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*18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people. 19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, 20 Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.*

I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know John the baptist again. We spent some time with him in the study in the gospel of Matthew but it seems we don't return often enough to consider this important life and what we can learn from his example for us.

Especially in our time, in our day and age, it is critically important to pay attention to John's example. Jesus said John was the greatest man ever to live up until his time. We should pay attention then to John's life and John's example if we have any desire at all to be pleasing to our God and our Lord.

I'm excited to have this opportunity this morning to try to visit an important passage that speaks loudly to our generation. Let's jump right in and see what the Spirit has for us. How can John the baptist be relevant to people in 2019?

Three important things jump out at me. There are probably more.

*15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were*

*wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ,*

The people were in a state of expectation. First prophet in over 400 years, and he's obviously the real deal. God is suddenly visiting His people. John is the fore-runner to Messiah. Everybody's in a state of expectation.

But, let's think about the human condition. The evening of Nov. 8th and the dawn of November 9th 2016, many people were glued to their television sets in anticipation. There was something similar happening in America. Something many people can relate to.

Luke says the people were in a state of expectation. That is what we witnessed 2 years and a couple of months ago. Expectation. Anticipation. And it's because we believed that one way or another, our lives would be forever altered depending on a single person.

Christians believed if Hillary was elected, open persecution against christians would follow with total loss of religious freedoms. So, many of them voted for a megalomaniac instead. The only other choice.

We are subject to expectations that one person will change our lives. We understand what Luke is talking about here.

If Messiah comes, our lives will be totally different. He will sweep in and deliver Israel from Rome, and we will be a sovereign nation again without wicked nations ruling over us.

Everything will flourish. There will be ease and comfort and safety and plenty. Every man will sit under his fig tree. Life will be good. Better than we've ever imagined.

They were like children going to bed on christmas eve anticipating opening presents the following morning. That was the atmosphere in

Israel. Expectations based on one man bringing life altering change. Messiah is coming soon. Our lives are going to be altered. It's going to be great.

But, John has a different message for them. It isn't going to be how you think it's going to be. You think it's all about this world here and now. And your anticipation is based on how it's going to be for you. In our short-sighted broken state, that's the natural place we go.

This is all about me and my life and my well-being. God's going to send the messiah and my life is going to be great. But that isn't how God is working out His plan. God has bigger fish to fry than giving us ease, here and now.

John's going to give them a wake up call. He's going to tell them; I'm *not* the messiah and when He gets here His mission is not going to be what you're anticipating. Listen to his answer;

*vs. 16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

There's nothing in those words that aligns with broken human expectations and anticipations of ease and comfort and good life now.

There's everything in those words about salvation for broken people. Jesus mission isn't to give you a better life here in Satan's kingdom. Jesus mission is to fit you and clothe you for life in His kingdom in a different time when He returns and vanquishes Satan and rules as King of kings in this world.

So, John's message is very simple. You're anticipating the kingdom of God, the authority to reign of God, but you're not clothed to be in that kingdom. Your anticipation, your expectation is wrong. It's different than what God requires. It's for a kingdom that is less than what God requires.

Listen to how Jesus characterizes the situation He encountered in Israel in the parable about the King's Son's wedding banquet; Matthew 22

*1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. 3 “And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 4 “Again he sent out other slaves saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited, “Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.”’ 5 “But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, 6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. 7 “But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. 8 “Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 ‘Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’ 10 “Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.*

*11 “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, 12 and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. 13 “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14 “For many are called, but few are chosen.”*

This parable is an exact picture of God calling people to come to His banquet, and people saying, we're not interested in you or your banquet, how 'bout you come and give me what I want and make my life here and now easy.

And God get's a little insistent. Come on, everything is ready! I've gone to great cost to prepare this event. And the broken people of this world say, we told you, it's all about us, not about you and we've got other stuff to do. And these slaves of yours are really starting to get on my last nerve.

So the King throws open the invitation to everyone, not just the original people who were called. The slaves go everywhere and call people to the King's banquet.

But there's another twist in the story. The people at the wedding banquet must be clothed for the wedding. They have to have wedding garments. And the ones who are improperly attired, get thrown into the outer darkness. A place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Frightening.

There is a crowd that has come out to see the John the prophet show, and they are full of expectations about messiah and how it's going to be for them when He arrives. It's all about them, not Him.

And John says, He's coming alright. But you're perceptions of Him are too low. When He comes, the greatest prophet of them all isn't worthy to even do the lowest possible job.

For these jews, removing sandals and washing feet was a job no Israelite would do. It was beneath them. That was a job for slaves. And John says, the difference between Messiah and me is that I'm not worthy to do the lowest common denominator job.

The greatest man ever born to women isn't qualified to do the lowest

slave's job. First message. Your thinking and perceptions of the difference between you and Him are all wrong.

