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John the Baptist: The Man and the Messenger; Matthew 11:1-19

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Introduction – The heroes of Scripture stand out to us as great examples of faith. They speak when we are often silent. They stand firm when we would often cower. They are courageous and bold. They are holy and set apart. They are not entrapped and enslaved by the world. They are heroes, and often we imagine them larger than life, larger than they truly are. Heroes of the faith are still human and sinful. Yes, they have their strong moments, but they have their weak moments too. Sometimes the Bible sheds light on their weaknesses and sins for good reason. First, that while we would be encouraged to follow their example of faith, we would be sure never to follow them for faith. Second, we learn from our heroes not only in their high moments, but in their low moments too.

John the Baptist is one such hero. Here is a man who forsook the comforts of the world and the applause of men to give his life to do the Lord's bidding. Even in the face of King Herod, John the Baptist did not bend and compromise the faith, which landed him prison and eventually cost him his life. He is indeed a hero of the faith.

But heroes are human. John the Baptist, the great forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, lost heart in the furnace of imprisonment. In his high moment, he is standing by the Jordan preaching repentance. He is an example to us to stand for truth. In his low moment, he's discouraged, depressed, and confused in the trial of persecution. He is an example to us then as well. Just as God had a word for him in his doubt, God has a word for us in our days of doubt and discouragement.

- I. The Man Who Needed a Reminder (vv1-6)
 - a. Now wait a minute. How in the world is John asking this question?
How in the world is John the Baptist, of all people, doubting the deity of Jesus?
 - i. This is the same John the Baptist that in Luke 2 leaped for joy in his mother's womb when Mary visited Elizabeth and was pregnant with Jesus.

- ii. This is the same John the Baptist that in John 1 saw Jesus headed down to the Jordan and declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”
 - iii. This is the same John the Baptist that in Matthew 3 hesitated to baptize Jesus because he said, “I need to be baptized by you.”
 - iv. What has happened? Has John lost his faith? V2 says John was in prison. Prison happened. Persecution happened. John was being treated wrongly for doing the right thing. John was being treated unfairly and poorly. Sitting day after day in a gloomy, lonely, dirty prison.
 - v. Doubt slowly crept in. Discouragement slowly took hold. Darkness slowly weighed on his soul. He hadn’t lost his faith; he’s just temporarily lost his way.
 - vi. I suppose John, in his dark cloud of doubt, may have been wondering, “If Jesus is the Christ, the promised Savior and King, the redeemer who delivers us, then why am I in prison? Why do the righteous continue to suffer and the wicked continue to reign?”
- b. Look friends at the compassion of Jesus.
 - i. He didn’t say, “I’m ashamed of John. I can’t believe John. Why is he so weak? He’s not living up to his calling.” No friend, Isaiah 42:3 says, “a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.”
 - ii. Rather He told John’s disciples, “Go and tell John what you hear and see:”
 - iii. You see friends one of the ways our Lord is compassionate to us in our suffering is by sending our brothers and sisters to us to testify and bear witness to the goodness and faithfulness of God and to the hope of the gospel of Christ.
- c. Then beginning in v5, Jesus sent to lonely, doubting John the Word of God.
 - i. Isaiah 35:5,6; 61:1
 - ii. In John’s great despair and doubt, in his weak moment of faith, Jesus gave him two verses of Scripture to cling to, to rekindle his faith, to awaken his soul, to strengthen him in his weakened state.

- iii. John, don't be plagued with doubt. It is me. I am He. Believe John. Rejoice John. I am here. Salvation is here. Yes, judgment will come in time. God's people will be vindicated in time. God's enemies will be defeated in time. But today is the day of salvation. Don't be offended by me John; trust in me John.
- d. Dear church, our greatest source of comfort and strength in our days of despair and doubt and weakness is always, always the Word of God. John just needed to be reminded. And sometimes so do we.

II. The Messenger Who is Remembered (vv7-15)

- a. Jesus spoke in defense of John to the crowds who would have heard of his doubt. Not only does He look after John in his despair, He also makes sure the crowds do not misjudge John's humanity for weakness or loss of faith.
- b. Vv7-8 are rhetorical questions. Anyone who was witness to the ministry of John would know the answers to be a resounding NO. John was no fickle follower, as characterized by the reed shaken by the wind. He didn't bow or succumb to the latest trend or political correctness. He proclaimed repentance. He wasn't a soft man with no backbone trying to keep up appearances or trying to maintain social standing. He wasn't a people-pleaser as characterized by those who never get their hands dirty.
- c. Vv9-10 – No John was a prophet. – John declared the word of the Lord, no matter what the response or reception may be. He declared truth. He called people to repent and get right with God and look for the Messiah.
 - i. Yes, he was a prophet. But he was more than a prophet. He was the last prophet. He was the forerunner, the announcer, the town crier. He did more than the prophets of old who spoke of the Lord's coming. He pointed out the Lord who had come!
 - ii. V10 is Malachi 3:1
- d. In vv11-14 Jesus continues to defend John explaining his unique role in redemptive history. Vv11-12 have historically been difficult verses to understand. We can begin by looking at vv13-14 because they are meant to be explanatory of vv11-12, "For."

- i. There Jesus is referring to Malachi 4:5. John the Baptist is Elijah who is to come.
 - ii. So up until the ministry of John, the Law and the Prophets were waiting for the arrival of the Promised One. John was here when the Promised One arrived.
 - e. V11 – There is no one greater than John the Baptist because he had the privilege of announcing Christ’s arrival and introducing Him to the world.
 - i. And yet, embracing Jesus is even greater than announcing Jesus!
 - f. V12 – The opposition to the gospel has increased now that the Christ of the gospel has arrived! So it is no easy task, it is no comfort-laden path, it is no road of ease to embrace the gospel. That’s why John is in prison. It’s not a life of ease to take Jesus as your life in a world that opposes Jesus.
 - g. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Jesus used two verses from Isaiah to prove that He was the Messiah. He used two verses in Malachi to prove that John was indeed the forerunner of the Messiah. And if John is the forerunner and Jesus is now here, then Jesus is the Messiah. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
 - h. Sadly, so many in Jesus’ day and our day did not have ears to hear.
- III. The Hearers Who are Responsible (vv16-19)
 - a. Jesus is saying that so many in His day are like selfish children whose arrogance is astounding. They only want you if you play their game. They only embrace you if you do what they want you to do. If you don’t roll to the beat of their drum, then you are dismissed. The ignorant, arrogant autonomy that believes reality is self-determined is astounding. If you are not what we think you should be, then you are not God. That perspective didn’t end in Jesus’ day did it?
 - b. Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds. Jesus, in referring to Isaiah to himself and Malachi to John is saying, “You don’t validate us; God’s Word validates us. We are not justified in doing your bidding; we are justified in doing the Lord’s bidding.”
 - c. It’s not what we think God should be, or Jesus should be, or salvation should be, or sin or heaven or hell should be; it’s what God’s Word says. The fear of the Lord; that is wisdom.

Conclusion – He who has ears to hear, let him hear.