

NEW BEGINNING – NEW SIGNS

John 1: 6-9; 15, 19-34.

read v6-9

Introduction

There came a man who was sent from God v6

John is not interested in the details surrounding John the Baptist's birth (note he always simply refers to him as 'John') unlike Luke for instance who has a greater interest in the birth narratives of both John the Baptist (Luke 1 v57-80) & Jesus (Luke 1v26-38 & 2v1-20).

John's purpose is different as we saw last week. He seeks to clarify the nature, person and purpose of Jesus.

His aim is clear....

*that you may believe
that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,**
and that by **believing** you may have **life** in his name.*

John 20:31

Therefore John's interest in John (the Baptist) is to do with him being a **sign pointing to Jesus.**

John's selection and shaping of the material concerning John the Baptists concentrates on his relationship to Jesus and this can be summarised in one verse

*He came as a witness
to testify concerning the light
so that through him
all men might believe*

John 1:7

How does John the Baptist point to Jesus?

1) He points away from himself.

John is defined by who he is not rather than who he is.

- *'He himself was not the light v8*
- *He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely 'I am not the Christ' v20*
- When asked if he was Elijah or The Prophet, he states quite clearly 'I am not' or 'No'
- The message gets through to his hearers as the Pharisees *if you are not the Christ – John 1:20*

Louis Gigolo comments as to how refreshing this is in Christian leadership compared to some whose ministries appear to point to themselves rather than point to Jesus. The celebrity culture and desire in our society is to make a name for yourself is not confined to the 'world' (X Factor)

It is Jesus who is the source of **life** and **light** and **love**, not us.

The opening words of Rick Warren's *'The Purpose Driven Life'* are a powerful corrective when he writes *'It's not about you'*

John the Baptist defines himself not by who he is, his gifts, his ministry, his importance, his position, but rather in terms of his relationship with Jesus.

Let's remember for a moment though who John the Baptist was so we can grasp the significance of his repeated emphasis on who he is not.

There came a man 'who was sent by God.' v6.

Now this is significant. That had not been one 'sent by God' for over 400 years. The gap between the Old and the New Testament is about four hundred years and whilst there are many events in the life of the people of God during that time which we know about from other writings, the Bible itself is silent. And then from nowhere John the Baptist appears. John

the gospel writer does not give us the background that Luke in particular does, we are simply told
'There was a man who was sent from God: his name was John'.

Not only was there this gap of 400 years this man is clearly significant as his ministry catches the attention of one of the powerful religious/political groups of the day. The Pharisees (Wright's interpretation of 'the Jews of Jerusalem'), Jewish Leaders send a delegation of Priests and Levites from Jerusalem down the road to the other side of the Jordan (v28) to check him out.

They attach significance to his ministry as it was popular, unique and had a resonance in the expectation of the people.

- They thought he might be the longed for Messiah – the Christ v20
- That he might be Elijah who because he had not died normally but been taken into heaven had long been expected to come back to herald the arrival of the Messiah v21
- That he might be a prophet like their greatest prophet Moses as one like Moses had been longed for to lead his people once more. v21 (Deut 18 15-18)

The flattery of attention even from your potential opponents is useful to publicise your cause and your own personal standing amongst the people.

Yet John the Baptist who could be mistaken even by those in authority as being either the Messiah, Elijah, or the promised prophet like Moses, defines himself by who he is not rather than by who he is.

Application

We live in a culture that values 'me'. This is most obvious in the celebrity culture which many disdain but it has its more subtle forms.

We can seek to **gain adulation by achieving.**

As a ministry team we were sharing the other day how much pressure our young people are under in our particular sub culture here in Woodbridge that values, and some would say over values, education. That desire to want to be like others and have the five 'A' stars. This pressure can come from within ourselves or is placed on us by others – parents – teachers – the education establishment. We need rather to value all and remember that actually what is important to remember is who 'we are not' rather than 'who we are'. Paul for instance is thought to have been in the top 5% of his day in terms of academic brilliance yet he could describe himself as *like one born out of due time.*

John the Baptist points to the '*I am.....*' preferring to describe himself as '*I am not....*'

Question for discussion.

In what ways do we avoid the adulation of others, seeking rather to point to Jesus?

