

# John the Baptist

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Christian Friend vol. 14, 1887, p. 15 etc.

(This instructive little work is translated from the French.)

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## Chapter 1.

### *The Nation and the Remnants.*

#### **Luke 1 - 3.**

The title of this little book might mislead the reader; its subject is not so much John the Baptist as Christ. All-important and interesting as his personality may be, John can only be like the background of a picture intended to bring into relief One who was greater than he; and it is thus, as his words and his life prove, that the prophet himself would have written his history.

Luke 1 very strikingly portrays the circumstances in which Israel was found at the coming of the fore-runner, and which preceded the manifestation of the Messiah. A great change had come over the

circumstances of Israel since the days of Nehemiah. The people had been brought into subjection to the last universal Gentile empire, but morally their state differed little from that revealed by the prophet Malachi 450 years before Christ. Israel was no longer in open warfare with Jehovah; the false gods had disappeared out of the house which was swept and garnished, the fig-tree was covered with the leaves of an empty profession, but absolute barrenness lay hidden beneath this outside show. Indifference and insensibility, worse than hatred, were to be found in the heart of the people. One feature of the apostasy is, that God is no longer esteemed worth the trouble of thinking about, and men of our days are in process of casting Him aside as a thing of the past. That which will bow to the very dust the forehead of the repentant remnant of Israel, when at last their eyes are opened to Christ, will be the fact of having been able to pass by the Man of Sorrows with indifference, setting no value on Him. (Isaiah 53.)

Such were the relations of Israel with God in the time of Malachi. When Jehovah said to them in the tenderest accents, "I have loved you," they replied, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" for they knew not the heart of God. When He said to the priests, "You have despised my name," they replied, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" so blinded were they as to their own state and transgressions. They polluted the table of the Lord, and "offered the lame and the sick;" because, in spite of all their religious forms, God was not in their heart or their life, nor had they the *least conscience* as to the dishonour they brought upon Him. (Mal. 1.) Such a religion must end some time or other by seeming superfluous to those who practise it. What is the good? "Behold, what a weariness is it!" they say. (Mal. 1: 13.) It is thus that the heart of a professor expresses itself; and if beneath religious weariness he do not become an idolater himself, he soon returns to the idolatrous world, connects himself with it, "marries," as says the prophet, "the daughter of a strange god," and becomes one flesh with her in the eyes of an avenging God, who will execute judgment on both. (Mal. 2: 11-16.)

This is a great danger even for the Christian in these days of ruin. Asaph expressed it thus: "Therefore His people return hither [towards the wicked] and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them," when times of affliction came upon him, contrasting with the growing prosperity of the world. (Psalm 72.) But for the believer there is a second and more subtle danger than this, because a more plausible one; and that is to *isolate* himself in proportion as he sees the increase of the indifference and worldliness so general among the children of God. Now this tendency is diametrically opposed to God's thought for His own, and it is precisely in view of these times of ruin that the prophet says to us, "Then, they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." (Mal. 3: 16.) The apostasy does not isolate those who fear the Lord; it incites them to come together. As the psalmist says, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee." (Ps. 119: 63.) It is the same at every dark epoch in the history of the people of God; it was thus with the youthful witnesses during the Babylonish captivity. (Dan. 2: 17.) Such is now the case in the perilous times of the end (2 Tim. 2: 22); so it was during the gloomy hours that followed the cross, when the still ignorant disciples communed one with another on the road to Emmaus; and in the early chapters of the Gospel of Luke we see a present. and striking realization of His word.

"They that feared the Lord spake often one to another" is God's resource for days of ruin. Look at these few faithful saints, amidst the barren waste of a lifeless profession, seeking and finding one another, and holding converse together. Mary and Elizabeth talk one to another, Zacharias and his neighbours commune of these things, the shepherds publish them, Simeon announces them, and Anna speaks of them "to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Remark, moreover, that there is but *one* subject of intercourse for all these faithful ones — it is the consolation of Israel; it is Christ, the Messiah; it is the person of the Saviour; and such conversation is pleasing to God, who lends an attentive ear thereto. He records these things in a book of remembrance — a special book. Nothing is so pleasing to God as hearts appreciating His beloved Son. Dear reader, He takes note of the value that

you and I set on the name of Jesus. Those who appreciate Christ in days of affliction will have God's own approval at a future day of glory. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." (Mal. 3: 17.) Is not such a promise well fitted to encourage our souls?

"Spake often one to another." This occupation of the faithful allies itself with the most simple daily duties of this life. Zacharias accomplishes his priestly functions, and offers incense; Elizabeth is in the country; Mary journeys; the shepherds keep their flocks. It even connects itself with the apparent inactivity of a Simeon, who dwells at Jerusalem; of an Anna advanced in years, weakened by age, confined to the temple, but preserving unimpaired the most precious part of her activity, the hidden life of her soul with God, "night and day." But what an element of freshness and joy the person of Christ brings into the intercourse of these saints! Souls are running over, conversation changes into adoration, and those who speak one to another necessarily realize what worship is. (Luke 1: 46, 68; Luke 2: 29.)

Two messages had been brought by the angel Gabriel, the one concerning John the Baptist, the other about Jesus; and both elicit praises from the mouths of those by whom they are received. Still, even before His birth, as ever after, John the Baptist disappears before Christ to make way for the universal song, which rises around this little child from the lips of all the faithful. Whom does Elizabeth celebrate? Not her son, but the Lord. And Zacharias, while announcing the glorious mission of his new-born infant, only does so to exalt the Lord, the God of Israel, the Horn of Deliverance, the Christ, the Most High. With true witnesses it is always so. Blessings from the hand of God are only used by them as occasions of praise to Him who is the origin and centre of these blessings.

