Bible daily.

Obey what **God's Word** says.

Participate in a Bible Believing and Practicing Church.

Tell others about Jesus Christ: Crucified, Resurrected, and Coming Again.

If you have questions about any of this, please ask me, and either I, or someone else in this church, will meet with you, pray with you, and make sure you fully understand the most important question that you will ever have to answer in this life: What are you going to do with Jesus Christ, i.e., who do you say He is?

Pastor Mike

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