

Introduction: As we turn to John's Gospel for some important Bible notes on the *revelation of Jesus Christ as attested to by John the Baptist in John chapter 1*, we are mindful of the *important witnesses* who gather throughout the Gospels to testify to Jesus as the Christ, Son of the Living God. Whether we turn to John the Baptist, or to some of the earlier witnesses in Matthew, Mark or Luke, they all speak with a united voice, urging us to pay the most urgent attention to the Savior. May this week's notes, therefore, give us a new sensitivity and attentiveness to the Lord Jesus. May we hear His voice through the witnesses we encounter in the Scriptures.

Mon/Tues: read Matthew 11:1-11 & 14:1-12. We must begin our consideration of John the Baptist by looking at his broader backstory in the other Gospels. For example, looking at Matthew, we see that no man is more important as a witness to the Son of God than John the Baptist. John comes in Mt. 3:1-12, preparing the way for Jesus by hammering the sinfulness of men's hearts into rubble – over which the chariot of King Jesus can smoothly ride! Jesus then eulogizes John in Mt. 11:7-11, declaring John's greatness as a prophet and as the one sent before Him to prepare His way in Mt. 11:10. Jesus therefore places his seal of approval on John's faithful ministry.

Sadly, John pays a dear price for his bold condemnation of sin, as Herod Antipas beheads John for standing up to that ruler's adultery in Mt. 14:1-12. Moreover, John's persecution involves more than a swift, cruel death. Because of his courageous testimony about God's coming judgment on Herod's sin, John is imprisoned for more than a year before his beheading. Out of such a dark experience, John's doubts come to the surface in Mt. 11:1-3, where he sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He indeed is the Coming Messiah or if they should look for someone else. Jesus graciously removes John's doubts in Mt. 11:4-6, sending a message back to John's prison cell about the mighty proofs of the Kingdom of God in His miracles and teaching.

Meditate and Pray: Aren't you glad that Jesus Christ has the wisdom and power to speak wisely into each and every situation? Isaiah 50:4's promise about the Messiah's ability to speak a word to sustain weary ones is fulfilled as Jesus speaks to John's heart and brings him back from despondency! How do we know John was restored by the message of Jesus? Because we find John bravely declaring the truth in prison - even up to the day of his death in Mark 6:20-21! Herod feared John for good reason – the very word of God thundered from the lips of this one whom Jesus strengthened for the evil day. Jesus will not fail us in our evil day either, as hymn # 31 by Isaac Watts declares:

*Have you not known, have you not heard
That firm remains on high
The everlasting throne of Him
Who formed the earth and sky?*

*Are you afraid His power shall fail
When comes your evil day?
And can an all creating arm
Grow weary or decay?*

*Supreme in wisdom as in power
The Rock of Ages stands,
Though Him you cannot see, nor trace
The working of His hands.*

*He gives the conquest to the weak,
Supports the fainting heart;
And courage in the evil hour
His heavenly aids impart.*

Wednesday: read Matthew 3:16-17 and 17:1-5. John was the mightiest *human* witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ. But his witness pales compared to the witness of the Father who speaks at Christ's baptism and transfiguration: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased"*. The Son's witness also is unimpeachable, as John 8:14 makes clear: *"Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going"*. Together, the Father and Son fulfill the Old Testament's requirement that two witnesses are needed to establish any matter (John 8:16b-18).

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God for sending the "Spirit of Truth" into this wicked world. Just as the Father and Son stand together to witness to the world about the need for man to repent and believe in God's Son as their Savior, so the Holy Spirit is all-prevailing and efficient in convicting the whole world of "sin, righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8-11)! Let us magnify the ability of the Spirit of God the Father to "search hearts" (Rom. 8:27) through the Spirit! May God give us a spirit of supplication for unsaved loved ones and neighbors, praying as Solomon did: *"Hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)"* (1 Kings 8:39).

Thursday: read Matthew 11:9-15 and Malachi 3:1-7. John was sent to rebuke and expose the ungodly spiritual leadership of his day, as part of "preparing the way" for the coming of the Lord Jesus. This is what Malachi 3:1 teaches as it is quoted in Mt. 11:10. John was to be the "messenger" who would announce the coming of Christ as the final prophet, priest and king of His people! In every age God sent messengers to announce God's coming in judgment, and that the time to repent and prepare for God's coming was at hand. John was the last of such messengers, sent to close the prophetic age of the church. No more prophets would be needed, since the long-awaited Messiah was now come!

John's ministry was well-received by the populace, and many went out to him in the desert. But the soon-to-be-displaced leaders of Israel were not pleased. They opposed John and Jesus, (Mt. 21:23 & 26:3), thereby proving themselves to be false shepherds as they tried to obstruct Jesus' ministry to the masses! It is no surprise that they wickedly schemed to get rid of both John and the Lord Jesus. No wonder the Gospels as a whole contain so much rejection for Christ, with such hostile leaders in Israel! Truly John 1:11 is sadly accurate: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."

Meditate and Pray: May the Lord give us courage to face opposition to Christ in our lives, and give us grace not to count the cost of standing up for Him. Amen.

Fri/Sat/Sun: read Matthew 11:11-15. In eulogizing John the Baptist, Jesus declares His seal of approval on John's ministry, and His confidence that John's faithfulness would be acknowledged by His Father in Heaven. After all, as Hebrews 6:10 indicates, "God is not unjust to forget good works" – including John's. John had faithfully completed the task for which he had been sent, just as Elijah centuries earlier had faithfully foreshadowed the work of John in his own Old Testament ministry. These two servants are linked by Jesus in Matthew 11:14-15.

Of course, in his imprisonment, John would not have been able to hear Jesus' praise. Was John then left "in the dark"? Not at all. Remember Jesus' message to John in Matthew 11:4-5, where Jesus quotes Scripture in a way *guaranteed* to lift John's spirits. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 35:5-6; 42:18 and 61:1, as if to say to John, *"You did your job. You prepared the way... I have taken that way, John, and am doing what Isaiah said I would do: The blind see; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."* In this way, Christ owns the work of preparation which John did, by describing what He is able to do now – since the way has been cleared by John! John's work was not in vain.

Meditate and Pray: Along with John the Baptist, we ought to be comforted in our low times in, knowing that every ounce of our labors done in God's name, no matter how weak or unfruitful in the eyes of mankind, will be

owned by the Spirit of God. Our labors for Christ will not be a waste. John Owen writes of God's graciously remembering our lowly sufferings for Him, and our poor good works done in His name, in the following words:

Those poor, low graces, which now live and are acting in us, shall be continued, preserved, purified and perfected; but in their nature be the same as now they are, as our souls and bodies shall be. That love whereby we now adhere to God as our chief good; that faith whereby we are united to Christ, our everlasting head; that delight in any of the ways or ordinances of God wherein He is enjoyed, according as He has promised His presence in them; that love, and good-will which we have for all those in whom is the Spirit, and on whom is the image of Christ; with the entire principle of spiritual life and holiness which is now begun in any of us, shall be all purified, enhanced, perfected, and pass into glory. That very holiness which we here attain, those inclinations and dispositions, those frames of mind, those powers and abilities in obedience and adherence unto God, which here contend with the weight of their own weakness & imperfection, and with the opposition that is continually made against them by the body of death that is to be utterly abolished, shall be gloriously perfected into immutable habits....”(vol. 3, p 375 Owen)