

# Hats Off to Second Place

The Gospels

Selected Scripture

## Introduction

I imagine that it would be exciting to go back in history and stand in the courtroom to hear John Knox preach to Mary Queen of Scots – a woman known for her bloody atrocities against the name of Jesus Christ. I wish that I had had the chance to be there.

I imagine, as well, that it would be as thrilling, if not more, to go back in time to the Diet of Worms in 1521, and hear Martin Luther's stand as he was placed on trial for being a heretic. There, before the highest religious and political leaders of his day, he said, "My conscience is bound to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. It is all that I can do."

I also imagine one other point in history that I would love to have been a part of, or at least to have observed, and that is when a rustic, strange preacher came from the wilderness region. He was a man who was clothed rather unusually and had a strange diet. He came thundering from the wilderness and pointed his finger at the religious leaders and the populace of his day and cried, "Repent!"

Some estimate that hundreds of thousands of people followed this man, as he taught and baptized. He would have been an amazing individual to observe.

Jesus Christ said, in Matthew 11:11,

*. . . among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! . . .*

In other words, there is no one before or since that has ever been born that has been greater than John the Baptist.

Now today, we will not only study John the Baptist, but we will do much more. By applying aspects of his life to our own, I hope we will become, in God's estimation, as great. I think the things we will discover will be a little different than we expect, in terms of that which makes one truly great.

## The Messenger

Turn to Matthew chapter 3, where we have much to cover in our study of John the Baptist.

### 1. First, the arrival of John the Baptist was anticipated.

Notice Matthew 3:1-3.

*Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,*

*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

*For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!'"*

This man was anticipated by the Jewish nation. It had been prophesied that John the Baptist would come.

Every orthodox Jewish family in their Passover feast would take one chair and set it aside and hope that Elijah would come – the one prophesied. The scriptures told them that the Messiah would be heralded by the coming of Elijah, so if Elijah came and sat in that chair, they then knew that the Messiah was just around the bend.

We know from other passages, especially from the words Jesus will say, that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of this passage; he is the one coming in the spirit and power of Elijah. His ministry will model Elijah's in many respects.

The coming of John the Baptist was not a surprise. The nation was awaiting the one who would herald the coming Messiah.

### 2. Secondly, the appearance of John the Baptist was authentic.

Note Matthew 3:4a.

*Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; . . .*

In II Kings 1:8, we read that Elijah was clothed exactly like this. So John the Baptist, evidently mirroring the life of that prophet, wore the same kind of garment – a rough garment of camel's hair and a wide leather belt around the waist. There is no mention of shoes, so perhaps he was barefoot.

The next description, in Matthew 3:4b, gets a little stranger when it says,

*. . . and his food was locusts and wild honey.*

I thought some of the people I know had strange appetites!

I got in trouble last week when I mentioned my dislike of lima beans in my sermon. I had a few people come up to me after the service and say, "The problem is that you haven't had them the way I cook them."

I did not volunteer!

I mentioned lima beans and green peas as being my least favorites. My wife is visiting family out of town for a couple of weeks and a wonderful couple in our church invited me to lunch after the service last Sunday. That dear lady – I am so glad she and her husband and I are good friends – had prepared green peas. The ironic thing was that they had debated the day before, "Should we give him green peas or lima beans?"

I will tell you that as a test of character, I ate some of those green peas. I ate fourteen of them – I counted every one!

It was a test because I was raised in a home, as you may have been, where my mother made me take something from every bowl on the table. I was well trained, so I did that. I think my mother was probably punishing her four sons for things she never caught us doing! I can remember, as a kid, thinking, "Man, I can't wait 'till I grow up so I can eat what I want."

Then I got married and I am still being punished for things my mother never caught me doing! My wife is out of town so I can inform you of this. This will be our secret – not a chance, right? In our home, we have to take something from every bowl on our table or we cannot have dessert. I have a remedy for this situation in my three-year-old daughter. She is

still too young to catch on that when Mom goes to the kitchen, I scoop my green peas onto her plate!

