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Last week's message ended with the disciples of John the Baptist returning to his prison cell to tell him that Jesus' miracles fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah, and that those who are not offended by Jesus are blessed. Today's passage begins with Jesus telling the crowd that John was the fulfillment of a prophecy that had taken place before their very eyes. That prophecy also declared who Jesus is.

²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. Luke 7:24 -26

There were those around Jesus who heard His answer to John's disciples. So that they would not think less of John for asking if Jesus was the One, Jesus clarified the greatness of John. He began by reminding them of the reason they went out to see John. A reed shaken by the wind was a metaphor for an easy-going life. John was a fireball of zeal. He gave no quarter to the comforts of this life. He was all out, one-hundred percent servant of the living God. He didn't dress in comfort but wore coarse camel hair like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8ⁱ; Matthew 3:4ⁱⁱ). He told it like it was and feared only God. They went out to see him because of the conviction in his message, and the power with which he spoke.

Prophets delivered God's message to a particular group of people at a specific time. They were messengers of the Word of God and spoke eternal truths that we can apply to our day. John was the fulfillment of a prophecy that referred to him as God's messenger. The people went out to him to see and hear a prophet. That meant they had better remember and take to heart what he said to them.

²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." Luke 7:27 Jesus quoted Malachi 3:1 to describe John. In that prophecy God is speaking. God said I will send my messenger before me. Jesus changed the pronouns from me to you. In other words, Jesus heard it spoken by the Father to Himself, ie: I will send my messenger before you. The messenger of God prepares the way for Jesus who is the messenger of the New Covenant.

¹ "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 3:1 Look carefully at the verse Jesus is quoting. The LORD of hosts is speaking. He sends the messenger before Himself. Jesus is one with the Father, so Jesus hears it as John the Baptist who prepared the way for Him. He comes suddenly to His temple, the temple in Jerusalem, which may refer to the triumphal entry. **Jesus is the messenger who not only tells us of the New Covenant but inaugurates it with His own blood (Luke 22:20ⁱⁱⁱ). He is the One in whom we delight because He paid our sin debt.**

Jesus is saying John is special because he alone had the opportunity to get the hearts of Israel ready for His coming, the coming of the Messiah. Other prophets spoke of

the Messiah, but John prepared His way with the fiery, uncompromising message of repentance (Matthew 3:2^{iv}).

Gabriel predicted John would prepare the way. Luke 1:17 ¹⁷ *and he will 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 for the Lord a people prepared.*”

That was a reference to Malachi 3:1. Zechariah heard that and referred to it when John was born. Luke 1:76 ⁷⁶ *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,* He had a clear understanding that his child would fulfill that prophecy of Malachi, which must have been very exciting as the whole nation was expectantly waiting for the Messiah to come. I would be surprised if Mary and Elizabeth didn't discuss this when they were together before the birth of John.

²⁸ *I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*” Luke 7:28 To that point in time John's special role as the messenger preparing the way of the Messiah and the uncompromising way in which he continually yielded to the Holy Spirit made him the greatest person to ever live. So why did Jesus add that the least in the kingdom is greater than he?

Those in the kingdom must be greater than the one who announces its coming. This does not mean that John is not now in the kingdom. What it means is aside from the righteousness we have in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21^v), John was the greatest man to live, even greater than Abraham and Moses! We can point to compromises in the lives of those great men, but none are recorded about John's life. His divinely appointed role was greater as well, for while they ushered in the old covenant, John was preparing the way for the new. That was a real paradigm shift for the Jews. They saw Abraham and Moses as the great fathers of the nation. But Jesus is ushering a kingdom that is much more inclusive than one people group. John was preparing the way for the One who would draw people around the world to the faith that Abraham had in God. It was much more than a physical nation. It is the worldwide kingdom of God. The first David was king over a land region, the Jewish people, and those he physically conquered. The second David (Hosea 3:5^{vi}), King Jesus, is King of kings over all nations and He conquers not just bodies but hearts all around the entire world (Psalm 2:8-12^{vii}; Hebrews 12:28^{viii}).

²⁹ *(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)* Luke 7:29-30 It appears that the people understood exactly what Jesus was saying, for in accepting John's baptism they had prepared their hearts for Jesus and the new covenant He would make possible, making them children of the kingdom of God. They declared God's way is just. It's a way of saying God's way is right. The words of John and God's call to repentance through him split the nation into the humble and the prideful. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3^{ix}) and the nation was brought into the valley of decision. It is the same message King David understood when he penned Psalm 32. He wrote of the blessedness of forgiveness when we confess our sins to

God and turn from them (Psalm 32:1^x,5^{xi}). It is the same message that Jesus preached at the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 4:17^{xii}).