It might be seeking attention in our family, marriage, relationship or from people at work or any other setting.

2) His words point away from himself.

Read v15, 19-28

John is a sign of a new beginning and he is able to do this because he understands his primary role is to testify about Jesus. John the Baptist **speaks** more about Jesus than he does about himself

He came as a witness to testify concerning the light v7

John testifies concerning him v15

Now this was John's testimony... v19

He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely.... 20

Then John gave this testimony... v32

I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God v34

(The noun 'witness' or 'testimony' is used 14 times in John- not once in Matthew; three times in Mark; and only once in Luke.

The verb 'testify' is used 33 times in John- once each in Matthew and Luke and not at all in Mark.)

Later in Jesus' ministry he returns to the place where John's ministry had been undertaken

Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days.

Here he stayed and many people came to him.

They said, 'Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.

And in that place many people believed in Jesus.

John 10v40-41

What is important to John the gospel writer is who Jesus is (the Son of God) and that he can be believed in ('belief' used 98 times in John's gospel) because of the testimony of so many people and that started with John. Notice though it is John the Baptist's words that are remembered rather than his ministry. John the Baptist understands his purpose as being 'the voice'. When asked who he was he 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 1:23 quoting Is 40:3

John is of course known for his ministry of baptism but the primary emphasis that John the gospel writer gives is that of him being a voice or more correctly 'the voice'.

This 'voice' occurs three times in the passage from Isaiah

A voice of one calling Is 40:3 & a voice says cry out Is 40:6 & lift up your voice with a shout Is 40:9

Once more this is a reference to the **lasting nature of the word of God**

In the same passage in Isaiah we read

The grass withers and the flowers fall

but the word of our God stands for ever

Is 40:8

The voice is also **one of authority** as it heralds the arrival of a King. In the Near East the custom would have been to send a representative ahead to announce the coming of a monarch and to prepare the way.

Application

Some in the life of the Church suggest that we should only use words if needed. But this contradicts one of the chief ways that John the Baptist is a sign of a new beginning. He announces, testifies, witnesses to the true light that is coming into the world (John 1:9)

Even though John physically comes before Jesus he is secondary to him clearing the way for him. He acts as a herald to the one who is about to come. He is the announcer.

The other Gospel writers note that being the voice, the announcer can cause offence to some. (Luke 3v19-20)

Question for discussion.

How much time do we spend talking about ourselves rather than talking about Jesus?

In what ways do we as individuals speak about Jesus?

Who is offended in our society by what we say about Jesus and the consequence of his coming for all our lives?

3) His ministry points away from himself

Read v29-34

John's ministry points away from his ministry to the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus surpasses John because although physically born after him (elders would normally have the greater respect) Jesus already existed before the beginning of time (John 1:1-2)

It is Jesus ministry that will be effective in taking away the sins of the world. John's ministry is clearly linked to the washing away of sin as an act of preparation for something greater that is to come.

That is why John describes Jesus as 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world v29

*That is why I came baptizing with water,
giving you a good bath
and scrubbing your sins from your life
so you can get a fresh start with God.*

John 1:33 The Message.

The real baptism is not that with water but the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Later in John's gospel the Lamb of God was killed on the afternoon when the Passover lambs were being killed in the temple. John the Baptist is pointing then to the ministry of this Lamb of God whose sacrifice will be more effective than his ministry and more effective than the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. That had to be repeated each year and was restricted to the Jews, the people of God.

As **Jesus is for everyone** so the effect of **his sacrifice and ministry is for everyone** that is everyone who **believes** in his name. All of this is accessed no longer through being born into God's people but through belief in Jesus. (John 1 v12-13).

We can all have a fresh start and we can all have the spirit of God poured into us because Jesus himself had the Spirit come down upon him in order that he might eventually pass on that same Spirit so we might continue and further Jesus ministry.

John the Baptist is clear

I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God

John 1 v34

Application and Question for Discussion.

In what ways does your particular ministry point to and prepare others to receive the ministry that Jesus brings?

This presupposes you know what your ministry is, and its place in enabling others to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. If you don't know what this is why not ask your group members to pray with you so God might reveal this to you. Knowing what your particular role is ensures that you are able to more easily give it away and not point to yourself but rather ensure it points to Jesus.