I got caught a couple of weeks ago, however. One of my little boys was sitting beside me on the opposite side from my daughter. We were waiting for dessert, as my wife went into the kitchen, and my two boys and daughter were triumphant in that they finished everything on their plates. I thought my napkin was perfectly covering my multitude of sins, or whatever, but my son was studying my plate. I knew this was going on because he was looking at me and looking at my plate. All of the sudden, he pipes up and says, "Hey, Dad, why are you getting dessert? You didn't finish everything on your plate."

I threatened his life – no TV for fifteen years!

As strange as I may consider some things, I think it is helpful to know that according to the Old Testament, the locust was considered a clean animal. There were four varieties that could be eaten. However, this was the food of the very poor. Perhaps John the Baptist was representing them as he stood as an indictment on the world to which he had come to preach repentance.

He was very simple – with simple clothing and a simple diet. John the Baptist was an unusual man.

### **3. Thirdly, the audience of John the Baptist was alarmed.**

Look at Matthew 1:5-8.

*Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan;*

*and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.*

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*

*"Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;"*

Understand that John the Baptist's major indictment was against the religious world that had so distorted the Old Testament scriptures. As a herald, he had to come to straighten out some things.

John the Baptist calls the religious leaders "vipers". The word used, in the original, is the same

word used of the snake that bit Paul on the island of Malta. (Acts 28:3) It was a poisonous desert snake.

The thing that made this snake so dangerous was the fact that its color, appearance, and style caused it to look a lot like a twig or a dead branch. When people went out to collect firewood, they would accidentally pick up one of these vipers and be bitten, as Paul was.

So when John the Baptist calls these religious leaders “vipers,” he is saying, “You people look like something that you’re really not. You look harmless, but you’re really poisonous; you’re really dangerous. It is because of you and your teaching that people are being destroyed.”

Now I have previously shared some things about these Pharisees. They are almost funny; they are comical and tragic at the same time. Let me share some other information that I found in my study. This shows the way they had so distorted the teachings of Moses and had added to it so that by the time of John the Baptist, the people were totally bound by their legalism; by their lists of rules that were carried on and on and on. Listen to some of these rules that I discovered.

In defining a burden, Jeremiah 17:21 (NKJV) says,

*... “Take heed . . . bear no burden on the sabbath . . .”*

This is simple. Obviously, they were not to work like they normally would on Monday through Friday. God was saying, “I want you not to bear a burden on the sabbath.”

Now the Talmud, which was the religious leaders’ commentary of that day, added to this. Let me give some examples of their definition of work.

- When eating, all food picked up at a single time had to weigh less than a dried fig. (I guess that rules out the salad bar at Golden Corral for us!)
- When drinking, no mouthful could weigh more than one swallow of milk.
- For a sore throat on the sabbath, vinegar could be swallowed, but not gargled because that would be work. (I doubt many people complained of sore throats on the Sabbath, but they had to swallow vinegar if they did.)

- A woman could not look in the mirror because they might see a gray hair and be tempted to pull it out, which would be considered work.
- A knot could be tied in a rope, only if one hand was used. (This is deep!)

There were four exceptions to the rule concerning tying knots in a rope. Legalism, by the way, always has its exceptions. Two hands could be used to tie a rope when tying wine skins, sandals straps, a woman’s cap, and a woman’s girdle.

Now, if a man needed water and could not tie a knot with one hand in the rope to let the water bucket into the well, then he could tie the rope to his wife’s girdle and let it down, since a two-handed knot was quite legal for a woman’s girdle.

Can you believe this? He could say, “Sweetheart, would you come here, please? I need a bucket of water.”

I wonder how many wives were lost down wells with heavy buckets of water. I can just hear it, “That’s the third one I’ve lost down there!”

This is an indication of the way it must have been in that time.

John says, “My mission is to come along and straighten out the path; straighten out the road and make it ready for the coming of the Messiah.”