The prideful Pharisees and lawyers refused to repent and be baptized and were thereby rejecting God's greatest messenger and refusing to prepare their hearts for the Messiah and the new covenant. The promise of this new covenant was proclaimed by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jeremiah 31:31-33^{xiii}; Ezekiel 11:19,20^{xiv}) This new covenant promised to do for people what the Pharisees were trying so hard to do in their own efforts, put God's law in our hearts. But the law that the prophets were predicting was not the 613 laws of Moses but the Great Command to love God with our all and our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27^{xv}) which is the foundation for all of God's laws. Pharisees refused to enter God's kingdom, but preferred their own works, the self-righteousness that comes through deeds of the law. What a contrast between humility and pride! They wanted to keep drinking the old wine of rules and regulations because they took pride in how much better they were at it than the common people.

Lest we skip over this warning thinking we don't pride ourselves in the law, let me put it in other terms. I could become so familiar with preaching, communion, Bible study, that it is merely a job. I could pride myself in church attendance and Scripture knowledge, thinking I must be better than others, after all, look at all I do. As the prophet Isaiah said, ¹³ *... this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,* Isaiah 29:13 We can take pride in religious practice without having love for God.

We can think that because we come to church, tithe, and don't cuss, get drunk, or watch vile movies we are good Christians. We must always remember the good deeds in God's eyes come from a surrendered heart in an intimate relationship with our loving Creator, and if that is not the case, the works are merely prideful shows that are filth in God's eyes (Isaiah 1:13-17^{xvi}; 64:6^{xvii}). Our sins need to break our hearts, for we realize they are the reason our Savior suffered on the cross. If walking in the flesh does not grieve us, we have either let sin callous our hearts or we have never known salvation. John's uncompromising commitment to total surrender should be our heart cry because we love our Savior for all that He has done for us (Romans 12:1,2^{xviii}).

³¹ *“To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’”* Luke 7:31,32 Jesus commented on the Pharisees' and lawyers' refusal to repent and receive John's baptism and thereby rejection of Him. The big events in communities of that day were weddings and funerals. In the small villages, everything would shut down so that the town could celebrate or mourn. Children's way of playing like adults would be to pretend like one or the other of those events were taking place. Children would play wedding or funeral and some children liked imitating one more than the other. Both involved flutes but were very different in tone. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees were like children who refused to join in the games. They didn't like either one. Then Jesus explained what the two styles represented.

³³ *For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'* ³⁴ *The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'* Luke 7:33,34 John was an ascetic. He did not partake in any form of luxury. He was the last of the office of the prophets of old whose sole priority was to hear the voice of God and convey His message (Luke 16:16^{xix}). Any niceties were considered a distraction. In Jesus' analogy John is represented by playing funeral. Jesus on the other hand ate and drank with sinners (Luke 5:30^{xx}). He was joyful. He represented a wedding. John the Baptist even used that analogy speaking of their different styles (John 3:29^{xxi}). But the Pharisees' self-righteous, judgmental spirits condemned both styles of ministry (Deuteronomy 21:20,21^{xxii}). To them, pride in religious routine was more important than God's heart, and we could say even more important than the words from God they were saying they honored. That can be said because they were ignoring the prophetic promises taking place before their eyes.

The judgmental self-righteous are still with us. If you don't do things the way they think is right they will find fault with you, your church, one thing or another that is said. I've seen pastors that loved God and spoke the truth fired because they preached the Word. The vilest accusations were hurled against them. In most cases it comes from those who feel they are losing control over what they see as *their* church. Sometimes the accusations are about motives. Who can defend themselves against what someone thinks is in their heart? It is an unverifiable accusation. Other times it is a simple mistake or even a good deed that is misinterpreted and blown out of proportion. Those who want to stay in control and feel the church belongs to them will always find fault. That is why many smaller congregations have a pastoral change every two or three years. It turns people away from wanting to be a part of any church.

There are also individuals who want church to be exactly to their liking. "Don't get too serious, or don't be so light hearted," they will say. They will complain about the music being too slow or too fast, too old or too modern. They'll say the preaching is too intellectual or too simple, too evangelical or too charismatic. No matter what tune is played, funeral or wedding, they don't want to play along unless you will play their game with their rules. When there is no humility that comes from the conviction of sin, pride will always find fault with something. No church is perfect. But we all need fellowship with other humble souls that know our continual need for Jesus and a willingness to overlook unimportant things we would prefer were different for the sake of unity and love for the Lord and one another. A person who recognizes how much grace they have received will extend grace to others (Matthew 5:7^{xxiii}).