The circumstances which accompanied and preceded the Saviour's first coming seem to me, in many ways, applicable to the present time. As then (see Luke 3: 1, 2) organization is increasing in the world, which seeks a ground of safety in its own institutions; as then, under the auspices of the world, a traditional and orthodox religion prevails, indifferent, self-righteous, and ripe for the apostasy; as then, sects flourish, such as the Rationalistic Sadducees, or the Herodians, who pronounced the then existing administration excellent; as then, the Lord's coming, or rather *return*, is at hand; but does this happy message produce now in the hearts of the saints the same fruit as then? Oh that there might be found in our hearts that freshness of hope, those divine rays from the morning star appearing for faith in the splendour of its pristine dawn, that star resplendent with grace, herald of the glory, whose sight causes the heart to overflow with unspeakable adoration! Dear reader, if we are awaiting it, we shall be found speaking one to another until the day of glory, when we shall be the peculiar treasure of One who is coming.

## **Chapter 2.**

### ***His Birth.***

#### **Luke 1: 15.**

The angel Gabriel was commissioned to announce two glad tidings — the one to Zacharias, the other to Mary of Nazareth; but the circumstances and the import of these two messages present more of contrast than of similitude. Zacharias and his wife "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Nevertheless, *old age* had crept over them, and Elizabeth was *barren*.

May we not see in them a picture of godly Israelites under the law, and of the utter inability of the

law to bring forth fruit even in a regenerated man? Moreover, it does not produce intimacy with God any more than fruit; for Zacharias, who was of exemplary piety, seeing the angel, "was troubled, and fear fell upon him." Finally, it does not induce *confidence*, which grace alone calls forth. The priest under the law was *unbelieving* as to the message of grace brought by Gabriel, and so this representative of Israel remained *dumb* until the day when, the divine promise having in grace been fulfilled, he could, like the remnant by-and-by, praise the Author of his salvation. Mary was not only pious, but humble and simple — an *object of grace*, and not an exponent of the law. "Thou hast found favour with God," said the angel. She was *subject* — "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord;" and her *confidence* was in the word of God, for she added, "Be it unto me according to thy word." (Luke 1: 30-38.)

The contrast between these two messages is worthy of remark. John should be "great in the sight of the Lord." Of Jesus the angel said, "He shall be great." We will return to this subject in another chapter. All John the Baptist's greatness depended on the Person whose herald he was, whilst Jesus was great in Himself and of Himself. From the place whence I write, I can see, in the light of the rising sun, the shadow of a chestnut tree assuming gigantic proportions; yet this shadow is not a picture of the size of the tree, but a witness to the sun's rising and splendour. Such was John — great because he had the signal honour of being the messenger of One of whom the angel said, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom their shall be no end." (Luke 1: 32, 33.)

But these words of Gabriel's — "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord" — do not express all that should characterize the Baptist; for he adds, "And he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." This is Nazariteship; at least, the first mark thereof. John could only be great in the sight of the Lord by being a Nazarite. From Numbers 6 we see that to be a Nazarite was "to separate one's self unto the Lord." There were three distinct signs. First, the Nazarite abstained from wine and strong drink; next, he allowed the hair of his head to grow; and finally, he "came at no dead body." He deprived himself of wine — sign of joy to the heart of the natural man in the company of his equals. His long hair proclaimed that he abandoned the dignity and rights of man for subjection to the will of God, whose claims on him he acknowledged; and lastly, he avoided all that could bring him into contact with sin, whose wages is death. Such was the ordering and the secret of a Nazarite. Separation to God could only subsist at the expense of these three things, and they were carried out in the life of John the Baptist. But in this passage he is presented to us as especially set apart from all that constitutes the joy of a social man. The world, no doubt, on seeing him, would have said, "He is a sad and dismal misanthrope." What a mistake! This natural joy, the only one known to the world, was replaced in the prophet's heart by a joy which communion with the Saviour gives. These two joys are opposed to each other, and cannot subsist together; and it is only in proportion as we deny ourselves the former that we can enjoy the latter. Throughout his career divine joy was one of the characteristic features of this most austere man. As a miraculous babe in his mother's womb, his first movement is one of joy when the salutation of the mother of his Lord reaches Elizabeth's ears (Luke 1: 44); and at the end of his course he says again, "This my joy therefore is fulfilled." (John 3: 29.)

We must not forget that every Christian is called to be a Nazarite, and that with regard to this there is no longer any thought of a special class of persons among God's people; neither is it now a question for us as for the Nazarite Jew of an external separation or one consisting in forms. True Nazariteship - separation to God — is of the heart. The world sees the effects in life, joy, and power, without understanding them; but separation in itself is a secret between the soul and God. Proclaiming that I am separate, occupies others with me; saying that I am in dependence on God, is to be so no

longer, since I ascribe something to myself. I surrender by so doing my secret to the world, and, like Samson, abandon my flowing locks to its scissors. When once Satan and the world have learned the secret of my strength, they will not rest till they have robbed me of it. But if there are Christians to be found who are so satisfied with themselves as to divulge the secret of their Nazariteship, there are others who are constantly talking about their failures; doubtless two extremes, but two formed of the same pride. The one does not see the spots on his coat, while the other displays them; but both neglect the only things needful — humiliation and purification. If in any particular we have broken our Nazarite vow, if we have defiled ourselves for the dead, restoration is possible. (Num. 6: 9-12.) Let us examine ourselves. With humiliation we shall find purification. But, alas! and it is a solemn thing, we lose through sin a joy such as the Baptist's, and a power such as the man of Zorah's. We must begin over again. It took time for Samson to recover, along with his hair, strength to break down the pillars in Dagon's temple.

To the words, "He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink," Gabriel adds, "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." Here it is as if the special power of the Holy Ghost were connected with Nazariteship. Many Christians imagine that to be filled with the Holy Ghost is a special favour, that only *could* belong to privileged ones among the people of God. No such thing. This condition is in point of fact the normal state of the Christian — he is qualified to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is to say, in order that the Spirit may restrain and annul every manifestation of the flesh which the child of God has in him. Every believer is a temple of the Holy Ghost; but every believer is not filled by Him. And why? Is it a lack of power to do so on the part of the Holy Ghost? Certainly not, or it would not be the Holy Spirit of God. Is it perhaps that we are unable to do aught but grieve Him? In this case we do not, as believers, know deliverance. What then is lacking, even among Christians knowing deliverance, in order to be filled with the Spirit? The reality of Nazariteship. As it is said in Eph. v. 18, "*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*" Oh, beloved children of God, what power of *enjoyment, testimony, conformity to Christ* would be ours if, true Nazarites, we were filled with the Spirit? Have we never, were it but for a moment, tasted such a blessing?

