

"Upon this rock I will build my church"

Matthew 16:18

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JOHN THE IMMERSER

INTRODUCTION:

A. Who was John really?

1. His birth was prophesied by an angel and then brought about by God when his parents were

beyond the childbearing years (Luke 1).

a. These facts point to a great man.

b. Yet John had no choices to make concerning his conception and birth.

c. God knew the kind of man he would become, and God had plans that He knew would be fulfilled in the life of John as he grew to manhood in the care of Zacharias and Elisabeth.

B. But, as is the case with all valiant men, John's willingness to obey God when he was confronted with

difficult choices made him a valiant man.

C. Men apparently had various ideas about the identity of this great man. Jesus corrected some of those ideas and revealed his true identity.

DISCUSSION:

I. HE WAS A MAN WHO STOOD FIRM.

A. Like faithful preachers of God's word in every age, John had to work against contrary winds.

1. Judaism was passing away, and he was given the duty of preparing the way for the Messiah.

2. The people were wedded to their sins and he was given the job of calling them to repentance.

3. He, along with Christ, was criticized unfairly for things that had nothing at all to do with matters of right and wrong.

4. He was able to win the battle between humility and self exaltation (assuming that he was ever tempted to use his God-given position as a stepping-stone to higher personal glory).

5. In the face of all these contrary winds he preached the message that God wanted him to preach, endured criticism, and recognized his lowly position relative to the Son of God in all that he did.

B. After John sent two of his disciples to inquire concerning Christ, Jesus asked the multitudes

concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" (Matthew 11:7b).

1. If they had gone in search of such a weak-kneed, feeble mouse, they did not find one

in John!

2. Instead they found a man of God with his feet firmly planted and his mouth ready to speak a word on God's behalf.

a. He called upon sinful men to repent of their sins (Matthew 3:1-3,7-9).

b. He gave them a clear and unequivocal warning of the judgment to come (Matthew 3:10-12).

c. He applied his "general" doctrine to the very specific sins of those who came

to him (Luke 3:10-14,19,20).

3. He was not among those who were "always learning and never able to come to a

knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7).

4. He was not among those spiritual babies who were "tossed to and fro and carried

about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14).

5. He knew the truth and stood firmly for it.

a. His message was not muddled with uncertainty and ambiguity.

b. His outward show of confidence was due to his inward reliance upon God for his teaching and action.

C. Like the little hero of Holland who kept his finger in the leaking dike until he was relieved by others who could deal with the problem better and more permanently than himself, John stood in the gap between the Old Law and the ministry of Christ with firm resolve to prepare the way by preaching and doing what was right.

D. There is a need for you to stand like a stone wall for all that is right and against all that is wrong in our day.

1. Right is right and wrong is wrong. Truth has been revealed and error has been exposed in the word of God. Your confidence in God's word ought to be as strong as that of John the Baptist (John 8:32).

2. The real question is this: Will you find the courage to really live and speak the truth while the contrary winds blow hard against you?

a. Will you speak the truth no matter how unpopular it may be?

b. Will you practice the truth no matter who may oppose your doing so?

c. Will you warn the lost no matter how much the lost world may protest?

d. Will you attempt to reclaim backsliders even though they might hate you for your efforts?

e. Will you contend for the faith at the risk of being branded by those who press for unauthorized change as a trouble-maker?

f. Your answers to these and similar questions will help you to measure your

own willingness to be a valiant man, like John, who will stand firm.

II. HE WAS WILLING TO FOREGO SOFT LIVING FOR GOD'S CAUSE.

A. A life of comfort and luxury cannot be the primary aim of anyone who would be a worker in God's vineyard.

1. The gospel must be taken to the uttermost parts of the earth and those who take it must be willing to live in conditions that are not ideal or even to their liking.

2. The gospel must be sent to all men and those who send it must devote a sizable portion of their income to the cause of Christ. In order to do so they must place limits upon what they will possess that otherwise would not have to be.

3. The word of God requires us to devote time and attention to the work of God that could otherwise have been spent acquiring material comforts.

4. The dishonest gain acquired by many in the world is not available to the Christian.

B. Jesus asked the multitude concerning John: "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings houses" (Matthew 11:8).

1. If they had gone in search of such a vain, ostentatious peacock, they did not find one in John.

2. Instead they found a man appropriately dressed, physically equipped, and mentally toughened for his wilderness work.

a. "And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4).

b. They saw a man who was willing to live under harsh conditions in order to do the will of God.

c. They saw a man who would rather go to a jail cell and face death than to

compromise one iota of his God-given message (Luke 3:19,21).