You think messiah is going to be a king who will be just a slightly more powerful version of who you already are. The king will come and of course he'll be thrilled to be one of us. Chief brother, and together we'll go out and conquer Rome and remove that infestation, and then we can get down to the business of the really good life.

John says, no, Messiah is God and the greatest prophet who ever lived is unworthy to do the lowest thing imaginable. So the first problem to solve is to re-arrange your false perception of the gap between you, and Him.

He's God, and you are like the guy at the banquet without wedding clothes. That's the reality their minds were missing. First problem, they think this is all about them. He's coming to make my life fabulous. It's all about me.

Second problem, He'll be just like me, but, of course he'll be a little better, but not that much. Small gap, large gap. Answer, He is God, you are filth.

And then John says; You've got two choices. When He comes, He'll have two options for you. The Holy Spirit. Or, fire. Proper wedding attire, or outer darkness, in fire, forever.

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

The imagery of the threshing floor is foreign to us. Every person listening to John would have understood.

A threshing floor was a place where the wind was blowing like through a tunnel, so a constant sideways motion of air. And they would separate the wheat from the unusable part, the chaff, by a motion of throwing the stuff into the air flow with a fork.

And it's the same idea as gold. The chaff is lighter so it lands in a different place than the wheat, and you end up with two piles. Wheat which has great value, and chaff which is then burned up. It's worthless.

If you are wheat, you are valuable and the Master gathers you into His barn. If you're chaff, you are valueless and the only thing to do is burn you up. Except John adds the frightening truth, the fire is unquenchable and the torment lasts forever.

So then, in John's teaching to his startled hearers, what is it that turns worthless people into valuable people. What is it that causes us to be clothed in wedding garments, white and clean, so that we go into the wedding feast banquet and partake of the joy.

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.* See it there at the end of vs. 16.

John was baptizing with water and it was a symbol of repentance. Coming out of this world and its values and brokenness and sin, and coming up cleansed by the removing of sin, for a new life.

The water was symbolic of what the Holy Spirit will do for people who receive the messiah. Baptism is a picture of newness. You go into the water with the old, you come out of the water with the new.

The Holy Spirit does that for every real christian. The Holy Spirit comes when we believe and ask Jesus to come into our hearts. We are joined in an indivisible union with Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. God in us, and us in God.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, misunderstood by some, happens when we believe. The Spirit takes us into Jesus death and resurrection. We are joined in His victory, and the Holy Spirit clothes us with the righteousness of Jesus. His righteousness is imputed to me. My sin is imputed to Him, and paid for in full at the cross.

It's a baptism, and immersion. I am immersed into Him by His Spirit. I come up out of that water, white and clean, clothed by the Spirit of God, ready for the bride groom.

John says, the Messiah isn't going to bring what you're anticipating. He IS going to bring this baptism of eternal life, or, fire.

Most of those who heard that day, and also of those who followed Jesus around listening to His teaching and seeing the miracles, went back to their old life, dis-appointed that He wasn't going to throw Rome out and begin His reign here and now.

Only 120 believers in the upper room after His departure. The rest, all the thousands, grew dis-illusioned and dis-illusionment leads quickly to a dangerous fickle dis-appointment.

You didn't give me what I wanted. As far as I'm concerned, they can take you away and crucify you. That is what we'll be studying for the next many months to come.

I find a disparity between what John says to his hearers then and what the evangelical church seems to be saying to the world today.

The message the evangelical church seems to be broadcasting to the world today is that you don't have to change. Jesus wants you just how you are. And if you add Him to YOUR life, heavy on the you, it's YOUR life, He will let you keep doing whatever it is you're doing, no

change required or implied, but He'll make everything you already have . . . better.

So, no change needed, your life gets better, and in the end, heaven. What a deal. That's what *these* jews that came out to hear John wanted to hear. Messiah is coming, He'll be here soon, and He's going to make your lives better. All your dreams will come true.

That isn't what John said at all. John said, you can have wedding clothes, or you can have fire. You can be baptised by the Holy Spirit, out of this world and into the next one, positionally, or you can be baptized into fire, forever.

It was a pretty rough message, and most of them didn't buy it. Most of them are represented by the guests who are invited and they say, I'm not interested in you or your banquet, I've got MY life to somehow get the most out of. I don't see you in my picture. And they moved on with their lives, without Jesus, without the Holy Spirit, without the wedding garments required by the King.

What *we* don't see very well from our current vantage point is that this life is 5 minutes long, compared to eternity. I urge you to give that 5 minutes wholly and completely to the King of Kings, and be dressed now for the wedding later.

It isn't about now, it's about later. Oh, He is a gracious Father and He does bless His children with good things now, but, really, it's about then. The most important things we can do now, is first to be baptized into Jesus by His indwelling Holy Spirit.

