

Pursuing God's fullness: Spiritual Violence of John the Baptist (Mt. 11)

¹ JESUS HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

² When John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" ⁴ Jesus answered..., "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear (Isa. 35:5-6); the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Isa. 61:1). ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." ⁷ As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ For this is he of whom it is written (Mal. 3:1): 'Behold, I send My (Father's) messenger before Your (Jesus') face, who will prepare Your (Jesus') way before You.' ¹¹ "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Mt. 11:2-11)

- A. In v. 6, Jesus warned the people to not be offended by what God does or does not do. Jesus knew that God was not going to deliver John from being killed. This would cause some to be offended.
- B. Jesus asked the multitude three times, what they expected when they went to see John (v. 7-9). Did they expect to see a reed shaken by the wind, or a man in soft garments or even a prophet?
- C. Jesus vindicated John by speaking of his courage (v. 7-8), saying he was more than prophet (v. 9), declaring that He was the Father's messenger who came to prepare the way for Jesus (v. 10), the greatest man ever born (v. 11) and the burning and shining lamp (Jn. 5:35). John heard the Father's voice at Jesus' baptism (Mt. 3:17). Gabriel said John would be great in God's sight and would operate in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk. 1:15-17).
- D. To understand the context of what Jesus was saying, we must understand the implication of a supernatural and transitional generation. A "***supernatural generation***" is one in which the majority of God's people witness the power of God on a regular basis. There are only three supernatural generations in history. First, the generation of Moses when God established the Old Covenant. Second, the generation of the apostles when God established the New Covenant. Third, the generation the Lord returns to establish the Millennial Kingdom. A "***transitional generation***" is one in which the way God moves among His people increases dramatically. For example, the measure of power and revelation that God's people experience is much greater.
- E. John's very presence was a statement from heaven that they lived in a ***transitional generation***. Jesus was asking the people if they understood the implications for their generation of the presence of a man of John's stature in God.
- F. When God releases greater measures of His presence and power, He requires a corresponding greater dedication. This is necessary for protection from God's zeal and Satan's counter attack.

II. THE KINGDOM SUFFERS VIOLENCE

¹¹ There has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the (New Covenant era) kingdom of heaven is greater (in opportunity) than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers (permits) violence, and the violent take it by force. (Mt 11:11-12)

- A. Jesus introduced two new ideas. First, that greater privilege and power in God was available. Second, that it would require spiritual violence to experience it.
- B. In the OT, there was a great limitation on what a believer could experience in God. The Spirit only rested on a small number of people (prophets, kings, judges) to “anoint” them to accomplish specific tasks. God had not yet opened the door for all His people to experience the deep things of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10). He opened this door after Jesus established the New Covenant by His death (Heb. 10:19-22). Thus, in the New Testament era, all can experience much more by the empowering and indwelling Holy Spirit.

¹⁰ The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God...¹² Now we have received...the Spirit...that we might know the things...freely given to us by God. (1 Cor. 2:10-12)

- C. The Kingdom of God now suffers violence. To “suffer” violence means that God “permits” (requires and rewards) spiritual violence in our pursuit of the deeper things of God. Jesus used the word “violence” to speak of a lifestyle of holy abandonment to God. Jesus was speaking of spiritual violence, not physical violence. Spiritual violence points to being willing to pay any price of self denial in seeking and obeying God. Radical obedience is violent because it is disruptive to our worldly pursuits. It violently confronts our sinful desires, pride and selfishness. It “violently” reorders our priorities. It reorders the way we talk, spend time and money, how we relate to our enemies, pursue comfort, success and honor, and express our sexuality.
- D. Spiritual violence speaks of holy intensity in meekness and in loving God and people. It disrupts our life. It disrupts the status quo that we have grown accustomed to. We declare war on our sin and a religious spirit. This has a dramatic or violent impact on the devil’s kingdom and religious systems. The source of our spiritual violence is the love of God and not fear.
- E. Jesus connected spiritual violence to the lifestyle of John. Jesus set him forth as a model of what greatness is in God’s sight. The measure of John’s greatness was not the number of people he impacted; it was the measure of his “spiritual violence” or his resolve to seek God without compromise. John is the premier example of wholeheartedness in a transitional generation.
- F. God suffers or requires and rewards spiritual violence. He is waiting on us to violently seek Him. He wants people with a spiritual fervor that will lay aside everything that gets in the way of obeying and loving God with all of our heart. This does not refer to being irresponsible. We do not need to abandon our God-given responsibilities to obey God. Jesus was speaking of laying aside compromise, selfish comforts, pride, fear, and religious reasoning. We must walk this out in the practical issues of real life. Most do not mind hearing sermons on radical obedience. What convicts and disturbs us is when someone lives it out in the way they spend time and money.

