

“HE IS MUCH GREATER THAN I AM”  
TO SEARCH FOR THE KING SERIES #2  
Psalm 29, Acts 19:1-7, Mark 1:4-11

We started this series, “To Search For The King” last week with the account of the Wise Men seeking out the “new-born king of the Jews,” and we discovered five things that helped these Magi find Jesus. They paid attention to what was going on around them; they trusted God’s guidance to take them where Jesus was; they humbled themselves before Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords; they honored Him with costly gifts; and they proclaimed Jesus to be God’s Messiah, the one who had come to redeem Israel from their sins. We discovered how we, too, can apply these things into our own lives in order that we might also find Jesus as our own King, Messiah, and Savior.

Today we look at another person who was searching for the Messiah King, John the Baptist.

As a part of the birth narratives in Luke’s Gospel account of the life of Jesus, we see that Jesus and John were cousins, John being the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth who was a cousin to Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus. As we recall the account, **Elizabeth was miraculously six months pregnant** with John when the angel Gabriel went to Mary announcing that she would be the mother of Jesus. So there was a six month difference in their ages. Yet John was to be the harbinger of Jesus, announcing to all of Judea that the Messiah had come from God.

During Gabriel’s visit to Zechariah, telling him that Elizabeth was going to have a child in her old age, he told him that he was to name the child John. Gabriel told Zechariah, *“He will be a great man in the Lord’s sight. He must not drink any wine or strong drink. From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again; he will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; he will get the Lord’s people ready for him”* (Luke 1:15-17).

John’s purpose was to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah. We have no record of John and Jesus ever getting together as they grew up, yet, each of them learned the traditions

of their Fathers as Jews. They were raised learning the teachings of the Law and Prophets. John would have heard about God's promise of a Savior who would rescue Israel.

So from the very beginning of his life, John was **called by God to preach** and ready the people for the Promised Messiah. He would be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, which was "*God said, 'I will send my messenger ahead of You to open the way for You.' Someone is shouting in the desert, 'Get the road ready for the Lord: make a straight path for Him to travel'*" (Mark 1:2-3). As he grew up, then, John, filled with the Holy Spirit, would live his life according to the Laws and prophets, following the Lord's ways. He remained pure and holy before the Lord so that he could accomplish this great thing that the Lord had called him to do. Listen to how he became the "messenger" Isaiah had foretold. This is Mark 1:4-11. (READ Mark 1:4-11)

John recognized that he was the messenger before the Messiah. He was not the Messiah, but "*one shouting in the desert...make a straight path for the Lord.*" His was the duty to get the people prepared for the coming of the Lord. So he **called the people to repent** of their sins, to change their ways so that they conformed to the ways of the Lord God found in the Scriptures. John called the people back into conformity of the ways of God so that they might be a pure and holy people before the Lord. Even though they were living under the domination of a foreign country, John called the people to align themselves with God once more so that He might be pleased with them again.

His preaching did not fall on deaf ears. There were "*many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem (who) went out to hear John*" (Mark 1:5). They were interested in what he had to say. They were holding on to the prophecies of the leaders of old who called the people back into alignment with the commands of the Lord God. The people were eagerly seeking the Christ of God, too.

The first step in the process of seeking the Messiah of God was to let go of the things of the world, and conform to the ways of God. This means they needed to confess their sins to God and repent of those sins so that they might transform their lives back into the image of God. If they were to seek the Lord, they had to give up their pursuits of living in the world's ways. Turning from the sinful

practices of the world would prepare their hearts so that they might be open to seeing the One that God was sending to them. If John was the messenger, then there would be another who would come as God's Messiah.

So what did it mean when John called them to confess their sins and repent? In Luke 3 we hear the people call out to John, "*What must we do then?*" (Luke 3:10). If they were to repent of their sins, what actions needed to follow to show that they had changed their ways?

So John lists some things that they needed to do. "*Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it*" (Luke 3:11). Surely God has supplied us with an abundance of all things, so to repent means to give up the pursuit of material riches and begin to look at the needs of those around us who have less than we do. We are to begin to share the resources that God has given to us with those who are in need, and that will begin to show our hearts are focused on God's ways rather than the world's ways.

When the world tells us, "Get all that you can, in any way that you can, from all the people you can, for as long and as fast as you can," John begins to turn us in another direction so that our focus is not on the acquisition of things, but the generosity of what we do have with those with less. As John Wesley has stated it, we need to "Give all we can, to as many as we can, in all the ways that we can, for as long as ever we can." You see, it's not "the one with the most toys wins," but rather, "the ones with the most are to be sharing the most so that all might win."