Stephen enjoyed it to the full during his short career as a witness. "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," it is said after the first mention of him; "Stephen, full of grace and of power," the Word adds, when this Nazarite, full of the Spirit, was in active service among the people; Stephen, "being full of the Holy Ghost," it says again, when the sanhedrim were gnashing their teeth on him. (Acts 6: 5, 8; 7: 5-5.) And there, in presence of those who were stoning him - the ungrieved power of the Spirit fixing Stephen's eyes on heaven — he sees "the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." His eyes and his heart, occupied by the Spirit with this heavenly vision, are arrested by an *object* - Jesus in glory. This man on earth sees the Son of man in heaven, and rejoices in the One who, having finished His work, has, in His own person, prepared that glorious place. Our inability to "see Jesus," our want of personal acquaintance with this precious Saviour, is connected — note it well — with the measure in which we realize the apostle's recommendation, "Be filled with the Spirit."

But Stephen not only *enjoys* Christ; he is a *witness*, and says, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." That with which he is filled by the Spirit flows abundantly from his lips. He does not say to himself that he must bear testimony. The river overflowed its banks and watered the earth. Supplied from a heavenly source, it became in Stephen's heart a fountain of springing water. Moreover, this blessed martyr does not only bear witness; he is himself *changed*, while beholding, with unveiled face, the glory of the Lord. He reflects on earth, and without dimming their lustre, the character, ways, and words of the Saviour. All this, I repeat, is not a special

gift, but the fruit of the Holy Spirit acting in our hearts without hindrance. Let us then exhort one another with these words, "Be filled with the Spirit."

Alas! in many ways we all fail. Jesus only, the true Nazarite, never failed. Jesus, conceived of the Holy Spirit, baptized by the Spirit, full of the Spirit (Luke 1: 35, Luke 3: 22), realised all these things in absolute perfection, without a shadow of failure. Man of sorrows on this earth, His joy was full; humble amongst the humble, He was possessed of a divine power which made Him victorious in conflict with Satan when led by the Spirit into the wilderness, which caused "His word to be with power" when "He returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." (Luke 4: 1-14, 32.) Pure and holy, He could say, Satan "hath nothing in me." May He be the pattern of our Nazariteship — "He that was separated [a Nazarite] from his brethren." (Gen. 49: 26; Deut. 33: 16.) Then in the power of the Holy Ghost we shall follow Him, at a distance of two thousand cubits, no doubt, as Israel followed the ark; but we shall follow Him nevertheless, and to follow Him is to grow in His likeness.

### **Chapter 3.**

#### ***John the Baptist in the Wilderness.***

##### **Luke 1: 80; Matt. 3.**

The two passages at the head of the chapter describe the life of John the Baptist from his birth "till the day of his showing unto Israel." "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit," it is said. To be a Nazarite is, as we have seen, the first condition necessary to the normal development of the man of faith. Then the Spirit can exercise His activity in order to make us grow, and to strengthen us with might in the inner man. Nothing will grieve Him, and He will not need to be occupied in rebuking and correcting us; we shall be like a tree planted in good soil, watered by streams of living water, and exposed to the sun's vivifying rays. The tree develops under such a salutary influence: its buds become flowers, and its flowers fruit, according to the season. Such were the characteristics of the prophet when still a child, and yet he was but a feeble picture of the One whose coming he was about to announce.

Of Jesus, John the Baptist's *Lord*, it is said, when a child that, He "grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him." And again, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke 2: 40, 52.) He would not have been truly a man, if He had not from His birth passed through the successive stages of a man's life; He would not have been God, had He not done so in absolute perfection. John was in need of help to grow and wax strong in spirit; and the evangelist says, "The hand of the Lord was with him." (Luke 1: 66.) Jesus grew and waxed strong of *Himself*, so to speak, although, as man, in absolute dependence. In Luke we find the perfection of this unfolding. The flower is in bud, not a blemish; it is in full bloom, not a defect; divine favour, the dew of heaven, fills its chalice; its perfume and grace are such as may delight God and men. It gives promise of fruit which appears in due season, the divine development of perfect maturity.

We have seen the moral state of the son of Zacharias. Let us briefly consider his external condition, such as it would, from his youth, have appeared to a human observer. The Word tells us that he "was in the deserts." What a contrast with the world by which he was surrounded: The Roman "beast" was at the zenith of its prosperity, and stable as no empire which had preceded it. (Luke 3: 1.)

Its administration, army, art, religion, even the Jewish religion (Luke 3: 2), were organized to a remarkable degree. This certainly did not resemble the desert; and it was pleasant to live under such an economy. Between the desert and Judea under Herod a Lot would not have hesitated. John the Baptist found nothing there to attract him; he was in the desert, separated from the world wholly and visibly. Hence when, sent by God, he crosses the threshold of the desert to prophesy amidst the world and its noisy activity, his heart is met by emptiness and silence — "the voice of one crying in the *wilderness*," he says, for the world was a wilderness to him. He asks nothing of it; he does not go to it seeking "soft raiment;" he brings into it the customs of the country of his choice. His raiment is of camel's hair, the only coarse garment that the desert can offer him; he has a leathern girdle about his loins, as had in other times the prophet Elijah, when he presented himself to the officers of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1: 8); his meat is locusts and wild honey, which he gathers in these desolate places. Like Elijah by the brook Cherith, he depends entirely for subsistence on that which God had prepared for him in a barren land — dependence painful to the flesh, but doubly blessed, for it is the power for all true ministry. John the Baptist was qualified by his wilderness life and experience to be the "voice" of Him who makes Himself heard there, and, like Elijah, fearlessly to fulfil his dangerous mission.