We are told the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to John the Baptist in the desert. He says, as we read in Matthew 3:8a,

*... bear fruit in keeping with repentance;*

In other words, he was not interested in them. They were faking it. They were coming to John because, “Maybe he is who he says he is.”

These religious leaders were coming to him for, what we would consider “fire insurance”. They just wanted to be sure they covered all the bases. They thought they had better make sure and get baptized because the Pharisee, in that day, considered the merits of Abraham to be all important. They thought, “He’s saying something a little unique and he’s unusual. We’ve got Isaiah and we can check it out. So let’s go out there and just kind of look and see what’s happening.”

John the Baptist sees them coming and calls them what they are. He says, “You bunch of snakes – bring forth fruit.”

In other words, “Let’s see something, if you really mean it, in terms of repentance.”

Continue to Matthew 3:9.

***and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father”; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.***

Historically, we know that the rabbis were teaching that Abraham, their father, sat at the gate of Gehenna – the gate of the place of torment. His job was to turn back every Israelite that may have been consigned there. No Israelite would ever face torment.

The Israelites believed that it was the merit of Abraham that brought the rain. It was the merit of Abraham that caused their ships to sail. It was the merit of Abraham that caused their seed to multiply. It was the merit of Abraham for everything.

John the Baptist was saying, in Matthew 3:9

***. . . do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father” . . .***

In other words, this does not matter because God does not give inheritance in the spiritual world.

Of course, these leaders did not appreciate John’s words.

## **The Message**

Let us take a closer look at the message of John the Baptist. Turn to Luke chapter 3. He had basically a two-fold message.

### **1. The first part of the message of John the Baptist is “repent”.**

Look at Luke 3:8a.

***Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance . . .***

The word John the Baptist probably repeated more than any other was, “repent” – “repent,” “repent.”

Repentance was the inner change. Baptism was the outward sign. Baptism was the outward symbol that the inner change of repentance had taken place.

Do not get this confused with the believer’s baptism that happens after Christ has invaded our lives. This baptism looked forward to the coming of the Messiah.

Every prophet had some kind of sign or symbol. A person could not say they followed God and not circumcise their sons, if they were in the Abrahamic days. A person could not say they followed God and not keep the sabbath, if they were in the days of Moses. A person could not say they were following God and not get baptized, if they were following John the Baptist. He was an Old Testament prophet. So they came together – repentance and forgiveness.

For us today, immersion represents an identification with the Messiah that has come because repentance has taken place and we have been brought alive.

Now the shocking thing in this situation is that Jews were required to be baptized. John the Baptist is not just telling the Gentiles, “You need to be identified with the people of God,” he was telling the Jews. The Jews thought they were the people of God. John is saying to them, “You need to be identified with the *true* Israel.”

We can understand the furor John raised in telling the Jews this.

### **Three evidences of repentance**

Now, John the Baptist goes on to give three evidences of repentance. If a person says they are repentant, three things are going to happen. Let us look at them in the text.

- The first evidence of repentance is the ability to show compassion.

Look at Luke 3:10.

***And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?”***

The crowds were saying, “He says he wants to see fruit. What fruit does he want to see?”

Continue to Luke 3:11.

***And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.”***

In other words, it is not just observing the needs. It is not just recognizing that there is a need. It is not simply talking about the fact that there are great needs. It is going to the closet, pulling out the second coat and giving it to the person who has none.

Repentance gives a person the ability, and perhaps a better word would be willingness, to show compassion.

Let me tell the rather unusual story about a seminary that will remain unnamed. Four of the seminary students were told to preach a sermon on the Good Samaritan. They did not know this assignment was a trick. They went to their dorm rooms to prepare the sermon. They were then told when and where to preach their sermon. One at a time, each of the four men left their dorm to walk to the building where they were to preach their sermon.

There was a sidewalk that ran along a major city road between the dormitory and the building where these four students were to speak. An individual had been planted, dressed like a bum and carrying a bottle wrapped in a paper bag, standing on the sidewalk. As each of the four men came near, he would let out a gasp and fall down across the sidewalk. This was to see what the four students would do.