Now I know some of you are thinking, "That's exactly what the government is pushing." Well, there's a difference. While the government is planning to demand that we give up our affluence for the sake of the poor, the illegal, the foreigner and the oppressed, John suggests that when we repent of our sin of greed, we naturally come to the conclusion that God has supplied all our needs, so we surely have enough to meet the needs of those around us who are in difficult situations and need our assistance. While one demands that we give up our affluence, the other invites us to open our eyes and see the opportunities to touch the life of another out of genuine love and care and demonstrate our faith by how

much we care for one another. We see that in the last verses of chapter 4 of the Book of Acts, where all the believers of Jesus were freely sharing all they had so that everyone had enough.

John goes on to address other issues to demonstrate our repentance. He says to the tax collectors, *“Don’t collect more than is legal”* (Luke 3:12). Here he is addressing the proper conduct of business. In the business practices of the day, tax collectors could demand not only the part of the Roman tax, but they would increase the amount so that they could skim off the top for themselves. John calls them to stop cheating the people and start dealing appropriately with what is required.

So for us, John calls us to evaluate our business dealings and make sure that we are being fair in all things. We are not to have big packaging, with little within the packaging, making it seem like we get a lot, but in reality get very little for our money. We are not to gouge another by selling our products at inflated prices, especially when they need it. I marvel at the price of gas, how it always goes up when people will be traveling the most, like during holidays, yet goes down when everyday travel happens. And I always wonder why it cost me so much for the few bags of groceries that I take home with me from the store. NO! John says, be careful with how you conduct business so that you don’t *“collect more than what is legal.”* Make sure that your business practices are just and right.

Then John instructs us a little more about what repentance looks like. To the soldiers, John says, *“Don’t take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely. Be content with your pay”* (Luke 3:14). In that day, soldiers could exact their own tax from the people, demanding them to pay extra for their services. And if they refused, they would often make false accusations against them to force them to pay-up. Like the police officer in Chicago who pulled an out-of-state driver over, accusing them of speeding in a 25 mile per hour speed zone, and then telling them that he would let the ticket go if they would pay the money to him. Those in leadership positions were to deal appropriately with the people, and to be content with what they were receiving as income. While everyone wants a little more than what they have already, John tells us to be happy with what we have, and to treat others with respect and dignity.

These were the signs that John listed as being true repentance from the sins of the world. They were calling the people to focus on being the people of the Lord rather than people of the world. They are calling us to give up our worldly ways and begin seeking the things that are above (Colossians 3:2).

John was called to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah, and as he confronted them with their sins, the people began to gain hope. And as we repent of our own sins, and begin dealing with one another as God wants us to deal with each other, hope may begin to arise among us, too. Those around us watch to see how we treat one another, and when we show love and respect and treat others with dignity, people notice it and are encouraged by it. When we live in care for one another, they like what they see and are attracted to follow our example. As we live our faith every day, folks will notice.

So along with repentance, John offered baptism as a sign of the repentance of the person. He used water as a symbol of washing away the sin of the person, putting to death the things of the flesh and becoming alive to the things of God. This was the outward sign to all the people around that the individual was giving up their sinful ways and were now taking on the ways of God. They were repenting of their sinfulness. They were asking God to wash them, body, soul and spirit, so that any sin active and growing within them would be removed. They were now conforming to the things of God's commands, seeking His ways rather than the ways of the world.

In his search for the King, John was calling the people to prepare for the Messiah by repenting, turning away from things that God hates and turning toward things that God loves. John pointed out the sinful practices of their day, and the people confessed their sins and were baptized in the Jordan River (Mark 1:5). They eagerly sought out the change in their life so that they might be prepared for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah of God. They were willing to make the changes in their lives so that they might become holy once more in the sight of God. They would no longer seek the approval of men, but desired the approval of God over any other.

John was drawing their attention to another who would come after him, one who would not only baptize with the water of repentance, but with the Holy Spirit, giving power to those who believed to do

the things of God. Repentance was the first sign of seeking the King. Baptism with water was the second sign of seeking Him, and receiving the Holy Spirit was the third sign that a person truly sought out the King. The Holy Spirit would bring His fire into the life of the individual and would refine them further, burning off the dross of that person's life, leaving them truly pure and holy before God. God's Messiah would bring the Holy Spirit to anyone who would seek Him, turn from their wicked ways and follow the commands of the Lord once more with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

So it was, as John was calling the people to repent and was **baptizing them with water** as they came to him, that Jesus "*came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan*" (Mark 1:9). Jesus didn't need to be baptized as a sign of repentance, for He was already pure and holy before the Lord God. In fact, as Matthew shares the account, John protested Jesus' coming to him for baptism. "...*John tried to make him change his mind, 'I ought to be baptized by you,' John said, 'and yet you have come to me!' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so for now. For in this way we shall do all that God requires'*" (Matthew 3:14-15).

