

"A man sent from God"

Luke 7: 19-23; John 1: 6, 20; John 5: 33-35; John 10: 41, 42; Acts 18: 24-28.

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I felt impressed to follow the line that has been before us in regard to the service of the Lord.

We have heard of Barnabas; now we refer to John Baptist, another man who united two dispensations together. According to the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ there had never been a greater man born into the world than John the Baptist. He was the man to whom was given the wonderful privilege of publicly presenting the Son of God in the beginning of His testimony in this world. A man who, coming down from a priestly family was himself in a favoured position, yet nevertheless was wrought upon by the Spirit of God in view of his outstanding service for the glory of God, and as a witness to the glory and the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 1, we read "There was a man *sent from God*, whose name was John." Receiving his commission in secret with God he moved out in the power of that divine communication, and became an outstanding witness to Israel of the glory and the greatness of the Son of God. We ourselves do well to start there, in the secret of God's own presence, learning there what our work is, what God wants us to do. If we learn it there in secret with God, as John the Baptist did, we may be assured that when we step out publicly from the presence of God Himself, our testimony will bear fruit.

Here was John, a sort of nomad in the regions of Israel, brought up in the wilderness, but a man who had a history with God, a man *sent from God*. It is almost the same term used of the Son of God Himself, except that the Son of God coming from God came from heaven itself, while John the Baptist came from communing with God in the wilderness. What John learned formed him as one of the outstanding servants of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the power of that formation he came out publicly and practically turned the land of Israel upside down. Thousands flocked to hear the testimony of this man, who had but one theme for his discourse, the message that God had given him, a message learned in the presence of God, testifying to the Son of God whom as yet he had never seen. About to introduce Him to Israel, he says, "I knew Him not; but He that sent me . . . said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He." Time after time his sending by God Himself is referred to, and when the moment came that Christ was manifested publicly on the banks of the Jordan, John could say "I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

The Pharisees, aroused by this movement, sent a company to John to ask of him, "Who art thou?" "What sayest thou of thyself?" Mark these words, "what sayest thou of *thyself*?" We may pause a moment and ask, Had God told John to say anything at all about himself? We can be sure He had not; and John knew that full well. Note the element of reduction in his replies to their questions. "I am not the Christ"; "I am not"; "No"; five words, three words, one word. A servant who has received his commission in the presence of God Himself, and who bears testimony to the glory and the greatness of the Son of God, will never be guilty of referring to himself. Again these men from Jerusalem persisted, "Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us." John answers, "A voice"; just "A voice" to bear testimony to the Son of God. John would say as it were, I am not talking about myself; I have a voice, I have a message, but it is concerning the Son of God. Who I am is of little importance; who He is, is of all importance. Press him as they will to talk about himself, his only theme is the Son of God, and of Him only will he speak.

In John 5 we have the Lord's own words concerning His servant. In verses 32 to 34 we read "There is another that beareth witness of Me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of Me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man; but these things I say, that ye might be saved." Then the Lord says of John, "He was the burning and shining lamp, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light," (v. 35 N. Tr.).

Let us look at this twofold testimony, *burning* and *shining*. Perhaps difficulties arise because we may shine a little but do not burn. Clearly though we may express the truth, if the warmth of love is absent there will be a lack of interest. As the burning and shining light there was not only illumination coming out through John, illumination as to the Son of God; there was also divine love flowing through his testimony. Obviously it made an impression upon those Pharisees, although they did not believe his testimony. The testimony borne by a saint of God has often been refused, and yet those hearing it have had to bear witness that he meant what he said; he burned as well as shined. If something of the love of God permeates our testimony in this world; if people see that we mean what we say as having learned it in the presence of God, there is bound to be fruit from the service. Let us then seek grace to *show* as well as to tell what this word can do, forming us after the character of Christ, in order that there might be a *burning* as well as a shining in the testimony we bear for Him in this world.

In John 10, where John is mentioned again, we reach the close of the Lord's public ministry. We read in verses 40 and 41 that Jesus "went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there abode. And many resorted unto Him, and said, John did no miracle; but all things that John spake of this Man were true." What John said had left an impression, and having listened to John's testimony, when they saw the One of whom John had testified, they were obliged to say "All things that John spake of this Man were true." What a faithful witness! There was no mistake as to the fruit that was evidenced in the lives of these people. That burning and that shining light had affected them in their souls, and the result was they recognized the Son of God, "many believed on Him there."