It is sad to tell the reaction of these men as the supposed bum clutched himself and fell across the sidewalk. The first guy kind of looked at him and walked around, carrying his sermon notes. The second guy even stepped over the man as he went to preach on the Good Samaritan. All four of these seminary students observed the need, as if to say, "Bless his heart," but none helped.

Repentance produces something more. It produces the Christ-given ability; the willingness to show compassion to those in need.

- The second evidence of repentance is the ability to work honestly.

Look at the Luke 3:12-13.

*And some tax-gatherers also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"*

*And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to."*

John the Baptist got these men right where it hurt. I have previously talked about the tax collectors of this time. They would exact from the public more than Rome required. They would give Rome the amount they were due and then pad their own pockets with the rest. As a result, tax collectors were among the wealthiest Jewish citizens in Jerusalem.

These tax collectors said, "Okay, we're going to show we're repentant. What do you want us to do?"

"Be honest at work."

"Oh."

It is interesting that repentance will produce in us credibility on the job. In John's estimation, there was no greater arena in which to be credible than the workplace.

- The third evidence of repentance is the ability to live contentedly.

Look at Luke 3:14.

*Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."*

"Oh."

Now the words, "accuse falsely," only appear one other time in the New Testament. They appear when Zaccheus stood and said, "Whatever I have taken falsely or by false accusation, I restore fourfold." (Luke 19:8)

Most would agree that these soldiers were actually Jewish citizens who were used to back up the tax collectors. In other words, if a Jewish citizen came along and had some things to be taxed, but refused to pay, soldiers were standing right there to make sure they paid, even taking it by force.

John the Baptist is saying to these soldiers, "Be content with the money that you get."

Now it is interesting that this could involve all three arenas of our lives.

Repentance affects society at large, in that it affects the way we view and treat other people. Do we look at them with compassion or selfishness?

Repentance also involves what we do at work.

How do we live – in society at large; at work; at home? Do we live credibly? Or do we live dishonestly; back-stabbing; ladder-grabbing?

Contentment, by the way, has nothing to do with what we have or do not have – contentment has everything to do with what we wish we had.

John the Baptist said, "I want you to learn to live with contentment."

This would be a great evidence of repentance.

**2. The second phase of the sermon of John the Baptist is "reconciliation".**

This is a part of John's message that I discovered in the last few weeks. It is a part of his ministry that is often overlooked. Turn to Malachi chapter 4, which is the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament, and we will look at the last two verses. Note the words in Malachi 4:5-6.

*Behold, I [the Lord] am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.*

*He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*

If you are wondering who He is talking about, turn to Luke chapter 1. In Luke 1:16-17, the angel Gabriel is talking to Zacharias. Notice what he tells Zacharias about the ministry of his son, John the Baptist.

*And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.*

*It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

This is fascinating, is it not? It means the coming of the Messiah is going to be predicated and will be built upon a revival of the family.

We need this prophet today. I tend, in my own thinking, to place the heaviest weight of responsibility in our society's blight upon the father. You can disagree if you like. I think it is because of the absent, the undisciplined, the selfish, the uncaring, the unloving father that we see much of what is produced today.

I was reading some facts from a file that I keep related to teenagers. It marks me every time I read it. This year, one million teenage girls will get pregnant – 400,000 of them will abort their little babies. Thirty percent of our teenagers will drop out of school. The second cause of death among teenagers is murder. Seventy percent of our teens will use alcohol and drugs by the age of sixteen.

Focus on the Family did a survey recently and found that 55% of Christian teenagers spent less than 15 minutes a week with their dad.

Although we do not have any of his sermons, Elijah preached repentance and then, he must have

spent a great deal of his ministry preaching reconciliation between family members. The second string on his fiddle was, "Fathers, turn your hearts back toward your children."

## The Maturation

What happened to John the Baptist? Let us look at his doubts and his death. I am glad the scripture record of his life includes this part.