But there is One who has distanced John the Baptist in these experiences, He of whom it is said, in Psalm 110, "He shall drink of the brook in the way" - a short sentence expressing the Saviour's earthly career. In this psalm David views Him as already at God's right hand; but also he considers the way which will lead Him thither. How much is contained in these words: "He shall drink of the brook in the way." It is a picture of a man on the march hastening to accomplish his mission. Our thoughts are straightway carried back to Gideon's companions, who were raised up by the Lord for the deliverance of the people, and who drank of the brook in the way. (Judges 7.) There were three hundred of them chosen for a temporal deliverance: Jesus was alone and took the responsibility of an eternal salvation. Nothing arrested Him even for a moment. Of provisions He has none, only water to quench His thirst; and He does not deviate from the path to seek any. The resources which God has put in His way suffice, for He has only one end in view, the accomplishment of the mission on which His heart is wholly set. He would not have gone down upon His knees beside the brook to drink at His ease.

Have you ever noticed in the Gospels how many times the Saviour drank of the brook in the way? The springs of refreshment which He meets with after long stages under a burning sun are quickly counted springs produced by some beneficent rain wherewith heaven has for a moment watered His path, and whereat He has drunk without slackening His pace. When, at the well of Sychar, the conscience of a wretched woman of Samaria was reached by One who asked of her a drink, when she knew not even how to give Him a drop of water, the brook was flowing in the Saviour's path. And with what joy does He quench His thirst thereat by the way — "I have meat to eat that ye know not of . . . . He that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together!" (John 4: 32-36.) When at the Pharisee's table, a poor woman, a sinner already convicted of sin, brought her tears, her kisses, and her ointment to the feet of grace, to Him who alone can forgive, it was not of Simon's repast which the Saviour partook, but of the table which God had prepared in the heart of this woman. While Martha, "careful and troubled," and "cumbered about much serving," prepared to receive Jesus into her house, He drank of the brook in the way with His eyes resting on Mary, who, seated in silence at His feet, listened to and found in Him the good part. And at the extreme limit of the last stage of His journey, where beneath the consuming fire He was about to cry, "I thirst," He finds a second time, not at the table at Bethany, but in Mary's house, the brook made ready for Him, when, anticipating the day of His burying, she expended all her perfume on the feet and head of the Saviour about to die.

Ah! these occasions were rare, but they were enough for a heart so perfect, so entirely subject to

and dependent on the Father. Blessed Saviour! Thou hast drunk of the brook in the way, but Thou shalt lift up the head. Already Thou art in the highest place, seated on the Father's throne at His right hand. Thou hast the joy of having finished Thy work to the glory of Thy Father, and Thy presence on high is the unalterable witness thereto. In virtue of this work Thou hast been saluted of God a High Priest for ever for us, after the order of Melchisedec. But it yet remains for Thee to occupy *Thy* throne, to take Thy place there, and to make Thine enemies Thy footstool. Then Thou wilt have us with Thyself. Thou shalt see of the travail of Thy soul, and shalt be satisfied!

## Chapter 4.

### *John the Baptist as Prophet.*

#### Matthew 3.

In Matthew 3 we have the public ministry of John the Baptist presented to us. A few words of the Saviour's, uttered in defence of John before the multitude, seem to me to characterize this ministry. "*A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.*" (Matt. 11: 9.) John the Baptist was a prophet, but even as such his position and ministry went beyond those of the ancient prophets. These last prophesied at Jerusalem, in Israel, or in the midst of the captive or returned people. John the Baptist separates himself from the people; he dwells in the desert. The only prophet to whom he can be likened in other respects is Elijah; but his failure, and not Jehovah, led him into the wilderness. (1 Kings 19.) A remnant of Judah had returned from captivity in Babylon, but in the eyes of the prophet it did not merit the name. Henceforth there was but a remnant of this remnant which could be recognized as Israel.

This is why John the Baptist does not appeal to the people as a whole, like the prophets who had preceded him. He says, "The voice of one crying in the *wilderness.*" Israel was a wilderness for God. The prophet's appeal is henceforth based on their irretrievable ruin, whilst that of the ancient prophets always supposed the possibility of a national return to Jehovah. Divine judgment was not then definitively pronounced on the human race, and the prophets were authorized by their mission to search and see if there were any good in man by which he might be brought back to God. Like them, doubtless, John the Baptist had preached repentance, but a *repentance founded on ruin without remedy.* Therefore Isaiah, describing the ministry of John, adds, "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it surely the people is grass." What remains of man? Nothing. The wrath of the Lord has blown upon him. Henceforth repentance owned that there must be self-judgment in the presence of God; and they "went out" to the prophet, "confessing their sins," to be baptized of him in Jordan. The sinner did not confine himself to the confession of his sins, but owned that henceforth the only answer to his state was death, that there was no remedy.

Moreover, the period about to dawn in the world's history rendered such a ministry necessary. The Lord was appearing upon the scene. The history of the first man was virtually at a close (it was ended, in fact, at the cross), to make way for the history of the second Man, to whom henceforth it was a question of belonging. The way to belong to this living Messiah on the earth\* was to pass condemnation on oneself, and to accept *grace.* Thus Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophecies of the little child, "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our

God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." (Luke 1: 76-79.)

\*John baptized to a living Christ, Christian baptism is to the death of Christ.

And what kind of people are seen coming to the prophet's baptism? Publicans, men whose character was openly despicable; soldiers, accustomed to oppress the people. Corruption and violence, but owned and judged, find a meeting-place at the baptism of repentance. "John," said the Lord, "came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him." (Matt. 21: 32.) For such people there is no resource, and God can only recognize in them the fruit of His own work. "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Matt. 3: 9.)

There is another character of prophetic ministry which cannot be lacking in John the Baptist, and which he presents more fully and strikingly than his predecessors. It is *judgment* in contrast to grace. The Pharisees and Sadducees went with the crowd to his baptism. They did not come as guilty, but as self-righteous. The sight of the work of God in publicans and harlots produced among these people neither remorse nor faith (Matt. 21: 32), and their final sentence is pronounced. A "generation of vipers" can only be destined to "the wrath to come;" such cannot be taught to flee from it. If they accepted this judgment, they would bring forth fruits meet for repentance. The seed of Abraham, according to the flesh, was set aside. God would raise up children to Abraham by giving life to that which was dead and hard as stone. (Matt. 3: 9.)