In the verses read from Luke 7 we have another view of this remarkable servant John, although rendering a faithful testimony, is in prison, perplexed and in doubt. Why? John was not privileged to know what we know today; he did not expect that Christ was to be rejected; that was not revealed to John. He did not know that the very One he had testified to; He who was to take "away the sin of the world," that this One would ultimately be refused by Israel, and crucified. The kingdom was not yet established in power. It looked as though the enemies were gaining the ascendancy. John is in prison; and as far as he can see the kingdom was not about to be set up as he had expected it would be; and indeed it was *not* set up as John had expected. He calls two of his disciples and sends them to the Lord asking "Art Thou He that should come? or look we for another?" John began to cast about in his mind as to whether he had missed something in his testimony. Had he failed somewhere? Was this the One he was to present? He was perplexed because things had not turned out as he thought they would have done, and so he sent these two disciples to Jesus. Sufficient for the moment was the fact that the Lord "in *that same hour* . . . cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind He gave sight" (v. 21). He said, as it were, to these disciples of John, "That is all the testimony you need as to who I am." "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard . . . And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me." John, wonderful servant as he was, nevertheless reached a point of disappointment in regard to that service; he did not know of the *many* who had believed on the Lord as the result of his testimony as we have seen at the end of John 10. It looked as though his service had failed, and, probably discouraged in the prison, John sought a little comfort, or a little confirmation from the Lord. Have we, in our service ever reached the point when we thought we could not see any fruit for our service? We may look in on ourselves and wonder

whether there has been anything wrong with us? We may quite easily get perplexed like that; and the danger when we do get like that, is to think that the service is not worth while. John was in prison, but he did not give up, although he was disappointed and perplexed. Let us seek grace to continue, and not to allow disappointment or perplexity to deter us from going on with the service. Only when we have left this world and have joined men like John the Baptist in heaven above, only then shall we see what has been produced in a steadfast careful testimony to the Son of God. No faithful service has ever been rendered for the Lord by any servant, whether in the early days of the church of God, or in the present days of manifest weakness, but what that service has been registered in heaven, and its results will be seen in a day to come.

In Acts 18: 24 we read "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus." To be instructed in the word of the Lord is an absolute necessity if we are to be fruitful in service. Apollos was a Bible student; he was a man who searched the Scriptures in order to find out the truth, as we read in verse 25, "This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord." That word "diligently" may be translated "accurately." How essential it is that the Scriptures should be quoted accurately! The word of God is that which the Spirit uses. A brother now with the Lord said that Satan scorns every other weapon but the Word of God. The only thing he cannot defeat; the only thing he cannot overcome is the Word of God. How necessary then for us to use it aright.

This man Apollos, a man who has been taught the way of the Lord, is also a man fervent in spirit. Converted through the testimony of John; characterized by the features of the man through whom he was converted; fervent in spirit, burning in spirit; like a lamp shining brilliantly, he is found in that assembly at Ephesus, speaking "boldly in the synagogue," as yet "knowing only the baptism of John."

Coming into contact with Aquila and Priscilla "They took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly," or as it might read "accurately" — it is the same word again. What he had already learned was accurate, accurate as far as it went; but Aquila and Priscilla "unfolded to him the way of God more exactly" (N. Tr.).

The wonderful result of this instruction is seen in the last verse of the chapter. "He mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." *By the Scriptures*. May that word go home to each of us. Had John Baptist been in that assembly at Ephesus listening to Apollos, he might have enquired as to where he had first come into contact with these things. Can we not imagine the joy of this servant, who at one time was perplexed and somewhat disappointed, as he learned that Apollos commenced his service "knowing only the baptism of John?" If an "Apollos" was the result of our service, would it not be worthwhile? And if we are bearing accurate simple testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ, may such a result not be?

We need, brethren, to cultivate being alone with God, the first requisite if service is to be fruitful; "there was a man *sent from God*". Then the necessity of knowing the Scriptures, of bearing a simple, warm, enlightening testimony to the Son of God. Of such service fruit will be produced for God.