

POINTING TO JESUS

Have you ever been in a strange town and needed to have directions to find your destination? Or maybe, in your hometown, you have had someone come up to you and ask you how to get to a certain place. Justin Wilson, the Cajun humorist, tells of a man who was passing through a small town in southwestern Louisiana and he needed directions. So he stopped at an intersection and asked a young fellow for directions. He said, "If I take this road to my left, where will it take me?" The lad answered, "Me, I don't know." Again the man asked, "If I take this road to my right, where will it take me?" The answer was the same, "Me, I don't know that either." "If I go straight ahead, where will that road take me?" The boy said, "It breaks my heart clean into, but me, I don't know that neither." The man was becoming put out by this time and he commented, "Son, you don't know a thing." The boy, not to be outdone, came back with, "Yeah, but at least I ain't lost." The little boy is like so many present day Christians, all they know is they are saved (not lost); however, they do not know the directions to point someone else to Jesus, the destination that every life really needs.

John the Baptist had a mission in life and that was to point people to Jesus. He came to give testimony (be a witness) that Jesus was the Messiah for Whom Israel had longed for so long. The Apostle John tells us that John the Baptist was sent from God. We all know the story about the special circumstances surrounding John's birth and the fact that his mother and father were blessed with a child in their latter years. Now, almost 30 years later, John is fulfilling his purpose in life. In a sense, all of us that have experienced the New Birth have the same calling as John the Baptist. We are to point people to Jesus. We are to bear witness that Jesus is the Light of the world.

John was very careful to point out that John the Baptist was not the Light but the herald of that Light. An interesting comparison between John the Baptist and Jesus can be shown as follows: [Jesus/John the Baptist]: {Is God/Sent from God}, {Was the Light/Bore witness of the Light}, {Was the Word/Was the voice}.

Word about the work of John the Baptist got back to the Jewish religious leaders and they wanted to investigate the situation. They saw themselves as guardians of the truth for the religious life of the nation. These were zealous people. The Pharisees had strong beliefs as did the Sadducees. They did not always agree and their emphasis on what they believed was off base; however, they were emphatic about it. There had not been a prophet in Israel since the days of Malachi and the word about someone running around preaching in the country side wearing camel hair clothes and living off locust gave them no little concern.

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" John 1:19-23

The Jewish religious leaders were not the priests and Levites. The Jews referred to here were likely the Sanhedrin which was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees. Most of the priests were Sadducees and were liberal in their theological interpretations. Many times they were not really well versed in what the Scriptures said. These priests and associate priests came in a delegation to question John the Baptist. "Who are you?" John suspected what they were thinking and he gave them an answer as to whom he was not. He said, I am not the Christ. They had probably discussed the possibilities of who this person was and had a list that they were going to cover. "Are you Elijah?" They remembered the prophecy of Malachi that said that Elijah must come before the Day of the Lord (Mal 4:5). John denied that he was Elijah. In the gospel accounts we do find that John came in the "spirit and power" of Elijah -- he was NOT the reincarnation of Elijah as some people try to argue and John's own words support this. Moses had referred to a prophet that God would raise up from

among the Jew that would be like Moses and these priest wanted to know if John the Baptist was the fulfillment of that prophecy. John's answer was "No" to that question also. All of a sudden, they were at the end of their list and they still did not know who this character was. In frustration, they asked directly, "Who are you, who do you say you are?"

John the Baptist saw himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of "the voice crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. John 1:24-28

The Jews leaders were not really very satisfied with that answer. If John the Baptist were not the Messiah, the promised prophet or Elijah, then what right did he have baptize people? John's answer was something to the effect that they hadn't seen anything yet. His actual words are recorded to be "I indeed baptize with water, but One is coming after me that will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and I am not worthy to untie His shoelaces.

The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." John 1:29-34

John was led to know that the time for the earthly ministry of Jesus was to begin. John had seen Jesus before, after all they were cousins and about the same age. Now at this particular time John makes an announcement that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Apparently, this particular situation occurred after the temptation in the wilderness which happened immediately after Jesus had been baptized of John. If you recall, during that baptism, John saw the Spirit of God descending and resting upon Jesus. This was the sign that God had told John to watch for. For the person that this happened to would be the promised Messiah of Israel.

John the Baptist is quoted as saying "I knew Him not" in this passage. The interpretation of this is that even though John and Jesus grew up together and their mothers knew each other, John did not know who Jesus really was. He knew Him as the carpenter's son and as his cousin; however, now He knows him as the fulfillment of many significant Old Testament promises as the Lamb of God. John saw in Jesus the purpose of his calling in life. He was to point people to Jesus as the solution to all of life's problems.

We can be witnesses of what God has done in our lives and we can relate those things to the Biblical teachings of Jesus and be someone that points others to Jesus even as John the Baptist did. With this upcoming Christmas season we can find opportunities to share with others what living for Jesus is all about and the requirements that God has for every person. The Good News is that through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and by the debt that Jesus paid at Calvary, we can measure up to God's expectation.