John adds, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees." As in a forest the trees to be cut down are marked with a hatchet, so already the objects of judgment were designated; but it was no longer a question of cutting off branches or even the trunk; the *root* was bad. "Nothing will remain of you," said the prophet, "in view of the judgment which is at hand." And who will execute this judgment? Christ. "He," said he, "shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (v. 11.) He possesses the two means of destroying sin — the Spirit, the gift of grace consequent on the Saviour's work; and fire, consuming judgment. It seems as if the prophet said, "I cannot do a work in your favour. I baptize with water; but He brings to you complete deliverance, and to the world definitive judgment." Then, describing what the Lord is about to do in Israel, he contemplates in the future the final result of His action, "whose fan is in His hand" - a judgment which separates the chaff, but which preserves the grain to be gathered into His garner. This is what will take place for Israel. Then the threshing-floor of Jehovah will be thoroughly purged, and there will be no more defilement, but unquenchable fire will destroy all the chaff. Such then is one of the features of the ministry of John the Baptist — the fulness of judgment and the greatness of deliverance, both made known in the person of the Messiah.

This brings us to the Lord's second word, "Yea, I say unto you, and more *than a prophet*." John the Baptist is the only prophet heralded by the prophets themselves (Isaiah 60; Mal. 3; Mal. 4), but that does not constitute the especial greatness which raises him above them. He does not announce in the midst of Israel future glories introduced by the coming Messiah, but he is the messenger of the Lord Himself, sent to prepare His way before Him. (Matt. 3: 1; Luke 1: 76.) The Messiah whom he announces is a coming Messiah, *already present* among His people. The kingdom of heaven was there; not near at hand, but *having come* in the person of Christ. (Matt. 3: 2.) The Lord was going, if received, to take in hand the government of the earth immediately. John did not fail in his mission. *He prepares* the way before the Lord. (Mal. 3: 1.) He appeals to faith, and finds an answer in the heart of a feeble remnant of Israel. He cries, "Prepare ye the way." This way by which the Lord could enter was

repentant hearts convicted of sin, confessing their guilt, finding the end of the flesh, in death and grace the only resource. John had hardly said the words, "He that cometh after me," before Jesus came Himself. (Matt. 3: 13.) John opens the door, and in the person of Jesus — this Man, poor and abused — the Messiah of Israel appears upon the threshold.

How admirable at this moment is the great prophet, John the Baptist! He stoops lower than the latchet of the sandals of Christ. (Matt. 3: 11; John 1: 27.) He declares that he has need to be baptized of Him. (Matt. 3: 14.) Thus humbling himself, he exalts, on the one hand, the personal dignity of his Lord; and owns, on the other, in the presence of such perfection, his own condition as a sinner. But how much more worthy of admiration still is the Saviour Himself! He, the most high, humbles Himself still lower than John, who stooped to the sandals of His feet. "Suffer it to be so now," He says; and taking His place in grace at the baptism of John with those who repent, He finds His delight in broken and contrite hearts, and associates Himself with the "excellent" of the earth. Then, not content with abasing Himself, He adds, "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," raising John to a level with Himself, and making him a companion in the accomplishment of the will of God. "The heavens were opened" upon and occupied with such perfection, and our hearts too may well be opened to contemplate it.

## Chapter 5.

### ***John the Baptist as a Man and a Witness.***

#### **John 1; John 3: 28-31.**

We have been considering John the Baptist's greatness as a prophet, according to the Lord's words in Matthew 11: 9. A second word in this same chapter presents to us rather his greatness as a *man* — "Verily," said the Lord, "among them that are *born of women* there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (v. 11.)\* In the first chapter of John's gospel he is great in three ways *personally*, as a *witness*, and *morally*.

\*We do not forget that Luke 7: 26 applies this same passage to the *prophet* John the Baptist.

Let us first consider his PERSON. From the opening of the gospel, after having brought before us, to borrow another's words, "that which the Lord is divinely in Himself" (vv. 1-5), the Holy Spirit solemnly introduces a man upon the scene who was distinguished by his mission from all other men — "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." (v. 6.) Then (v. 8) he characterizes him by a negative sign — "*He was not that Light.*" What must have been the personal worth of this man, for the Holy Spirit to declare that he was not that which God Himself is in His essence! The Lord proclaims in John 5 what he actually was — "*He was a burning and a shining light:* and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light" (v. 35.) As a lamp, his brightness was so great, that when he appeared he brought with him nearly as much joy as the daystar brings. When the Jews send priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask who he is, John replies, "I am not the Christ" nor "that prophet" (announced in Deut. 18: 15-18). Such was his worth in the eyes of men, that he must needs announce that he is not the most noted person in Israel. Except Christ, never was there in this world a greater than he.

Let us now examine his TESTIMONY. It was well-nigh unbounded as connected with Christ's divine character in this gospel. It was manifold, even though referring to an only and unique object.

*First*, "he came to bear witness of the light" — a mission unprecedented in the history of man. Morally the world was a desolate place, buried in perpetual night. John the Baptist comes upon the

scene, announcing the appearance of a Luminary which would dissipate the darkness, and bring health and joy and life to the miserable. Such is the earliest testimony of this man. Alas! its results ought to have been in proportion to its importance, for John came "that all men through him might believe" (v. 7); but the predicted Light was neither comprehended by the darkness, known by the world, nor received by His own (Israel). These last were very willing to rejoice for a season in the light, but they *would not* come to the Son to have life. (John 5: 35, 40.)

*Secondly*, John the Baptist bears witness to the Word made flesh (v. 15), to God become man, come down to change our state and to reveal to us the Father. What a testimony was that in contrast with what God had revealed in past ages! The law was given by Moses, but that which in grace could meet man's state while also revealing it had till now been unknown. Israel had been able to know God as Jehovah. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, has brought us into relationship with the Father. Moreover, the testimony of John admits of this revelation.

