

John the Baptist — only "a voice"

Questions and how to meet them.

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I have been very much interested of late in looking at the excellent way in which John the Baptist met the various questions which came before him; for, alas! there were questions in his day, as there are in ours.

What I specially refer to now is presented to us in John 1 and John 3.

The first question which this dear and honoured servant of Christ was called to answer had respect to himself, and of this he makes very short work indeed. "This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?"

It is ever welcome to any right-minded person to be asked to speak about himself. So, I doubt not, John found it. He readily told them that he was not the Messiah, that he was not Elias; yea, that he was not even the prophet. But they would have a positive answer. "They said unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?" Little indeed had he to say of himself. "I" had a very small place in John's thoughts. "A voice." Was this all? Yes; this was all. The Spirit in the prophet had spoken; John quotes the words, and there he leaves it. Blessed servant! Honoured witness! Would we had more of thy excellent spirit! — more of thy method of answering questions!

But these Pharisees were not satisfied. John's self-hiding spirit was entirely beyond them. "They asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias, neither the prophet?"

Here again the Baptist makes short work "John answered them, saying, I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

Thus, as to himself, he was merely a voice. And, as to his work, he baptised with water, and he was only too glad to retire behind that blessed One whose shoe's latchet he felt himself utterly unworthy to unloose.

This is uncommonly fine. I feel assured that the lovely spirit displayed by this most illustrious servant of Christ is to be coveted. I do long to know more and more of this self-hiding — this losing sight of self and its doings — this retiring spirit. Truly it is much needed in this day of egotistical boast and pretension.

But turn with me for a moment to John 3. Here we have another kind of question. It is not now about himself or his work, but about purifying. "There arose a question among some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came to John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all come to Him."

Now this was a mistake, for "Jesus Himself baptised not, but His disciples." But this is not the point here. What strikes me is John's mode of settling all questions, right or wrong. He finds a perfect solution for all in the presence of his Lord. "John answered and said, A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven."

How true! How simple! How perfectly obvious! What a complete settlement of every question! If a man has anything at all, whence did it, whence could it, come? Surely only from Heaven. What a perfect cure for strife, envy, jealousy, and emulation! "Every good gift and every perfect gift is *from above*, and *cometh down* from the Father of lights. What a tale this tells of earth and of man! What a record it bears to Heaven and to God! Not one atom of good on earth but what comes from Heaven. Not an atom of good in man but what comes from God. Why, then, should any one boast, or be jealous, or envious? If all goodness is from above, let there be an end of all strife, and let all hearts go up in praise to "the Father of lights."

Thus it was the Baptist met the questions of his day. He let all the questioners know that their questions had but little interest for him. And, more than that, he let them know where all his interests lay. This blessed servant found all his springs in the Lamb of God, in His precious work — in His glorious Person. The voice of the Bridegroom was enough for him, and, having heard that, his joy was full. The question of purifying might be interesting enough in its place, and no doubt, like all other questions, it had its right and its wrong side; but for John, the Bridegroom's voice was enough. In His presence he found a divine answer to every question — a divine solution to every difficulty. He looked up to Heaven, and saw every good thing coming from thence. He looked into the Bridegroom's face, and saw every moral glory centred there. This was enough for him. Why trouble him with questions of any kind — questions about himself or his work, or about purifying? He lived far beyond the region of questions, in the blessed presence of his Lord and there he found all his heart could ever need.

Now it seems to me that you and I would do well to take a leaf out of John's book as regards all this. I need not remind you that in this our day there are questions agitating men's minds. Yes, and some of us are called to account for not expressing ourselves more decidedly on some at least of these questions. But, for my part, I believe the devil is doing his utmost to alienate our hearts from Christ and from one another by questions. We ought not to be ignorant of his devices. He does not come openly, and say, "I am the devil, and I want to divide and scatter you by questions." Yet this is precisely what he is seeking to do.

Now, it matters not whether the question be right or wrong in itself; the devil can make use of a right question just as effectively as of a wrong one, provided he can succeed in raising that question into undue prominence, and causing it to come between our souls and Christ, and between us and our brethren. I can understand a difference in judgement, on various minor questions. Christians have differed about such for many long centuries, and they will continue to differ until the end of time. It is human weakness. But when any question is allowed to assume undue prominence, it ceases to be mere human weakness, and becomes a wile of Satan. I may have a very decided judgement on any given point, and so may you. But what I long for now is a thorough sinking of all questions, and a rejoicing together in hearing the Bridegroom's voice, and going on together in the light of His blessed countenance. This will confound the enemy. It will effectually deliver us from prejudice and partiality, from cliques and coteries. We shall then measure one another, not by our views of any particular question, but by our appreciation of the Person of Christ, and our devotion to His cause.

In a word, my beloved and valued friend, what I long for is that you and I, and all our dear brethren throughout the whole world, may be characterized by a deep-toned, thorough, devotion to the name and truth, and cause of Christ. I long to cultivate broad sympathies, that can take in every true lover of Christ, even though we see not eye to eye on all minor questions. At best "we know but in part"; and we can never expect people to agree with us about questions. But if Christ be our one absorbing object, all other things will assume their right place, their relative value, their proper proportions. "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect [as many as have Christ for their one object], be

thus minded: and if in *anything* ye be otherwise [or differently, *eteros*] minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. *Nevertheless*, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by *the same rule* [Christ], and mind the same thing" (Christ). The moment anything else but Christ is introduced as a rule to walk by, it is simply the work of the devil. Of this I am as sure as that I hold this pen in my hand.

May the Lord keep us all close to Himself, walking together, not in sectarianism, but in true brotherly love, seeking the blessing and prosperity of all who belong to Christ and promoting in every possible way His blessed cause, until He come!