C. No soldier has ever won a battle on silk pillows. No athlete ever won a prize in an easy

chair. No farmer ever gathered a great crop by spending the season in bed. No man of God has ever been able to do his duty while seeking first and foremost to do what is comfortable.

1. Moses had to endure desert sand, violent enemies from without, and irritating

complainers among the Israelites.

2. Paul had his thorn in the flesh.

3. Jesus had His cross.

4. You have yours if you are going to be a faithful child of God.

D. "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in

warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he completes according to the rules.

The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops.

Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. Remember that

Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the

point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will also deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself"

(II Timothy 2:3-13).

1. The next time you have to choose between what is right and what is comfortable, be valiant enough to choose what is right.

2. The next time you must choose between speaking the truth and retaining a friendship, be valiant enough to speak the truth.

3. The approval of God is worth more than all of the human pats on the back in the world and it is worth doing at the risk of losing all sources of comfort.

III. HE WAS A GREAT PROPHET.

A. Like the mighty prophets of old, John had a message for the people.

1. He knew the source of his message.

2. He knew the urgency of his message.

3. He knew the authority of his message.

4. He understood his position as being that of a simple messenger of the message.

B. Jesus asked the multitude again concerning John: "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. "For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' Assuredly, I

say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the day of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 11:9-15).

1. Those who had gone out into the wilderness in search of a prophet found what they were seeking.

2. Here was a man who boldly and clearly delivered his message without first holding

his finger in the air to determine the direction of the political winds blowing about him.

a. He called upon all to repent and revealed that the kingdom of heaven was then "at hand" (Matthew 3:1-3).

b. He cautioned the Jews not to trust their relationship to Abraham for salvation (Matthew 3:9).

c. He warned the people of God's wrath and showed them the choice that they must make (Matthew 3:10-12).

d. Having declared himself unworthy and less important than the Christ, he

revealed to his large audience that Jesus is the Messiah (Luke 3:15,16; John 1:19-34).

e. Having had the unspeakable privilege of baptizing our Lord, he stood beside Him and witnessed with his eyes and ears the confirmation of the Father and the Holy Spirit that this was the Son in whom the Father is well pleased (Matthew 3:13-17).

3. Jesus declared him to be a GREAT prophet.

a. He asserted clearly that no greater mortal had ever lived (Matthew 11:11,12).

b. He declared him to be "Elijah" who was to come. Brave. Bold. Powerful. Courageous. John was so much like the man who by God's power had stood virtually alone to defeat the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel that he was called by his name and declared to be no less than Elijah (Matthew 11:11-15).

c. Think of all the great men of the past ages: Noah, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David... None of these was greater than John.

C. Just as there was a need for a man like John to prepare the way for the Messiah and His kingdom, there is a need for men who will press the cause of Christ in the modern world.

1. Like Esther and Mordecai were needed to keep God's people from being swept away in their day.

2. Like Paul and the apostles were needed to stand as a restraining influence upon the

false teachings and practices of their day.

D. You are needed to stand for the truth that sets men free in our day.

1. Jesus declared that "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John (Matthew 11:11).

2. This is both an awesome and humbling pronouncement.

3. Equipped with the full revelation of God's truth on this side of the cross and Pentecost, we have a message for the world that is complete, powerful, and essential to all men who would be saved.

4. Our trust in God rests upon greater examples and clearer promises than were possessed by Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, or anyone living before the Christian age.

5. Our valiance ought to reflect the fact that we are standing upon the shoulders of all those great men who obeyed God in the past and prepared the way.

6. Courage, boldness, humility, confidence, and truth are yours if you will simply trust God and do His will.

7. Timidity and indecision will not mix well with these ingredients. Like oil and water, they simply cannot remain together. You must choose what you will retain and what you will reject.

8. God calls you to valiance.

CONCLUSION:

You have no control over some matters relating to your life. You may have been reared in poverty or amidst luxury. You may have had the greatest saints or the sorriest sinners for parents. These do not determine your

valiance.

God has placed HI will within your reach. Grasp it. Choose to hold firmly to it. Allow God to comfort you with His word even if you must endure worldly discomfort in order to walk in His ways. Speak it to all who will hear. This choice, and its daily application, determines your valiance.

Tim Nichols

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