After that, the most important thing we can do with our lives, which we learn really aren't ours, is by His Holy Spirit working through us, we can lay up treasure in that future kingdom. We can be one of His slaves that people don't like very much, that goes out into the highways and warns

others, calls others to the wedding.

But this morning, I want to draw us to a final lesson for us that we can learn through John's example. John was one of those slaves that people didn't like very much. And he managed to get on Herod's last nerve.

*18 So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.*

That word, exhortations is a window into John's preaching style. He was a failure in this world's estimations *then*, and he would be a failure *today*. Because people are intolerant to exhortation.

The word is (parakalōn) and implicit in it is the idea of one person trying to urge another person to move, to change, to be in a different place than where they are currently at.

There was nothing in John's message that said it's OK to be where you are currently at. He was continually imploring people, encouraging people, telling people, you need to be in a different place. Where you're at now is going to be burned up like chaff.

Nobody wants those people around. Especially in our world today. It used to be that God and His standards were recognized as right vss. wrong. No more.

Our world has freed itself of this sky god who demands that we be different. And anyone who comes along and says, God is real, and yes He has a standard which is perfect righteousness, He even showed us what that looks like in His own Son who He sent to earth. And God will judge you against that standard of perfection.

You introduce that into this world today that has extricated itself from that demanding God, and . . . there's going to be trouble.

All the rules are re-written. In my lifetime! There is no God. There is no standard except whatever I say is OK for me. And how dare you come along and say there is some God and some other standard written in some old Book.

The world has a name for that. Well, several names. Intolerance. And people who say stuff like that . . . haters. They're haters. Intolerant haters. And our tolerant culture is tolerant of everything and everybody, except for those guys.

Guess what. There's nothing new under the sun. John was one of those guys and he was telling people about God's standards and God's judgement, and he got under the wrong guys skin. He frayed the last nerve of the wrong person.

*19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, 20 Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.*

Herod is an interesting study. This is Herod Antipus. Also referred to as Herod the tetrarch. Tetrarch meant, a petty king. He's a king that you have to obey, but he isn't the big king. That would be Tiberius Ceasar. Herod is a petty king that derives his authority from the big king that put him in place and gave him authority.

Herod is one of the sons of Herod the great who upon his death, had his kingdom, again assigned to him by Rome, he divided it up amongst 4 sons.

So this is Herod Antipus, and he is wicked and ruthless. He rules over the area east of Jerusalem and south and west of galilee. The Jordan wilderness where John's ministry is taking place, is right smack in the

middle of Herod Antipus' area that he controls.

His father went through 10 wives, so that's his model. And the wife he currently has he has stolen from his brother Philip. So it is, that the offending issue at that time is all about sex. Nothing new.

There's no record of when Herod Antipas came to see John. Josephus mentions that Herod had John locked up in prison. Luke's account is not chronological here. We know that Jesus and John both were ministering at the Jordan river, baptizing for some time after John baptized Jesus.

We need to turn to Mark's account of Herod's destruction of John to get the full story of what happened. Mark 6:

The context here is that Jesus and the 12 disciples are seeing a great working of miracles and healings, so much so that everyone in the whole country was hearing of the magnificent miracles being done. Including Herod Antipas. He heard all about the miracles of Jesus.

*6:14 And King Herod heard of it, for His name had become well known; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." 15 But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!"*

*17 For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so; 20 for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him. 21 A strategic day came*

*when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; 22 and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." 23 And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom." 24 And she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." 25 Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, 28 and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.*

Herod used to enjoy his visits with John. He was always perplexed, because John would never hold back. John would always tell Herod Antipas that his life would be a black mark on a piece of coal, and that fire was coming for him.

What does that have to do with people in 2019? Just this, we are under fierce pressure to not make waves, to get on the right side of history, to not ever judge what another person is doing, and most important of all, to be tolerant.

And we look around the church today, and it was in the news just this week. Two headlines from the previous week;

Religion News Service [Methodist university presidents call on denomination to amend LGBTQ policies](#)

Telegraph Church of England to offer baptism-style services to transgender people to celebrate their new identity for first time

The church is joining the world. The Methodists and the Anglicans, both in the news this week, Both originally rock solid orthodox protestant denominations are jettisoning the words of God and they are joining the world in tolerance of what God's book clearly says is abomination.

What would John the baptist have to say to them, if he was present today.

Our lesson to take away from John, is that we are to be fearlessly exhorting people with the truths of this book, even if it gets you thrown in prison, and even if your head gets severed from your body.

Herod, spineless Herod, ultimately ruled by a teenage hottie and her mother who he was shacking up with, is in hell today, and will be for eternity.

John, who had a backbone of steel, got his head chopped off, and is celebrating the victory, with his friend Jesus, in heaven.

Which one are we, as individuals, and the church, going to emulate?