



THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER

Part 6 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 1:57-80 | November 01, 2009

OPENING PRAYER

Alright, Mars Hill, we continue in "Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God." If you've got a Bible, go to Luke 1:57-80; it's the large section of the Scripture we're examining today as we enjoy the birth of John the Baptizer. I'll pray. We'll get to work.

Father, as we examine the life of John, we pray that you would send the Holy Spirit to empower us, to fill us as he empowered and filled John. As we open the Scriptures, God, we confess that they were written by the power of the Holy Spirit and so again, we ask the Holy Spirit to teach us. If there's sin in our life, as there is sin in our life, we invite the Holy Spirit to show us our sin and reveal to us Jesus our Savior. God, I pray that our time would be Spirit-filled, that it would be pleasing to you, that it would be profitable to us, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

As we get into the story of John the Baptizer and his birth, he's someone we've been anticipating for some weeks in the Gospel of Luke and the way the Bible is put together is promise and fulfillment. God gives prophecy because he is sovereign over and foreknowing of the future, and then everything comes to pass just as God had promised. The promises and prophecies about the birth of this man, John the Baptizer, go all the way back to the Old Testament. And they are included early on in the Gospel of Luke with a very telling and intimate portrait where we meet an elderly couple that is barren, like Abraham and Sarah, named Zechariah and Elizabeth.

He is a country priest in the rural area of the Judean wilderness. He and his wife have never been able to conceive. They've always wanted a baby. They have been serving God faithfully in ministry and they've been asking God for years to provide for them a child. The biggest day of Zechariah's life comes. He is a priest brought to Jerusalem on duty and the angel Gabriel shows up and prophesies. He says, "Your prayer has finally been answered. Your wife will give birth to a son. You are to name him John, which means God is gracious." Zechariah, like so many of us, said what he shouldn't have said and so God just rendered him mute for the next nine months-let him choose his next words very carefully.

Around the same time, the angel Gabriel, we read, showed up to a young woman named Mary, who is a relative of Elizabeth. She was betrothed or engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. They were most likely teenagers in the simple, small, rural town of Nazareth. We have seen the interaction of these two women and the children in their wombs. Jesus and John were cousins.

And today, we read that John was finally born. Elizabeth gave birth to John. Finally, she got to be a mom. God lifted her reproach, she said previously, with this great gift of a son and everyone was clamoring to name the child. It's amazing how some things never change. Everyone has an opinion as to what you should name your child. And they say, "Well, let's name him Zechariah," and Elizabeth says, "No, we need to name him John." That's because the angel Gabriel had said, "Name him John." Zechariah was trying to communicate what he wanted his son to be called. He was called John and then Zechariah's mouth was open and he started by blessing, praising, and worshiping God. They then raised this young man, John the Baptizer, for a life of devotion and ministry. He's second-generation, at least, ministry family.

THE GREATEST MAN WHO HAS EVER LIVED

And had I asked you today coming in, who's the greatest man who's ever lived in the history of the world, the greatest person who has ever lived in the history of the world, other than Jesus-we'll put Jesus in his own category; God Incarnate, divine God-man, yeah, Jesus is the greatest person who's ever lived. In addition to Jesus, who's the greatest person who's ever lived? My assumption is perhaps none of you would have said, "John the Baptizer is the greatest man who's ever lived." And he was. He was. I'll show it to you. It actually is spoken of twice, one by the angel Gabriel and one by the Lord Jesus.

Luke 1:14-15, Gabriel the angel said, this was a prophecy, "many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great," there's our word, "before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."

Jesus says, a little later in Luke 7:28, "among those born of women none is greater than John." That is a powerful statement. When the Lord Jesus says, "The greatest man who's ever lived is John," that means John is the greatest man who's ever lived. And some of you may have a false understanding of humility. Humility is not that you are unwilling to aspire to greatness. Humility is that you're willing to aspire to greatness in a way that pleases God. There is a story elsewhere in the Scripture where some come to the Lord Jesus and they ask him, "How can we become the greatest?" And rather than

rebuking them, he told them, "Be the humble servant of all. Be the humble servant of all." And so what we see in John is the humble servant of all. We see John is the greatest because he is willing to be the least. He is perhaps best known for saying, "He," meaning Jesus, "must increase, I must decrease." John was humble and a servant. It's not a bad thing to aspire to greatness providing you define greatness biblically and you pursue it humbly.