Jesus was demonstrating to the world that He was no longer Jesus, the carpenter. He was changing His focus from the ways of this world to follow the ways of His Father, God. He was turning from living as ordinary men, to begin His living as the Messiah. This was the turning point in Jesus' life that changed not only His occupation, but His direction in life. His repentance was not from sin, but from the lifestyle of a carpenter to the lifestyle of the King, the Messiah of God. Jesus fully embraced His Father's plan for Him to be the Savior of the world, and in that way He would be doing all that God required of Him.

So John relents, and watches Jesus go into the waters of the Jordan River. "*As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, (John) saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are My own dear Son. I am pleased with You'*" (Mark 1:10-11).

John's search for the King had been fulfilled! Right before Him stood God's Messiah, the Savior of the world, Jesus of Nazareth! This is the One who would bring the Holy Spirit to the people!

This is the One who would take the sins of the people upon Himself and pay the terrible price for those sins. Imagine John's delight – the very person whom he had been getting the people prepared for stood right there in front of Him, confirmed by God the Father through the affirmation of the Holy Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. It wasn't an eagle! It wasn't a condor! It wasn't a hawk! All of them are predators, signs of aggression and force. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus like a dove, the symbol of peace and life given by God.

So what now was John to do? His whole life and ministry was focused on getting the people ready for the Messiah, and there He was, standing in front of him. Was it now time for him to retire and simply become one of Jesus' disciples? No! There were still so many people who had not yet heard, so many who had not yet repented in preparation for the Messiah. There were so many more who needed to turn from the ways of the world to the ways of God.

So having seen Jesus the Savior, having seen God's Hand on Him through the giving of the Holy Spirit, John continued his work of calling all people to repent and make their way straight for the Lord.

In fact, we see in John's Gospel that the very next day, John starts telling his disciples that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me, but He is greater than I am, because He existed before I was born.' I did not know who He would be, but I came baptizing with water in order to make Him known to the people of Israel.' And John gave this testimony; 'I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on Him. I still did not know that He was the one, but God, who sent me to baptize with water, had said to me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen it,' said John 'and I tell you that He is the Son of God'"* (John 1:29-34). John's voice of preparation for the people had now become the voice of confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah, the SON OF GOD.

He continued His ministry of calling people to repentance. He continued His calling from God to prepare the people for the Messiah, only now, he knew who the Messiah was. He knew that Jesus, the

Son of God, was the promised Messiah for the people of Israel to take their sins away and make them pure and holy before the Lord again. So he reached out to all the people, even those who were in government, to call them to repent of their sins. He stated that he “*must decrease and Jesus must increase*” (John 3:30), but John continued his work as the messenger proclaiming the coming of the King.

So it was that John confronted Herod Antipas, king of Galilee, for his unlawful taking the wife of his brother, Philip, as his own wife. John openly exposed the adulterous act, telling Herod, “*It isn't right for you to be married to Herodias!*” (Matthew 14:4). This infuriated Herod, and others in the palace, so Herod had John arrested for daring to confront him. John had dared call the king of Galilee to repent of his sins, and because he remained true to his calling of preparing the way of the Lord for the people, he desired that even the king prepare himself for the true King of the Jews, Jesus. But not all people were open to his message, and this landed John in prison.

But Jesus' popularity grew and He did mighty things before the people to prove that He was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ long prophesied. As John sat in prison, hearing from his disciples of all that Jesus was doing, he wanted one last assurance that he had not wasted his time and life proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. So sending a message to Jesus, he asked once more, “*Are you the one (I) said was going to come, or should we expect someone else?*” (Luke 7:19). John now wanted full affirmation that his job of calling the people to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah was fulfilled, that indeed, Jesus was the Christ of God. And Jesus confirmed his search once more by responding that He really was the Lord, the Messiah sent from God.

John's search for the King consumed him, and when he found the King, he continued to live his life as a witness to the King of kings, Jesus, before all the people. And Jesus lifted him up, saying, “*John is greater than any man who has ever lived*” (Luke 7:28).

Our search for King Jesus does not end with our acceptance of Him as the Savior, but throughout our lives as we daily live for Him as a testimony to all people that He is the Messiah. Live it well, in Jesus' name! AMEN.