A *third* testimony is found in verse 19; a negative testimony you may say, for John tells us here what he is not. It is this to which the Lord apparently alludes when He says, "Ye have sent unto John" (comp. John 1: 19), "and *he bare witness unto the truth.*" (John 5: 33.) Now this record sets John the Baptist aside entirely. The truth was that he was *nothing*, and that the Christ - the Prophet whom he had not yet seen — was *everything*. This testimony is of exceeding beauty. John the Baptist sets himself aside for the triumph of the truth. Later on, the Christ announced by John, after having made nothing of himself, appears before Pilate, witnesses to the fact that He is a King, and sets no value on His life in order to maintain the truth. John the Baptist had said, "I am not;" Jesus said, — "I am." On this occasion the Lord might have kept silence; but when it is a question of the truth He speaks, and His reply is like the signature to His condemnation.

We now come to a *fourth* testimony (v. 29) of particular importance in the career of this man of God. Until now John did not know the Lord personally. "He seeth Jesus coming unto him," and he utters a cry of joy. He does not say, "Behold the Light," or the Word made flesh, or the Christ; but, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The value of the work and person of Christ are made known to him at one and the same time. In Jesus he recognizes the perfect victim and the Saviour. He beholds the work of the "*Lamb of God*" right on to the confines of eternity. He contemplates it in its results until the new heavens and the new earth are established, where righteousness dwells, where sin shall be for ever banished. He is still occupied with its results. When bearing record, he says, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him . . . The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." (vv. 32, 33.) By this baptism the believer is henceforth assured of the efficacy of this work in his favour. He is filled with the hope of soon being with Christ, and conformed to Him in heaven.

Dear reader, what was the case with John ought to be the case with all of us. We only really appreciate the value of the work of Christ when we know Him as a Person. If John the Baptist had a profound knowledge of these things, it was because Jesus filled every place in his heart. The personal knowledge of Christ increases in our souls the knowledge of every thing, at the same time that it brings us to nothing in our own esteem and in that of the world, or rather in the way in which we seek its esteem. The apostle Paul, while looking at the unsearchable riches of Christ, said, "I, who am less than the least of all saints." But Christ is known only by *faith*. This is what men discover when with the intellect they seek to find out God — they think that John the Baptist is the Christ, and they say that Christ is John the Baptist. (Matt. 16: 14.)

This testimony, be it remarked, is not strictly prophetic. John, instructed beforehand, understood

these things, as we may understand them, in making the acquaintance of the Lamb of God. Also we find, in verse 34, a *fifth* testimony: "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." He can say, "Now *I have seen*, and borne witness to that which I have seen. This Man, to whom God Himself bears witness by the descent of the Holy Ghost, is the *Son of God*."

Such a witness as John the Baptist might have, without doubt, had a high opinion of himself. But what renders him MORALLY great (we have already touched on this point) is that he is less than nothing in his own eyes, not because he seeks to put himself out of sight, but because for him Christ fills heaven, earth, eternity, and his own heart, and that He is for him all that is contained in these precious names: Lord, Christ, Prophet, Lamb of God, Delight of Heaven, Son of God, Bridegroom. His whole heart is taken possession of by this Man, who comes after him, but who is before him. So when the emissaries of the Jews ask him, "What sayest thou of thyself?" he replies, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness." "I say nothing of myself; I am a voice." He might have said, "I am the mouthpiece of God;" but no, an instrument might even think itself something. "I am the voice of one crying" — that, so to speak, robs him of his personality; "crying in the wilderness" — a voice which awakens an echo, valueless in the hearing of men. "Why baptizest thou then?" they ask. "I baptize with water," he replies: "what is my baptism beside His?" Then, on the morrow, in company with his disciples, he stands there and looks; he looks *upon* the Son of God *as He walks*. His heart goes out to Him, "Behold the Lamb of God," he says. An eminent teacher likes to gather together disciples who listen to his instructions. Is this teacher sent from God? His satisfaction will be enhanced by the thought that he is communicating to them a divine teaching. Well, John incites his disciples to go to Jesus, and remains alone — not alone in the wilderness, he was accustomed to that, but alone amidst that which was about to become the family of God.

In John 3: 26 his disciples have not the same self-abnegation. They come to him and say, "Rabbi, *He* that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him." They make John the important man, and Christ the secondary person. "See," they say to John, "how He treats you." John reminds his disciples of his own testimony with regard to Christ. Then he adds, "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom." (v. 29.) The bride is not John; he knows that. But the great prophet is content to have a secondary place; for he has Christ. He is the "friend of the Bridegroom." He listens to outpourings which are not addressed to him; but what matter? He hears the Bridegroom's voice, and his joy is fulfilled. Others will find their joy in more intimate relationships; but John the Baptist's joy is perfect in an inferior relationship; the Lord has given it to him. It is not the highest, but it is of Him, and that is enough for this man of God. His joy is fulfilled in Him who is the Bridegroom of another. Touching humility in the greatest among them that are born of women!

May it not be truly said that John the Baptist's joy in this inferior position was much greater than ours is generally who have the privilege of being the Bride of Christ? And are we not humbled at the thought of this? John *appreciated* our relationship, *kept* his own, and did not covet another. There was no more jealousy in him than among the angels, when at the birth of Christ they celebrated good-will toward man, and magnified a work of which they were not the objects, but which contemplated guilty and lost sinners. John stood by with his eyes fixed on the Bridegroom's face, and his ears strained to hear Him. He found his pleasure in self-forgetfulness, like Mary at the feet of Jesus, and allowed his heart, like an empty vessel, to be filled by the countless perfections of a Bridegroom who was not for him. "He must increase," he adds, "but I must decrease." Christ has increased; John has decreased into nothingness. This great witness, after having recorded his testimony, gathered his disciples around Jesus, and saw his testimony entirely replaced by Christ's. His glory consists in having brought into

prominence the glory of the One who alone is worthy of glory. May it be so with us. We are not called to assume John the Baptist's prophetic and personal glory, but may it be ours, in self-forgetfulness, to be clothed with something of his moral greatness, and to have Christ filling our souls!

