



DATE: May 31, 2009

TEXT: John 1: 6-8, 19-34, 2:25-29

TITLE: "John IV: John the Baptist"

Have you ever experienced a time when you seemed to drift away from God? Have you ever experienced a time when you seemed to not hear from the Lord and your prayers seemed to hit the ceiling and bounce back? I know I have and I think every person goes through times like this. In a sense this was the situation in all of Israel in this early 1<sup>st</sup> century. If you read the Old Testament you see that God was constantly speaking to the nation of Israel. Prophet after prophet would come to the people and boldly proclaim "Thus saith the Lord." The last Prophet to do this was Malachi. Malachi spoke to Israel in the 430 B.C. For 400 years there had been silence. For 400 years the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Levitical Priesthood had been guiding and directing Judaism. What had become of the faith of the Jews? What path did the Pharisees lead this nation? They led them down the path of legalism! Judaism had turned into a religion of rules. I believe this is the great danger faced 2000 years ago and remains a gr4at danger today. *Religion turns relationship into rules.* 2000 years ago there was little love for

God... there was little intimacy with God... there was rules and rules and more rules.

Into this situation entered a man of God. He was quickly identified as a new prophet.

Once again a man was saying “Thus saith the Lord.” This man was name John and give the title

“The Baptizer.” John had a two-fold message. Matthew, Mark and Luke stress his first

message. Luke records these words of John the Baptist.... *Luke 3:7-9*

**John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9The axe 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."**

Not a happy message. Not a feel good message. Repent. Do not say “I was born into a Jewish family and this makes me a Jew.” I believe we could substitute the word “Christian into that statement. No one is born into the family of God! There must be true repentance. There must be a true turning away from sin... a turning away from legalism and rules and turning to the Savior.

We need to understand that Baptism was a very rare occurrence at the time of John the Baptist. Baptism symbolized the washing ways of sins... the same as today. However Jews did

not think they needed to be Baptized. Only Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism were baptized. That was very, very rare. But John's message was this... you Jews... you too need to be Baptized. You too need to see your sins and your need of repentance. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> message of John. I do not think we would like John today. He would be shunned and labeled a religious radical.

But John had another message. This is the message stressed in the Gospel of John. John stressed the fact of the coming Messiah. **“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”** The Kingdom of God is at hand... the messiah is coming. “Make way the path of the Lord.” God sent John to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ. John is the greatest witness to Christ who ever walked on this earth. I want us to look at the text in John and look at the ministry and the message of John the Baptist. I will share 4 lessons

**Lesson # 1** John always pointed to Jesus Christ. *John 1:29-30 states...*

**The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'**

John always pointed to Jesus Christ. He was one of those rare men who did not seek

attention and glory for himself but always pointed to another. Do you remember the old “Ed Sullivan Show? Every Sunday Night for year after year people would turn on the T.V. a watch who ever Ed Sullivan had on his show that night. It could be a man who could spin 30 plates at once.. It could be a great puppet show or it could be one of the greatest singers and entertainers of the day. Ed Sullivan was once asked what was the secret of his success he said... **“I am a pointer... I point to others who have great talent.”**

That need to be our role as Christians. We need to point to Jesus Christ. All that we say... all that we do needs to point to Jesus. Have you ever noticed in the bible where ministry takes place? No where in scripture is there a report of John the Baptist in a synagogue. Jesus upon occasion would visit a synagogue or even the Temple... but 99% of the time the ministry of Jesus was on the beach with the fisherman... in the mountains with the shepherds... in the homes of his disciples. Ministry does not take place here. This is not the place we need to point to Jesus. Out there is. In our homes.... in our work places... in our schools... in our neighborhoods. Let me tell you some of the men and women I have had the privilege to know who have pointed to

Jesus.

A couple were school teachers...Bill and Dorothy.  
 One was a worker for Penn power... Chuck.  
 One was a worker in a local mill... Tom.  
 Another was a engineer for a chemical company.. Mike.  
 Another was an accountant.. Harold.

I could go on and on... and truthfully, I purposely avoided naming people in this congregation... but I could name many, many people here in our midst. What sets these people apart? They point to Jesus. Not just here in church.... out there they point to Jesus. They impact others with the love and message of Christ. None are obnoxious. None are “Bible thumpers” They just always live for Christ and point others in that direction. They are the modern day John the Baptists.

Are you a witness for Jesus Christ? Are you always pointing to Jesus? Here at church... in your homes... in your schools... in your workplaces is Jesus being seen through you? Let me close this point with this statement... not everyone who sees Jesus in you will react positively. John the Baptist had men who hated him. Mostly it was the men who were comfortable in their religion. They did not want anyone to rock the boat. They did not want anyone to challenge

their nice comfortable religion. As a matter of fact.. They so hated John's message that they arranged for him to be beheaded. We too must expect some to react negatively to the message of Christ. It will often be the religious people in our paths. The irreligious will just ignore it... some comfortable religionists will hate the message of personal love for Christ. Our task is to point to Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of those around us.

**Lesson # 2** John pointed to the true Messiah. *John 1: 29, 32, 34*

**29**The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

**32**Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.

**34**I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Here are some amazing truths about Jesus Christ. He is a the lamb of God. Again remember this was not the message the Jews expected to hear or wanted to hear. They wanted a conquering Messiah. They wanted a king who would march in to overcome the Romans. Here is John pointing to Jesus .... clearing labeling him as the Messiah and stating that he is the Lamb of God. That he would die for the sins of the people.

But he also pointed to the fact of the Holy Spirit in His life. He was indwelt by the Spirit

of God. Today is Pentecost Sunday. We celebrate this fact... not only Jesus is indwelt.... every person who has surrendered his life to Jesus receives the same indwelling. We too have the Holy Spirit with us.

Finally John was clear.... Jesus is the son of God. He is the preexistent, living God. He is the Lord almighty.

We too must be a witness to the truth. This is hard in this day and age. Many people say they believe in Jesus but have little to no idea who Jesus is. We live in a day and age where the greatest authority on faith is Oprah or Phil. And many people see no contradiction between the teaching of Oprah and Jesus. People have turned Jesus into a comfortable good luck charm. The faith of “Highway to Heaven” or “Touched by an Angel” has become the faith of many people around us. Hear these words of Jesus... (*John 14:7*)

**"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

Jesus is the truth... we must proclaim the truth about Jesus... we must not twist the Gospel to fit our lives.

**Lesson # 3** John the Baptist was a witness for Christ by his worship and exultation of Jesus

*(John 3:29-31)* **The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.**

**He must become greater; I must become less. 31" The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.**

What is our greatest witness for Christ? It is not our words. It is not even necessarily our actions. What is our greatest witness? Our love of Christ.

I love this illustration given by John. The bride and the bride groom. We, the church are the bride and Jesus is the bridegroom. And John says we have the joy of the close friend of the bridegroom. In the past two weeks I have been to two weddings. They are places of joy and love. One of the greatest joys I have is when the bride begins to come down the church aisle. Yes, I first look at the bride and admire her beauty... but then I turn my attention to the groom and watch his face as his bride approaches him. The look of love and joy. That needs to be our witness to the world. Worship and joy. We are the bride of Christ. We share in his love and his commitment to us. Rejoice. Celebrate... and share that joy with others. That is our greatest witness... our love for Christ. Let us always point to Jesus

AMEN