SEVEN ASPECTS OF JOHN'S GREATNESS

And so what I want to do is a character study on John the Baptizer. I want to spend our time together today examining this man. If Jesus says he's the greatest man who has ever lived, if hundreds and thousands of years of prophetic expectation were awaiting his birth, if the angel Gabriel announced it, it's a big deal. And we'll examine seven aspects of John's greatness.

1. HE CAME FROM SPIRIT-FILLED PARENTS.

Number 1, he came from Spirit-filled parents. We are told that both his mother Elizabeth and his father Zechariah were Spirit-filled. Luke 1:41, we read this, "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit," and the remainder of the story goes on to say that she prophesied over Mary. Luke 1:67, "Zechariah," his father, "was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied," ultimately by the power of the Holy Spirit, over his son John at his birth. So we need to understand what it means to be Spirit-filled.

An aspect of John's greatness is that he was a Spirit-filled man. What does that mean? Some of you come from what we'll call charismatic and Pentecostal traditions or you've been to sort of those youth camps, they really spooked you out. And when I say Spirit-filled, you're like, "Uh-oh, what does that mean? I think I know what that means and it's weird." Because usually those who talk about being Spirit-filled are weird. And sometimes it's not always bad to be weird. John was a little weird. He wore camel's hair clothing, ate bugs and honey, and lived in the woods. So sometimes there is a good weird and then there is just a I'm-on-TV-with-a-white-suit-sitting-on-a-gold-throne weird. That's a whole other kind of weird.

And so what happens when you hear Spirit-filled generally then, people go to the Book of Acts and they'll say, "Oh, so-and-so was filled with the Spirit and they spoke in tongues. If you don't speak in tongues, you're not Spirit-filled. Come forward and the guy in the white suit sitting on the gold throne will touch you on the head, you could speak in tongues, and then you'll be filled with the Holy Spirit too." That's not what it means. It's not what it means.

If you want to understand what Spirit-filled means, you don't start in Acts, you start in Luke. It's one author, two books, prequel and sequel. So you go back to the book of Luke and you realize that he speaks of the Holy Spirit in his gospel more than any of the other gospels and he tells us that Zechariah was filled with the Spirit. So what it means to be Spirit-filled is to do ministry like Zechariah. What it means to be Spirit-filled is to be like Elizabeth because Elizabeth is Spirit-filled. The first Spirit-filled people we meet are Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John.

So whatever it means to be Spirit-filled, that understanding of what that means begins there in Luke. A little while later you'll see that Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is Spirit-filled. So what it means ultimately to be Spirit-filled is to be like Jesus. So that shouldn't freak you out at all. In fact, that's what we should aspire to. And John is aspiring to be like Jesus, and Elizabeth and Zechariah are aspiring to be like Jesus because he is their God as he is our God.

What does it mean to be Spirit-filled? You keep reading in the Gospel of Luke until you hit the Book of Acts. And it says repeatedly, "So-and-so," this individual or group, "was filled with the Holy Spirit," and then there's a little word: "and." "And they spoke in tongues." Some people are filled with Holy Spirit and they speak in tongues, which is a private prayer language to God or it might be a foreign language that you don't know to tell others about Jesus. Sometimes it says, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God boldly." So it's a preaching/evangelism/proclamation gift. Sometimes it says, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they praised and worshiped and celebrated God." Sometimes it says, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit and deeply convicted of their sin." Sometimes it says, "They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they went forth empowered to serve God in profound ministry." The point is the Spirit comes in and the life of Jesus goes out and it's not always the same.

Some of you will be Spirit-filled and speak in tongues, but we don't all have that particular gift. Some of you will have the ability to be filled by the Holy Spirit and preach and teach or to serve, or to worship, or to minister, or to repent. And the work of the Spirit manifests itself in a lot of different ways.

Now, when we talk about the Spirit, we're talking about God. Jesus says the Spirit is "he" not "it." He's a person who could be grieved, quenched, and resisted, the Bible says. It's not just an impersonal force. The Holy Spirit is God, the third member of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit loves, glorifies, honors Jesus. And so we know the Spirit is at work when people love Jesus, when they worship Jesus, when they serve Jesus, when they want to be like Jesus, when they confess their sin to Jesus, 'cause the Holy Spirit loves to show Jesus. In fact, he inspired the writing of the whole Bible to reveal to us the person in the work of Jesus.