## Chapter 6.

### *Failure of John the Baptist.*

#### Matthew 11.

We have hitherto considered John the Baptist in the different phases of his progress as a man of faith. We are coming to the only point in his history where weakness and failure are exhibited. The great prophet John, like Elijah, was for a moment disheartened. He was in prison, and his Master had not delivered him; his hopes were disappointed, and apparently there were no fruits to his ministry. The people, "offended in" Christ, had not "gathered under His wings;" the disowned Messiah had not where to lay His head; and this glorious Lord, who had been announced as coming "suddenly to His temple," on the very heels of His messenger, with His fan in His hand to purge His floor, was rejected and despised. Alas! under such circumstances, for the prophet to be discouraged was *natural*, but it was not *faith*, for it led John to doubt Christ, to ask himself if He was indeed the promised Messiah, *He* who was coming according to Mal. 3: 1. John did not in his uncertainty ask himself if he were really the messenger; our failures more readily lead us to suspect God than ourselves. Any way, this scene is somewhat consoling; if John be led to question the Messianic character of the Saviour, he is in no doubt about Him in other respects. The word of Jesus is his only and sufficient resource. "Art thou He that should come? or do we look for another?" It is decline in a career of faith; but, thank God, it is still faith, however small its measure, and it finds, as it always will, a perfect response. John, however, the great witness, failed in his testimony. It is ever so with man; something is lacking, and even be he a John the Baptist, he will not compare with Christ. We lose nothing by it. The Lord alone remains unchangeable. It is beautiful to see in John 1 the man of faith humbling himself before the Lord; the Lord Himself is still more admirable when, man being necessarily lost to sight, He alone remains in view.

Let us consider in greater detail the Saviour's part in this scene. Whilst John is in doubt about Christ, the Lord meets his failure by putting before him His grace. "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see" (His words and His works): "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." (vv. 4, 5.) All these miracles, accomplished in presence of John's messengers, were the sign of the presence of Messiah in Israel (Isa. 61: 1, 2), not Messiah in grace. Was grace then a less thing than the glory expected by the Baptist? To his question Jesus replies, "Grace remains in power, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." It is a precious thought, that in the present time — a time of weakness and of the cessation of miracles — a soul may recognize Jesus in the preaching of the gospel to the poor, and say, — "I myself have heard the Lord." Jesus adds: "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." (v. 6.) In spite of the forsaking of the people, there is a blest remnant convicted of sin, who, instead of awaiting Messiah's glory, have found favour in a rejected Saviour come for sinful man. The knowledge of grace in the person of Jesus constitutes the happiness of such. This was a gentle and delicate reproof to John the Baptist. Ought not the one who had saluted Jesus as Lamb of God to have remembered this grace? "Are you any longer of

this blest company?" the Saviour's voice seems to say. But for the glory of Christ, the great prophet John the Baptist must be an object of grace even as others.

Whilst the imprisoned forerunner is for a moment discouraged, and abandons his testimony, the Lord Himself bears witness to John before the multitude. What grace! What divine delicacy in the choice of such a time for re-instating John, whose doubts had lowered him in his capacity of prophet, in the eyes of all! "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" A man who in trial was weak and uncertain? Ah!! if he shows himself such at the time when Jesus was speaking, he had not been so at the outset of his career, and it was then that they had been called to make acquaintance with him. Or had they gone to see a rich man clothed like the great ones of this world? Nothing of the kind. But John the Baptist was still the great messenger of whom Malachi 3 speaks, although the Lord had not come to His temple. A little further on, alluding to Malachi 4: 5 (not to Malachi 3), Jesus adds, "And if ye will receive it" (that which I say), "this is Elias, which was for to come." If they received the Lord Jesus, the kingdom might be established, the curse still hanging over the people set aside, and relationships according to God re-established in Israel; in such a case, the future mission of Elias would not be necessary, and John the Baptist, come in the spirit and power of Elias, would occupy the place, so to speak, of the future prophet.\*

In what follows (vv. 16-19) Jesus does not content Himself with declaring the greatness of His messenger; in grace, He raises him in presence of the multitudes to the level of his Master, or rather associates Himself with him in testimony. Their testimonies are not alike. John was likened to those who "mourned," when he called the people to repentance; the Lord resembled those who "piped;" He brought the sweet strains of grace to all. The first presented himself with the severity of a prophet, separated from the people on whom judgment was pronounced; the second made Himself accessible to men, in order, if it were possible, to win for God the confidence of sinners. These two testimonies had found no echo; these two witnesses had been rejected; man did worse than that, he accused John of having a devil, and Christ of being a participator in the sins of those He came to save. By refusing grace, by refusing it thus, what a weight of suffering has not man accumulated on the heart of the Saviour

\*This explains why John the Baptist said to the messenger of the Jews that he was not Elias. In consequence of the rejection of Messiah, the mission of Malachi 3 will be accomplished by another. Who will this future Elias be? "Elijah the prophet," it is said. We must remember that Elijah did not see death. Such a man would be a worthy precursor of the One who is coming in judgment.

Whilst John, unstable beneath accumulated rejection and opprobrium, is like a reed shaken by the wind, Christ alone abides unmoved amidst the ruins. The prophet and the man of faith, the wise and prudent of this world, Israel with her cities, nothing of this remains. He abides for ever. He abides, not only in a divine repose, which meets everything, but in an unruffled and ineffable joy, even whilst His human heart is broken and bleeding under undeserved reproach. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit," the Gospel of Luke tells us. (Luke 10: 21.) The hopes of Israel were interrupted by the fact of the rejection of Christ; but even that opened to view other vast and infinite prospects. Jehovah hid His face (see Isa. 8: 17); the Father was revealed. Heaven was opened when earth shut the door on Christ. Babes, being of but little value, were raised to the enjoyment of supreme blessings, while the wise and prudent were blinded. The least in the kingdom of heaven was henceforth greater than the greatest of prophets (v. 11), through the enjoyment of privileges unknown to the most eminent among the representatives of the law. Henceforth a little child would be nearer to Christ, in position, in knowledge, and in glory, than the greatest witness to the coming of His kingdom. I repeat it, the Lord sees in His rejection the foundation of present and future kingdom-blessing for the people of God. The

people according to the flesh had miserably failed, and there was an end to all right to the kingdom as to fleshly descent; henceforth it would be taken by force, and could not be entered by right of inheritance; to have part in it, there must be a necessary act of faith, the giving up of pre-existing relations, the breaking of natural links.

