

John the Baptist: A Study in Greatness

Texts: John 1:6-8; Luke 1:5-7; 13-15; Matthew 11:11

William Shakespeare wrote, "Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them."

We see in the life of John the Baptist he was born into greatness. Luke 1:15: "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." And greatness was thrust upon him (John 1:19-23).

John was prophesied in the Old Testament: Malachi 3:1; Malachi 4:5, 6; Luke 1:15-17; Isaiah 40:3-5. Even his appearance matched the prophet with whom he was aligned: Matthew 3:4; II Kings 1:8.

Many believe that greatness comes only to the people who make much of themselves and put themselves first. Jesus said in Matthew 23:11, "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant." Let's study the life of a truly great man, one of God's greatest servants:

1. GREAT PEOPLE ARE NOT EXEMPT FROM DOUBT.

Matthew 11:2-6. One of the Greek words for doubt is διακρίνω (*diakrino*) (Mark 11:23). It means to be in two minds. Jesus said in Luke 12:29, "...neither be ye of doubtful mind." The Greek word for doubtful mind in this verse is μετεωρίζω (*meteorizo*). This is the root origin of our word "meteor." Literally rendered, it means to raise in mid-air, i.e. (figuratively) to suspend. It is the pain of non-resolution and being spiritually troubled due to the suspense of not knowing. Another Greek word for doubtful thoughts is διαλογισμός (*dialogismos*) meaning: a man with an inward debate, the thinking of a man deliberating with and arguing with himself (Luke 24:38). Yet another word for doubt is διστάζω (*distazo*), meaning to falter, to hold back and to distance oneself (Matthew 14:31).

John received his assurance from the Scriptures.

Jesus gave John affirmation by referring back to Bible verses that John was very familiar with as found in Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 61:1-3.

This is a good reminder to doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs.

2. GREAT PEOPLE POSSESS FORTITUDE.

Matthew 11:7; Matthew 3:7-10. John may have been like the bruised reed that the Lord would not discard. Jesus took John's doubts and weaknesses and strengthened his faith. John's faith became so strong that he willingly faced death with full assurance that Jesus was who He said He was (Matthew 12:20; Isaiah 42:3).

3. GREAT PEOPLE ARE NOT PREOCCUPIED WITH THE TRIVIAL.

Matthew 11:8; Luke 7:25. In 1975, John Molloy wrote a book entitled *Dress for Success*. The premise of the book was that successful people all dress

in a certain way. Some things never change. The Scribes of John's day were men who would dress very modestly, almost plain. Then under the reign of Herod, many of the scribes began to discard their normal attire and dress in the similar pompous attire of Herod. John illustrates that clothes do not make the man. It is the inward character that determines true greatness. Jesus said in Matthew 23:27: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."

Mark 7:15: "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man." Mark 7:23: "All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

3. GREAT PEOPLE ENCOURAGE OTHERS.

Matthew 11:11b, "...he that is least in the kingdom of heaven...." Mark 9:42: "And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."

Mark Twain said, "Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."—Mark Twain.

"A great person is one who affects the mind of their generation" - Benjamin Disraeli.

4. GREAT PEOPLE RISE ABOVE THE STATUS QUO.

Matthew 11:12-15.

James Fennimore Cooper said, "The man who has no other existence than that which he partakes in common with all around him, will never have any other than an existence of mediocrity."

When Theodore Roosevelt was in Paris on April 23, 1910, at 3 p.m. at the Sorbonne, he gave his most famous speech ever given. It was named by him, *Citizenship in a Republic*, but was later dubbed, *The Man in the Arena*:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Conclusion:

The tandem ministries of John the Baptist and our Lord and Savior intersected and gave a very strong message to the world as seen in Matthew 11:16-19; Matthew 9:14, 15; John 3:28-30.

There were two popular games among the children of Jesus' and John's day that were played in the market place. This was similar to our parks strategically located near the shopping areas of the community. These two games were weddings and funerals. When the children would play wedding, there would be a bride, bridegroom and attendants. When the children would play funeral, there would be a corpse and mourners. As the games would begin, the children would play their instruments and call for participants and most all of the children would join in. Of course, there would always be those party poopers who would look at their peers as immature and ridiculous. They would refuse to participate. Our Lord is making the parallel that John came and preached judgment against those who did not come into the kingdom. He was symbolized as the player in the funeral. And he was ridiculed. Jesus was symbolized in the wedding, calling all to the feast. And He was ridiculed. We understand the Lord (as He often did) used children to help in understanding the kingdom of God.

-Pastor Pope-