

The Preacher

The Birth of John

Luke 1:5-66

May 27, 2018 am

HDBC

He was **brash, bold, and courageous**. A **politician's worst nightmare**.
He was **branded a renegade** by religious leaders.
He **said what was on his mind**, with little concern for what others thought.
And, though he died a pre-mature death, **he changed his generation**.

I am speaking of John, the Baptist. The New Testament prophet who was called to prepare the way for the Lord. *Baptist* was a nickname earned because of his practice of baptizing individuals willing to repent and turn from their sins.

But, he was more than a baptizer. He was a preacher . . . **THE preacher** of his day. He had a message that shook his nation and prepared the way for the coming Messiah. He boldly and consistently proclaimed truth, even when it hurt.

Today we start a four-part series examining the life of this controversial man.

First, I want to dispel a myth. He is not called "the Baptist" because he was the first Southern Baptist. There were no Southern Baptists in that day. In fact there were no Baptists. The first Baptist denominations **originated in England and Holland in the early seventeenth century**. Our own SBC came into being in 1845 as a result of a dispute with northern Baptist churches over whether or not our mission board should appoint slave holders as missionaries.

Our predecessors in the Baptist churches in the south were on the wrong side. This is why in 1995 the SBC formally apologized for its complicity in perpetuating the evil institution of slavery as well as the discrimination and systemic racism that continued to persist in our nation and our churches even into this generation.

That was an important beginning of a process of confession, repentance, forgiveness and healing that is not yet complete. We still have a long way to go.

So, John the Baptist was not the founder of our denomination. However, he was a key figure in the early days of the New Testament. We don't normally think of him as being one of the GREAT men in history. But he was. In fact Jesus said there was no greater man born of woman than John. Pretty good recommendation! We have much we can learn from his life and ministry.

Today we look at his birth. The story is found in Luke 1. **Note three things:**

1. Faithful Couple (5-14)

John's conception was a miracle from God. Not like Jesus. This was not an immaculate conception, but it was a miracle, none-the-less. This becomes clear when we learn about his parents.

A. His Father was a Priest (5)

First thing is that John's dad was a priest. He and his wife were "in the ministry" as we would say. They were servants of the Lord.

B. His Parents were Righteous (6)

They walked blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. Luke seems to want us to know that their obedience was not simply external, but also internal. A thing of the heart.

C. His Parents had not Children (7)

There was a tremendous stigma attached to having no children. This was especially taxing on the woman. It was often viewed as some judgment from God.

2. Shocking Encounter (8-17)

There were many priests in those days. Priestly duties were allocated according to divisions of priests. When it was his division's time he went to Jerusalem. While there he was given the honor of burning the incense. This was such a high honor it could be done only once in a lifetime.

He entered the holy place to burn the incense before the Lord. The incense being a picture of the prayers of the people ascending to the Lord. It would have been a deeply moving experience for this man of God.

While there he was visited by an angel. (10-12) There has been 400 years of silence from Heaven. No messages from God. Heaven has been quiet for many generations. Now, when the Lord does speak, he does so to this humble priest.

Amazing that God chose to speak with a priest at all and to reveal himself in the temple. The temple service had become so politicized that it was far from what God originally intended. In general, the priesthood was pretty corrupt.

Notice his response of fear. (12) Natural. The angel's first words were of comfort. Zacharias was reassured.

Then he was told that his prayer had been answered. (13) What prayer? For a child? Yes. Surely he had earlier prayed for a son. But most likely that prayer had long since ceased to be on his lips. Could also refer to his prayer for the coming of the Messiah. The angel said he would have a son. His son would be a special person with a very special ministry.

A. His Character

1) Great in the Sight of the Lord (15)

That is all that matters. Matters not how others gage your greatness. The real question is "What does God think?"

2) Drink no Wine (15)

His heart, mind and body would remain pure. He would be so focused on the Lord and his calling that he would reject the normal comforts and pleasures of the world. We would also see this in the clothing he wore and the food he ate. He broke with the norm in every area.

3) Filled with the Holy Spirit (15)

He would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. Not only does this indicate a divine gift from God totally unrelated to anything John had done, but also indicates an ongoing yielding of his life to the Holy Spirit. He would be Spirit-led!

B. His Mission

1) Forerunner of the Messiah (17)

In the ancient world a forerunner was sent before a king to announce the king's coming so the people and towns could get ready.

He would be the one to prepare the people through his preaching. He would lead the way by breaking through the hardened traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He would be the New Testament equivalent of Elijah. Challenge the status quo.

2) Turn Heart of Fathers to Children

The family unit would be restored as fathers would be called to renew their commitment to the children. We need a modern day John the Baptist to do this for us.

3) Turn Disobedient to Obedience

He would call his generation back to obedience to God. Not just outward obedience to the law, but personal obedience from the heart.

Zachariah stayed too long in the temple. Upon coming out the people wanted to hear from him. Customary for the priest to come out and pronounce a blessing. Zachariah could not do so. In asking for a sign from Gabriel, he was struck with the inability to speak.

After a week his time for service was up. He left Jerusalem to return home. True to his word, God caused Elizabeth to become pregnant. She chose to remain in isolation for five months. Then was visited by Mary, who had just learned that she would be the mother of Jesus. The time came for her boy to be born. Let's pick it up in verse 57.

3. Surprising Name (57-66)

Gabriel had named the boy. His name would be John. (13) It means "God is gracious." Later, at his circumcision and official naming there was some disturbance among the family members and friends.

They expected him to be little Zac. Elizabeth insisted that his name would be John. So, they appealed to the daddy. He asked for writing tablet and confirmed the name. Immediately he was able to speak. Notice his first words. (64)

He began to praise God. Not only for the boy, but for the confirmation that God was up to something. God was about to do a great thing in Israel. Their son would be a key player. He would not be named after his father for he would follow his own path . . . one chosen by God.

Takeaways:

1. God does things in unconventional ways

He picked an older couple who were childless.

The sign he gave to Zachariah was a physical impairment.

He insisted on an unexpected name.

Don't expect God to conform His actions to your expectations!

2. God cares about the things that are important to us

God was in the process of bringing someone into the world who would prepare the way for the Son of God. This is big stuff. The plan of redemption that was formulated in the heart of God before the worlds were created, is about to be carried out. God was about to take human flesh and become the sacrifice for all mankind. This was a big event.

In the middle of doing this, he cared enough to also bless this elderly couple with a much-wanted child. He could have brought this child into the lives of a young couple. But in choosing them, he was not only blessing the world but also blessing them with a special gift.

3. God's word is trustworthy

Last thing recorded in the Old Testament is found in Malachi.

"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. "And he will restore the hearts of the

fathers to {their} children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

This was a prophecy concerning the coming of John the Baptist. Jesus later made that very clear. For 400 years the people had waited. Many probably had lost hope. Some had given up.

Time cannot diminish the trustworthiness of God's word. He was doing exactly as He said He would do. He can be trusted. Sometimes we may lose hope because the things we see around us seem to cry out "where is God?" This event, the birth of John, is but one example of the trustworthiness of God.

4. God has a plan for every life

God had a plan and calling for John long before he was born. This is not unique to John. This is true of each one of us. God knew you before you were conceived. God created you for a purpose. You were no one's mistake. You are a masterpiece personally created by God Himself. He has a plan for your life and that makes you important!