The mass of the people had turned away, but a remnant remained according to the election of grace, established in virtue of the work accomplished after the Saviour's rejection. Those who formed part of it were not offended because of Him; to these "violent" the kingdom henceforth belonged. As wisdom's children, begotten by her, they justified her by accepting grace. The Lord found all His delight among these few, and even if His work of grace had only brought Him one poor woman of Samaria, it would have been enough to enable Him to say, "The fields are white already to harvest."

The rejected Jesus remains alone amidst the rubbish, unmoved, full of assurance and joy, praising the Father, even though there was nothing more to be expected from man. He is not more perfect — that He could not be — but His perfection shines forth more absolutely in circumstances, which, putting the faith of a man to the test, acknowledged the incompetency and feebleness of man. Abiding alone, a high tower, a sure refuge, He says, "Come unto Me." Neither John nor any other could be resorted to. The weary and heavy-laden of this world could only find rest with Christ. The grace which revealed the Father's heart to poor sinners could only be known in His person; and practical peace of heart in the abandonment of self-will could only be realized after having been learnt of Him, the perfect man, subject to the yoke, the Father's will.

John the Baptist has vanished. The One whose herald he had been remains alone, the only One capable of meeting in grace the failure of His servant, of bearing all the weight of the work of grace which lays the foundation of the new creation, the only Centre of attraction for every poor sinner who thirsts for grace, and the only perfect Model for any who seek to be like Him. The law and the prophets come to an end. In Christ grace abides, set up for eternity, established forever.

## Chapter 7.

### *John the Baptist's Death.*

#### **Matt. 14: 1-12; Mark 6: 14-29.**

We cannot conclude these meditations without a few words concerning the close of John the Baptist's career. Come in the "way of righteousness" (Matt. 21: 32), he persevered in it to the end; separated to God from his mother's womb, he maintained this precious characteristic to the last. Herod knew him to be "a *just* man and an *holy*." (Mark 6: 20.) His practical righteousness and holiness are shown when he says to the king, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." But the testimony of the faithful, instead of improving the world, condemns it, and this is what it cannot bear. A frightful unfolding of the character of Herod fighting against the truth is to be found in this narrative. The *lust of the flesh* was at work in the heart of this man; and in order to satisfy it he is led into wickedness and pollution. The sinner cannot give up sinning even though under restraint; he goes on in his sin by getting rid of the witness who condemns him. Herod causes John to be taken, bound, and put in prison. (Mark 6: 17.) Corruption is necessarily followed by *violence*, which, kept within bounds at first, opens the door to *murderous* thoughts (Matt. 14: 5), and his conscience is hardened more and more. It is not the fear of God which makes him object to the crime, but that of public opinion, and a selfish desire not

to lose his influence and prestige. It is also a certain respect for a superior man, who cannot be got rid of without further formality, besides the loss of the profit of his counsels for self-exaltation. (Mark 6: 20.) Herod is led by Herodias, a passionate woman, governed by her hatred, and esteeming the prophet's reproof an unpardonable affront; she also "would have killed him" (Mark 6: 19), but had found Herod's feeling of respect for John a hindrance. (Mark 6: 20.) The passions of these two converge to one point; Herod's are accompanied by some scruples and *cunning* (Luke 13: 32), while Herodias is more energetic in her accomplishment of evil and triumph over obstacles.

"A convenient day" arrives; the hand of Satan is there urging on his instruments to the final act. Men are blinded, and think to accomplish *their own* will; they do not see that they are the sport of the devil, and that he is leading them on in warfare against God. It only remains to touch one or two more secret springs in man's heart, and the crime will be perpetrated. The day is well chosen; it is Herod's birthday, whereon his power and sumptuousness are displayed in such a way as to satisfy the pride of *life*. His lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee surround the king on this occasion. (Mark 6: 21.) The daughter of Herodias comes in, dances, and pleases Herod and those at table with him. The *lust of the eyes* enters with the damsel, and takes possession of the king, and he promises with an oath, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." (Mark 6: 23.) Incited thereto by her mother, this thoughtless girl, with no conscience, accustomed to see her caprices obeyed, eagerly asks (Mark 6: 25) "*straightway*" the head of John the Baptist.

Herod is exceeding sorry, but what matter? He is taken in the meshes of Satan. To his heart's secret desire is now added his so-called honour, and the fear of breaking his word before his courtiers. The devil leaves him no time for reflection; he has taken complete possession of his victim, and succeeds in stifling the testimony of God which was opposed to him. The end is attained; the instrument is left to himself and his misery. Of what advantage is his crime to him? Henceforth it will always be his companion. He hears Jesus and His miracles spoken of. "It is John," says he, "whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead." (Mark 6: 16.) Striking fact, this hardened man, like the Pharisees, believes in the resurrection; but believing a doctrine gives neither satisfaction nor rest of conscience; on the contrary, it is a means of increasing the torment. "He was perplexed." (Luke 9:7.) The desire of getting rid of this vague terror, which had laid hold of him at the thought of finding again the one whom he had put to death, makes him seek to see Jesus (Luke 9: 9), perhaps to kill Him also. (Luke 13: 31.) Anything is better than uncertainty. But *the uncertainty remains* in spite of all; when at last Herod sees the Saviour, he can neither see His miracles nor hear Him. He meets on earth a silent Christ, whose voice he will not hear until by-and-by when he will see Him as Judge! (Luke 23: 8-10.)

Freed from John the Baptist, Satan succeeds later on in getting rid of Christ by means of other springs in the heart of man. But, blessed be God, Satan, himself deceived, is only an instrument through which God will accomplish His own designs. However, all this wickedness draws forth divine vengeance. The Lord will execute judgment on men, and the God of peace will bruise Satan shortly under our feet. Then also afflicted saints will be at rest, and Christ will be glorified and admired in them, without restriction, in a John the Baptist, and in all those who have believed! H. R.