III. TAKE HEED TO WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS GOD'S HIGHEST FOR YOUR LIFE

²⁴ ***Take heed what you hear (believe about what God will give you). With the same measure you use (apply to your life), it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given (Mk. 4:24)***

- A. Take heed (be careful) in what you hear or in what you believe is God's measure of blessing for your heart. In other words, ***be careful in determining what you contend for*** in your experience in God. Most are too easily satisfied with too small a measure of experience in God.
- B. We need to be so careful to what we "hear" or buy into about our life vision because with the same measure that we use or apply to our lives, it will be measured back to us from God's hand. God will give more to those who "hear" what God desires to give them. Those who believe for only a small measure in God will miss out on much of what God desired to give them.
- C. God releases more of His power and presence according to the measure of our hunger for Him. Spiritual hunger comes as we get a vision to have everything that God will give the human spirit in this age. The book of Acts is not the ceiling. We are in the generation in which God will pour out the fullness of His Spirit. Hunger causes us to make radical changes in our lifestyle. When we alter our life to accommodate our spiritual hunger for more of God, then we are hungry.

⁶ ***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Mt. 5:6)***

IV. SEEKING THE FULLNESS OF GRACE: UNDERSTANDING 2 MEASURES OF GRACE

- A. The basis for our "introduction to grace" is our need for forgiveness. ***God automatically gives*** this to all who repent. He does this because of His compassion. We receive this without doing much to cooperate (except to repent of sin). The basis for the "fullness of grace" is our hunger for all that God will give the human spirit in this age. ***We must aggressively take it.***

² ***We have obtained our introduction...into this grace in which we stand... (Rom. 5:2 NAS)***

⁶ ***He gives more grace...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble... (Jas 4:6)***

- B. God offers greater measures of grace for those who persistently seek God with all their heart.

⁶ ***He gives a greater grace...God...gives grace to the humble... (Jas 4:6, NAS)***

¹⁷ ***Those who receive abundance of grace...will reign in life through Jesus... (Rom. 5:17)***

² ***Grace...be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God...18 grow in grace... (2 Pet. 3:2, 18)***

- C. God requires us to cooperate with Him in the grace of God. This is an expression of His desire for intimate partnership with us. ***God will not do our part*** and ***we cannot do His part***. If we do not do our part then some of the blessing that God would have given us is withheld. ***Our part*** includes making quality decisions to walk in spiritual violence which includes saying no to sin and pride, feeding our spirit on the Word with prayer and fasting, etc. ***God's part*** is to release supernatural influences on our heart (power, wisdom, desires) and circumstances, etc.

V. JESUS WOOS US WITH THE WEDDING SONG AND WARNS US WITH THE DIRGE

¹⁶ *To what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: "We played the flute (wedding song) for you, and you did not dance; we mourned (sang a dirge NAS, NIV) to you, and you did not lament." (Mt. 11:16-17)*

- A. Jesus rebuked His generation telling them that neither the wooing of God's love nor the warnings of judgment moved them. Jesus is Bridegroom, King and Judge. We must live in the paradox of two messages: the wedding song (Bridal paradigm) and the funeral dirge (End-Time judgments).
- B. These represent the two sides of wholeheartedness. There is a paradox of being lovesick with God yet carrying His burden of judgment. On one side we rejoice and on the other side we enter into the sufferings of Christ. We weep with great sorrow and yet we dance with great joy.

³² *You (Ezekiel) are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. (Ezekiel 33:32)*

VI. BEARING REPROACH FOR THE FASTED LIFESTYLE

¹⁸ *John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'* But wisdom is justified by her children (what it produces). (Mt. 11:18-19)*

- A. John lived the fasted lifestyle. He taught his disciples to pray which required fasting their time (Lk. 11:1), to give money and telling them that if they had two tunics or extra food to give to those who had none (Luke 3:11) and to fast food (Mt. 9:14). Israel briefly rejoiced in John's message then concluded he was demonized and dangerous. God will vindicate John and condemn those who rejected him on the judgment day. The wisdom of John's fasted lifestyle will be openly displayed for all to see in eternity.

³⁵ *He was the...shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. (Jn. 5:35)*

- B. David experienced this same type of reproach for his spiritual intensity with God.

⁷ *For Your sake I have borne reproach...8 I have become a stranger to my brothers...9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. 10 I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach. 11...I became a byword to them. 12 Those who sit in the gate speak against me. (Ps. 69:7-12)*

- C. The fasted lifestyle speaks of 5 expressions of fasting as set forth in Mt. 6:1-18, which includes giving, serving, praying (with the Word), blessing our enemies and fasting food. In this, we fast food, time, energy, money, and words. They are different forms of fasting. In these, we voluntarily embrace a "form of weakness" as we trust God to intervene on our behalf with His strength. When we fast we declare to God that we derive our life and strength from Him. Giving speaks of fasting money (giving our financial strength to others). Serving requires that we fast our time and energy as we invest them in others. Prayer is a form of fasting related to our time and emotions. Fasting food causes weakness related to physical and emotional strength. Blessing our enemies requires that we fast our words and reputation (self-preservation and promotion).