

John the Baptist: The Social Misfit

Sunday School Lesson 1

Personality and God's Purpose

Matthew 3

6/14/2020

Introduction: For the next two months, we are going to explore the topic of personalities and how God uses them to accomplish His purpose for us. While mankind was created in the image of God, He also allowed for each of us to be born with our own personality. We know that we have all been fearfully and wonderfully made by the hand of God (Psalm 139:14; Jeremiah 1:5). Yet, sin has corrupted every one of us, so our personalities must be submitted to the Lord for His use. Sin is never excused because of an individual's personality. In our service to Jesus Christ, we are expected to die to ourselves. This does not mean that we are totally without personality, though. We see a variety of personalities all throughout the Bible. Men like David and Joseph definitely had different personalities, but God was able to use both men to accomplish His will and purpose for them and for all of Israel. The disciples certainly had different personalities, but they were all followers of Jesus (excluding Judas). Elijah was a great prophet for God, but his personality varied greatly from another great prophet by the name of Daniel. As believer, we make up the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that the body can't have all the same members. There are different roles that people play in the body of Christ, and God has given each person the personality that they need to accomplish that role. In our first lesson, we are going to look at the personality of John the Baptist. He was a man who was okay with being a social misfit. While every Christian to an extent ought to be okay with being socially rejected, the reason for that rejection is typically our following of Christ and not just our overall way of life. Let's see how God's purpose can be accomplished by those who have no regard for societal norms.

I. THE LORD USED JOHN'S CONDUCT TO DRAW MEN OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS TO HEAR THE MESSAGE. (MATTHEW 11:7-15)

- A. Notice that John had one primary purpose in his service to the Lord (Matthew 11:10).** John the Baptist was tasked with one objective during his ministry. He was to prepare the way of the Lord. His message was for Israel to repent as the Messiah was coming. John was given an immensely important task. It was so important that God visited John's parents to inform them of the purpose that He had for John to fulfill. In a day where so many Israelites had become spiritually tone deaf to what God was doing, John had to find a way to get their attention. We must keep in mind that John was not the only prophet to ever tell Israel that the Messiah was coming. For several hundred years, the Israelites had one prophet after another who would proclaim the arrival of the Messiah. The Old Testament ends with significant warning to the Israelites about the increasing number of false prophets. It seems that Satan tries to muddy the waters whenever the Lord's arrival is imminent, as we know the same warnings are given now about the Lord's return. For that reason, John the Baptist had a very difficult task. Would the people listen to his message?
- B. Notice that men went out to the wilderness to listen to John out of curiosity (Matthew 11:7-9).** People were curious about John despite the fact that he never performed a miracle (Jn. 10:41). The Israelites expected miracles from their prophets. What caught their attention was the uniqueness of John the Baptist. His behavior was a curiosity to them. They likely wondered why he stayed in the wilderness, dressed the way he did, and ate the food that he ate. Of course, his preaching was very powerful. If they heard the message, they were undoubtedly going to be convicted of their present condition. It was just a matter of ensuring that they came out to hear it. Sometimes, we are guilty of boxing people in to becoming what we want them to become. We think that they must have a certain level of normal to be successful in this world. Even as Christians, we are prone to ostracize those who might be a bit unusual. We must understand that God can use that uniqueness to draw men to Him. I've seen people who have very little social skills lead others to Christ. I've stood at a door and ashamedly wondered why the person inside the home kept listening to what I perceived as someone awkwardly giving the plan of salvation.

II. THE LORD USED JOHN'S CONDUCT TO HELP HIM BE BOLD. (MATTHEW 3:1-7, 14:3-4)

- A. Notice that John's conduct tells us that he was not concerned much with the opinion of men (Matthew 3:1-4).** As Christians, we often worry too much about what others are thinking. We allow these concerns to keep us from doing all that we should for Christ. One thing that I have noticed among Christians whom others would consider social misfits is that they often thrive in the area of boldness or confidence. It's because they are not consumed with fitting in or avoiding doing anything that wouldn't be considered "mainstream." We should all purpose to be bold and focused on pleasing the Lord above others. If you find yourself with the personality of the social misfit, turn it into a strength for the Lord.