³⁵ *Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.* Luke 7:35 Those sinners and tax collectors said God was justified in providing salvation through repentance and faith. They experienced the heart change and the grace that John and Jesus proclaimed, and knew what they proclaimed was true. Our experience of the work of the Holy Spirit within us as we read the Word and go through our day assures us of the truth we have received. Our lives should testify that God's wisdom is right. Many theologians believe the personification of wisdom in the Old Testament refers to the Messiah (Proverbs 3:13-

18^{xxiv}; 8:22-36^{xxv}). I agree. Jesus is justified, shown to be right, by the transformed lives of His humble followers. We aren't the religious elite. We are just sinners saved by grace. We realize the words of the hymn are true, "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling."^{xxvi} People are confronted with the various worldviews, but they can see which one is right by seeing the effects on our lives.

I've been among Hindus and seen the disregard for life, for they say life is simply a cycle that one continues on when they die, and whatever your fate is, it is simply karma. I've lived among Buddhists and seen Buddhism practiced by most of its adherents as a cultural custom with little or no faith attached. I've heard people try to defend Islam, but if you read the Koran for yourself, you will find it is a religion with a government attached whose aim is to conquer the world and force all to submit to Allah, their version of God. The two sects of Islam kill one another over who gets to rule. Of course there are good things in each, but none measure up to the value of life, the freedom from guilt, the joy and peace that we have in Jesus. Our faith isn't just for mental giants or the those with strong wills, it is for the weakest and the least (1 Corinthians 1:26,27^{xxvii}). It is for all who will recognize how fallen we are and then humble ourselves. That is why we sing, "Lord I need You oh I need You, every hour I need You, my one defense, my righteousness, oh God how I need You!"^{xxviii}

Every religion including Christianity can be practiced in a prideful attitude of how spiritual we are, but true followers of Jesus know our spirituality is all due to Jesus and what He has done for us, rather than how well we do what He asks. True Christianity starts and continues in humility (James 4:10^{xxix}). The selfless acts that follow are not to gain favor from God or man, but because His life in us is generous and loving.

Is this your experience of the faith, or do you refuse to respond to either the funeral or wedding game? If your faith is just about doing instead of being, and today you desire to humbly repent and recognize your need for Jesus' grace and mercy, sing this song from your heart to the Lord! And if you had been walking with the Lord but right now you are just going through the routine, you too can sing this song as a plea from your heart. He hears us. He is gracious. He welcomes us into His arms of loving grace.

Questions

- 1 Why did Jesus ask who they went to see?
- 2 What verse did Jesus say John fulfilled?
- 3 Who are the two different messengers in that verse?
- 4 How did Jesus change the verse and why?
- 5 Who else said the verse was about John?
- 6 Why is John the greatest prophet?
- 7 Why didn't the Pharisees receive John's message?
- 8 How were they compared to a children's game?
- 9 What comes before faith in Jesus?
- 10 What comes with faith in Jesus?

ⁱ **2 Kings 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

ⁱⁱ **Matthew 3:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 22:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

^{iv} **Matthew 3:2 (ESV)**

² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

^v **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{vi} **Hosea 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

^{vii} **Psalms 2:8-12 (ESV)**

⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

^{viii} **Hebrews 12:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

^{ix} **Luke 3:3 (ESV)**

³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

^x **Psalms 32:1 (ESV)**

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

^{xi} **Psalms 32:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

^{xii} **Matthew 4:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

^{xiii} **Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)**

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

^{xiv} **Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)**

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

^{xv} **Luke 10:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

^{xvi} **Isaiah 1:13-17 (ESV)**

¹³ Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

^{xvii} **Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)**

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

^{xviii} **Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{xix} **Luke 16:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

^{xx} **Luke 5:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

^{xxi} **John 3:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

^{xxii} **Deuteronomy 21:20-21 (ESV)**

²⁰ and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' ²¹ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

^{xxiii} **Matthew 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

^{xxiv} **Proverbs 3:13-18 (ESV)**

¹³ Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, ¹⁴ for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. ¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. ¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. ¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. ¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.

^{xxv} **Proverbs 8:22-36 (ESV)**

²² "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, ²⁶ before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. ⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, ²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man. ³² "And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. ³³ Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. ³⁴ Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting

beside my doors. ³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, ³⁶ but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.”

^{xxvi} Rock of Ages, words by Augustus Toplady

^{xxvii} **1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (ESV)**

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

^{xxviii} Lord, I Need You by Matt Maher

^{xxix} **James 4:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.