

Forerunners: The Spiritual Violence of John the Baptist (Mt. 11)

I. JESUS HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

- A. In Mt. 11, Jesus used John the Baptist as an example of dedication to God. John knew that he was going to die soon, so he sent his disciples to Jesus so they would know He was the Messiah. Jesus warned the people to not be offended by what God does or does not do (v. 6). Jesus knew that God was not going to deliver John from being killed. This would cause some to be offended.
- ²When John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” ⁴Jesus answered..., “Tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵the blind see, 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]. ⁶Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” (Mt. 11:2-6)*
- B. Jesus asked the multitude three times what they expected to see when going to John (v. 7, 8, 9). Jesus vindicated John by pointing out his courage (v. 7-8), saying he was more than a prophet (v. 9), and declaring him to be the Father’s messenger (v. 10) and the greatest man ever born (v. 11).
- ⁷Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? *Those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.* ⁹What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes...more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is he of whom it is written [Mal. 3:1]: ‘I send My messenger before Your [Jesus’] face, who will prepare Your way before You.’ ¹¹Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John...” (Mt. 11:7-11)*
- C. Jesus called John a burning and shining lamp. Gabriel said he would be great in God’s sight.
- ³⁵He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. (Jn. 5:35)*
- ¹⁵“For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Lk. 1:15-17)*
- D. Jesus understood that they were living in a “**supernatural transitional generation**” a generation in which the majority of God’s people witness the power of God on a regular basis. There are three supernatural generations. 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 when the Lord returns to establish the Millennium. A transitional generation is one in which God dramatically increases the way He moves in power through His people and how He relates to them. There is much more to contend for in the generation of the Lord’s return. John was more than a prophet (v. 9); his very presence was a sign that they lived in a supernatural transitional generation. Jesus asked the people if they understood the implications of this. When God releases greater measures of His power, He requires a greater dedication.

II. JESUS INTRODUCED TWO NEW IDEAS: MORE POWER AND MORE COMMITMENT

¹¹There 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. ¹²And 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. First, Jesus revealed that greater power was available to the people of God's kingdom. In the OT, the Spirit only rested on a small number of people (prophets, kings, judges) to "anoint" them to accomplish specific tasks. In the NT era, all can experience much more by the indwelling Spirit.
- B. Second, God requires "spiritual violence" to experience the fullness of the new privileges that we have in the new covenant. To "suffer" violence means that God permits, allows, and rewards it in our pursuit of the deep things of God. Spiritual violence is very different from physical violence. Spiritual violence points to being resolute to pay any price necessary in seeking God for more.
- C. It is violent because it confronts our sinful desires and pride. 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. It "violently" reorders our priorities and disrupts what we naturally pursue. It also disrupts the status quo in the kingdom and has a violent impact on the devil's kingdom.
- D. Jesus connected spiritual violence to the lifestyle of John. He set John forth as the premier model of wholeheartedness. The measure of John's greatness was not in the number of people that he impacted, but in his "spiritual violence" to radically seek God without compromise.
- E. Spiritual violence does not refer to being irresponsible. We do not need to abandon our God-given responsibilities to obey God. We must walk this out in the practical issues of real life.
- F. The source of our spiritual violence is the love of God and not fear.

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

²⁴Take 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 about—what you hear (accept or believe) as God's measure of blessing for your heart, circumstances, and ministry. Whatever we *hear* determines the measure we use or apply it to in our lives and, thus, the measure that God will give us. Those easily satisfied with a small measure of experience in God will miss out on much of what God desires to give them.
- B. 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. One with spiritual hunger will alter their life to accommodate the pursuit of more.

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

IV. SEEKING THE FULLNESS OF GOD’S GRACE

- A. When we are born again we receive an “introduction to grace” based on our need for forgiveness and God’s compassion. ***God automatically gives*** this to all who repent and believe in Jesus.

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

- B. There is “greater grace” that allows us to receive more than forgiveness. This fullness of grace is based on our hunger to have all that God will give. ***We must aggressively take it.*** God requires that we cooperate with Him in the grace of God. God will not do our part and we cannot do His part. This is an expression of His desire for intimate partnership with us.

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

- C. Never let go of your vision to be mighty in the Spirit, regardless of how much you fail. “Today” is always a new day in God’s grace because His mercies are new every day (Lam. 3:22-23).

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,¹⁷ 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 that generation, telling them that neither the wooing of God’s love (the flute), nor the warnings of judgment (mourned) moved them. We 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, the paradox of loving God, yet carrying His burden of judgment. On one hand we rejoice; on the other hand we enter into His burden.

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. A life that pursues God with spiritual violence is deeply connected to the grace of fasting. John lived the fasted lifestyle. He taught his disciples to pray (Lk. 11:1), give money (Lk. 3:11), and to fast food (Mt. 9:14). Many in Israel concluded he was demonized (v. 18). The wisdom of John’s fasted lifestyle will be openly displayed for all to see in eternity when God vindicates John.

- B. David bore reproach for his intensity with God. The fasted lifestyle includes five expressions of fasting—giving, serving, praying, blessing our enemies, and fasting food (Mt. 6:1-18).

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

VII. THE FORERUNNER MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

- A. Jesus called John the greatest man ever born (Mt. 11:11). No man has ever surpassed him in abandonment to God. We should listen carefully to what he said. The Church has lost much in neglecting John the Baptist. He is a model of what wholehearted pursuit of God looks like.
- B. In John's final statement in Scripture, he referred to himself as a friend of the Bridegroom. He opened his heart to share what he was feeling and how he saw himself.
²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. (Jn. 3:29)
- C. On May 7, 1997, in Assisi, Italy, the Lord said, "I will raise up 'friends of the Bridegroom forerunner messengers' who will prepare the Bride" (Jn. 3:29). We value John's life and teaching as the model of the forerunner ministry. His life is the clearest and most developed picture of the forerunner calling in Scripture. He was a down payment of a forerunner anointing at the end of the age. What John walked in is a promise of more to come.
- D. John the Baptist modeled the way to prepare a spiritual highway in his message in Lk. 3:7-20. He emphasized a 2-fold message—calling people to repent and announcing the coming of Jesus. He called people to live in righteousness. This is the only way that spiritual dullness is removed.
³He went into all the region...preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins ...⁸"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance"...¹⁰The people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"¹¹He answered... "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."¹²Then tax collectors...said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"¹³And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."¹⁴Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." (Lk. 3:3, 8-14)
- E. John also proclaimed the coming of Jesus to his generation.
¹⁶One mightier than I is coming...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. (Lk. 3:16-17)
- F. Forerunners call people to wait on the Lord to gain strength for their hearts. Many feel that their life is hidden from God and overlooked by Him. Waiting on God is the primary exhortation that Jesus gave to those preparing for the end times (Mt. 24:42-43; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-38; Lk. 21:36; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). Waiting on God is dialoguing with the Word and living in righteousness.
²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my just claim is passed over by my God"?...²⁹He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. ³⁰Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, ³¹But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:27-31)