You might not have to work as hard as others in this area of boldness! John the Baptist had no problem speaking out against the Jewish leaders and Herod because he was already used to being that guy that did what nobody else would do. He lived in the wilderness, and he ate a diet consisting of locusts and honey. While that is not nearly as uncommon in the Middle East, it still would be rare to have that as a reoccurring menu item. John the Baptist also wore an outfit that was outdated by several hundreds of years. Outfits like that had not been worn since the days of the Old Testament prophets. His outfit didn't start a new fashion trend!

- B. Notice that John had a bold message to give to those in authority (Matthew 3:7; Matthew 14:3-4).** Jesus was not the only one who had garnered the ire of the Jewish leaders. John the Baptist spoke out bluntly against the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He referred to them as a generation of vipers. He challenged them to repent. He called them out on their misplaced trust in Abraham. He showed great boldness in his interactions with them. He certainly was not intimidated. He also upset Herod the tetrarch by publicly condemning his relationship to his brother's wife. John the Baptist was not afraid to stir the pot when necessary. He knew he had a responsibility to preach the truth. His personality certainly helped him to be bold. Whether we have John's personality or not, we need to make sure that we are bold in our service to the Lord.

III. THE LORD USED JOHN'S CONDUCT TO HELP HIM STAY FOCUSED. (LUKE 7:33)

- A. Notice that John did not spend much time socializing with others, except for as necessary in his ministry (Luke 7:33).** In Luke 7:33-34, Jesus compares Himself to John the Baptist. He noted that John was not known for socializing with others. He did not go to all of the events. He did not sit among the people and break bread. This behavior was unusual. The Jewish leaders pounced on it as proof that something was off about John. They accused him of being of the Devil. On the other hand, we know that Jesus did socialize with the people, and they also accused Him of being of the Devil. It wasn't that it was wrong for John the Baptist to socialize; he just did not have much desire to do so. Most people are very social by nature. We crave that interaction with others. However, there are some who don't seem to need much of that social interaction. They don't have to be in a group. They don't have to have fellowships and other extracurricular things to do to engage with other believers on a regular occurrence.
- B. Notice that John spent his time totally focused on his ministry (Luke 11:1).** John was constantly preaching and teaching. He had many disciples that were following him. In fact, the disciples of the Lord asked for the Lord to teach them like John had taught his disciples. John's lack of social interaction allowed him to be consumed with preaching and teaching. When I worked in a secular job, I observed that some of the best employees were the ones who did not need the constant social interaction with others. They were generally more focused on their assignments. They were often the first people to volunteer for overtime. The employees with greater social skills had to work much harder to stay focused on a task. As believers, we all must be committed to the Lord and focused on doing His will and fulfilling His purpose for us. John the Baptist had a big assignment. God created Him as the exact person whom He would use to accomplish this big task.

IV. THE LORD USED JOHN'S CONDUCT TO HELP HIM STAY HUMBLE. (JOHN 1:28-32, 3:23-28)

- A. Notice that while John had many followers, he was mostly being followed by the common people (Matthew 14:5).** While John had a large following, we must understand that these people would be considered "common" during that time. They had regular daily occupations. They were not collectively wealthy. This was John's audience. This did not make him socially accepted. They were following him because his preaching caused them to recognize that he was a prophet. They were not following him because of his miracles or because of his personality. As soon as Jesus started His earthly ministry, many of the disciples of John quickly left to follow Jesus instead. This did not phase John. He knew it was going to come to pass. If John were popular based on personality or even more generally accepted socially, he would have struggled greatly with envy over what was taking place.
- B. Notice that John was filled with Joy that the Lord Jesus Christ was being magnified (John 1:28-32, 3:23-28).** When his disciples questioned what was happening with Jesus, John the Baptist told them that he was filled with joy that Jesus' ministry was getting started. The disciples of John were struggling with this. It seems that they felt that Jesus had taken away John's audience. They wanted to know what John was going to do about it. They were likely surprised when John said that he was happy. John told them that he was going to have to decrease in order for Christ to increase. John the Baptist was ready to do this. He was ready to be alone in the wilderness if that is what it would have taken for Christ to be magnified. John was a social misfit. He was not your ordinary prophet. Yet, Christ called him to be His forerunner. His personality helped him to draw men out, to be bold, and to stay focused and humbled.