### 1. First, let us look at the doubts of John the Baptist.

Matthew 11 tells us that John was placed into prison. We know from scripture that he is going to be beheaded. He experiences a period of intense doubt; perhaps even depression.

John sends some of his disciples to a place where Jesus was ministering. They were to go to Jesus and ask one question. Look at Matthew 11:3, as John's disciples ask of Jesus,

*. . . "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"*

I am thankful this is in the scriptures. John the Baptist – a man that God considered great – had a period of doubting. Why?

John the Baptist had come to herald the kingdom, so where was the King? He had come to prepare the path for the One who would come to set up His kingdom, yet nothing was happening. John was about to die and he was wondering, "Have I given my life in waste? Are You the One, or should we look for someone else?"

This is a sermon in itself, as Jesus Christ sends back an answer, by John's disciples, of great tenderness and compassion. He says, "John, take a look at what I am doing. Take a look at the miracles. Take a look at the ministry. You don't need to look anywhere else. I'm the One." (Matthew 11:4-6)

### 2. Secondly, let us look at the death of John the Baptist.

History helps as much as the scripture record to tell us of the death of John the Baptist. We know from those living in his day that he was incarcerated at the dungeon castle of Machaerus on the shores of the Dead Sea.

Herodias was incensed with John the Baptist because he had stood in front of Herod and said, "Herod, your marriage to Herodias is sin." (Matthew 14:4)

Herodias was Herod's sister-in-law and he had taken her. (Matthew 14:3)

This reminds me of Hugh Latimer who preached to Henry the VIII. Hugh stood in the courtroom and preached a sermon to the court that so incensed Henry the VIII that he demanded that Hugh come back the next Sunday and preach an apology. Hugh Latimer came back, history records, and preached the same sermon again, with greater energy.

John the Baptist would not change his mind, even though he was asked to.

Herodias' daughter, Salome, danced a seductive dance before Herod. In the drunken state in which he was so frequently, Herod said, "I'll give you anything you want." (Matthew 14:6-7)

Salome ran to her mother for prompting and her mother said, "There is one thing I want – the head of John the Baptist on a platter." (Matthew 14:8)

Herodias got what she wanted. (Matthew 14:9-11)

This was the death of John the Baptist.

## Application – Marks of Greatness

John the Baptist is the man that Jesus Christ said was greater than any man who ever lived. (Matthew 11:11a) What made John so great? Let me give several marks of greatness.

According to the world standards, John the Baptist would never have made it. His followers left him, he experienced times of great confusion, he never wrote a book, he did not leave an estate, and he died a cruel death, yet Jesus Christ had such great words for him.

Look at Mark chapter 1, where we will see several keys to greatness, and then, we will find one other from the Gospel of John.

### 1. Number one, John the Baptist refused to emphasize personal importance.

Look at Mark 1:7a.

*And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I..."*

In other words, John the Baptist is not intimidated by the coming of the One he would introduce.

Let me ask a question of you. Have you ever heard a salesman say that another salesman is much better?

I was watching a game yesterday and during halftime the media were talking to a rather well-known athlete who was injured. They were asking him, "Would this game be any different if you were playing?"

What do you think he said? In his great humility he said, "Oh, the game would be totally different," and went on to explain how.

Have you ever heard an athlete say, "That player is really much better player than I."? Have you ever heard a preacher say, "That pastor over there is a much better speaker than I."?

It is just innate. We have to be first. We are too intimidated by someone who might be better at what we do.

John the Baptist was the greatest preacher/prophet up to that point. However, when asked whether or not he was Christ, he said, "No, and there is One coming who is much greater than I."

This is a mark of greatness. John the Baptist refused to emphasize personal importance.

### 2. Number two, John the Baptist refused to accept personal recognition.

Look at Mark 1:7b.

*“. . . and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals."*

Now the sewage in that day, of humans and animals, was in the open streets. They obviously did not have the sewage systems that we have today. As the people would trudge along the roads, their feet got, not only got dusty, but filthy. We know from history that even those who would serve guests would not untie and take off their shoes – they might wash their feet.

Now Palestinian teachers of this day were not paid, but were served by their disciples and repaid by different services. We have an extant manuscript, dating back to the time of Jesus Christ, teaching that every service a slave did for his master, a disciple was to do for his teacher – except untying his sandals.

So what was John the Baptist saying? He was saying of the job that was below the duty of the most menial slave, "I'm not even worthy to do that. I'm not worthy to take off His shoes."

John the Baptist was always taking the focus and placing it on the person of Christ. He refused to take any recognition for himself.

### 3. Number three, John the Baptist refused to magnify personal achievements.

Look at Mark 1:8.

***“I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”***

“Compared to Christ,” John the Baptist was saying, “my ministry is insignificant.”

“Wait, John. Now just hold it a second. We know; we’ve read that at least three hundred thousand people came to you and were baptized and taught by you. Three hundred thousand?! This is the wrong time to be humble – you need to strut a little.”

John refused to strut, however. He was never concerned about himself being so important. Why? Because he had come to introduce the important One.

It is innate in all of us, ladies and gentlemen, to magnify our own importance. I read, this past week, about an Army Colonel who had just been promoted. He walked into his brand new office, complete with a big desk and a nice chair, and sat down. He was really a big shot sitting behind his desk.

A knock came at the door. It was a Private. He said, “Just a minute, I’m on the phone.”

He picked up the phone and talked quite loudly, saying, “Yes sir, General, I’ll call the President of the United States today. No sir, I won’t forget.”

He then said, “Come in.”

The Private came in. The Colonel said, “I’m a busy man, what can I do for you, Private?”

The Private said, “Well, I’ve just come to hook up your telephone, Sir.”

Caught! Oh, let it never happen to us! However, we do such things.

John the Baptist would not do this. In a world that says, “If you’re going to be great, you’ve got to be out front and you’ve got to let everyone know you’re out front; you’ve got to be the top,” he was always pointing at Someone else.

### 4. Number four, John the Baptist refused to preserve personal recognition.

Turn to John 3:26.

***And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.”***

The disciples of John the Baptist are a little concerned. The offerings are not what they used to be. The crowds are not as big. They say, “John, wake up man, we’ve got to do something. All of our people are going to that Jesus. Doesn’t that bother you?”

Look at John’s response in John 3:27,

***John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.”***

John’s disciples were saying, “Wait, John. Hang on to your work, man. You’ve given your life for this. Clutch.”

This is what we do with our lives, our possessions, our jobs, our positions, is it not? We clutch; hang on.

John said, “Whatever I’ve got in my hand, God gave it to me.”

Continue to John 3:28.

***“You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’***

***“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. . . .”***

In other words, after the wedding ceremony the bride left to attend to a nuptial tent and the best man, called the friend of the bridegroom, would stand there. He would wait until dark when the bridegroom would come, recognized by his voice, and the friend of the bridegroom would step aside. The bridegroom would enter and the couple would consummate their marriage, and the friend of the bridegroom would disappear.

John the Baptist is saying, “I’m just a friend of the bridegroom. I’m introducing the bridegroom to the key people here, and then I’m going to disappear.”

Look at the key verse, John 3:30.

***“He must increase, but I must decrease.”***

Williams translates this,

***“He must grow greater and greater and I less and less.”***

Have you ever wanted to make a long-distance call on the phone and used an operator? What does

she say? She says, "Please hold a moment and I'll connect you."

She does and then, she disappears.

The life of John the Baptist, like yours and mine, is to connect people; to introduce people. He was a man who did a phenomenal job of playing a supporting role. He was a man who played, with great passion, second string.

Ladies and gentlemen, a day is coming when the kingdom of God will reign. Those of us who know Jesus Christ will reign with Him and will be given positions of honor and authority, dependent upon the way we have lived today. Positions of honor will be given to those who have been, with great grace, second string; who have played, with great diligence, a supporting role. These are people who, with grace, have been willing to come in second place; whose life intention has been to glorify God and to introduce people to the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world.