Now, at Mars Hill, you need to know, we're a church that loves the Holy Spirit as God. We don't just believe in him, we love him. We pray to him. We ask him for guidance and instruction and correction. We love the Scriptures that he has inspired to be written through human authors like Luke. And as elders right now, we're having a big discussion-it's actually very unifying and encouraging-about the Holy Spirit. We're praying more than ever, singing more than ever, worshipping more than ever. We're enjoying the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit more than ever, and we're examining together, as an eldership, what does it mean to be a Spirit-filled church? Some would say, "Oh that's very dangerous, it's often divisive," for us it's been tremendously liberating and unifying. Actually, really healthy, happy pastoral team, and we're studying the Scriptures and praying, "God, what does it mean for us to be Spirit-filled leaders, leading Spirit-filled ministry, having a Spirit-filled church."

And here's what it means to be Spirit-filled. It means that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the Christian and transforms, empowers, gifts from the inside out so that they're never the never same. Wayne Grudem-I think the greatest systematic theology of the modern era was penned by Wayne Grudem. He's a man I've enjoyed the company of. He's taught at some of our church planting boot camps. He's a great guy. If you want to buy one systematic theology, his is my recommendation. He says that being filled with the Spirit is "an event subsequent to conversion in which the believer experiences a fresh infilling with the Holy Spirit that may result in a variety of consequences, including greater love for God, greater victory over sin, greater power for ministry, and sometimes the receiving of new spiritual gifts."

When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit regenerates you, you're born again, takes up residence in you, new heart, new mind, new nature, new life-that's called baptism or sealing in the Spirit. And then there are multiple fillings in the Spirit that occur throughout the course of life. And some have asked, "Well, how do you be filled with the Holy Spirit?" There's only one commandment in the New Testament that tells us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk on wine, be filled with the Holy Spirit." John is the embodiment of that. He never drank alcohol and he was filled with the Spirit. He wasn't controlled by substances; he was controlled by the Spirit. For some of you that are filled, consumed, controlled by drugs and alcohol, things of that nature and kind, the Spirit is the one that is to be filling you, inspiring you, transforming you, leading you.

And so what it means to be Spirit-filled is not that the Holy Spirit isn't willing to fill the Christian and that you need a guru like me or some massive experience so that God's Spirit would empower you. If I could work off of this analogy, Jesus says in John's Gospel that the Holy Spirit is like the wind. Right? The wind that is always blowing. And to be filled with the Holy Spirit simply means that we see our lives as a ship with a sail, and we keep our sail up. We keep our sail up. So that that sail could be filled with the Holy Spirit, that his presence, his power would direct our life and our life course, that he would take us where he wants us to go, that we would become who he wants us to be, that we would do what he wants us to do, by the power of the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit, that's what it means.

Now, the Holy Spirit, if I could use that analogy again, is always at work, right? The wind is always blowing, but some Christians take their sail down, through unrepentant sin, unbelief, lies over truth, foolish doctrine, and bad life decisions. They take their sail down. Sometimes those people wonder, "Why is God not active in my life? Why don't I see his power? Why am I not moving and progressing? God, where are you?" And he would say, "I'm right here, put the sail up, repent, read your Bible, pray, be in community with God's people, keep your sail up, keep your sail up, and I'll lead you, and guide you, and empower you, and enable you, and gift you, and encourage you, and I'm perfectly willing to, but you've not availed yourself to my presence and power." God wants every Christian to be Spirit-filled. The Holy Spirit is available to every Christian, and repentance, and faith, and truth, and trust, and obedience is the way in which we keep our sail up.

And John comes from Spirit-filled parents, and in this instance, they prophesied; they have a prophetic word from God-Elizabeth does for Mary, and Zechariah does for his son, John. We believe in that. We believe sometimes the Holy Spirit will give you a word to speak truth into the life of someone else. We believe all of this. But what we reject is that being Spirit-filled means that everybody is exactly the same. The way in which we're exactly the same is that we love Jesus and he controls our life; other than that, the way it expresses itself is different.

So, of the seven aspects of John's greatness, number 1, he comes from Spirit-filled parents, and we want that for all of you, mothers and fathers, to be Spirit-filled parents.

2. HE WAS FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Number 2, John himself was filled with the Holy Spirit. He's a Spirit-filled man. Luke 1:15, the prophecy was given before his birth by the angel Gabriel, "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." And then Luke 1:66 says, "the hand of the Lord was with him," that's another way of saying that the Holy Spirit was present with him, through him, in him through the course of his life.

And this is important. What could tend to happen when we do character studies of the Bible is we pick someone in the Bible and we look at their life and we say, "Okay, what are the good things they did? What are the bad things they did? Okay, I don't want to do the bad things, I want to do the good things," and the result is something called moralizing. Moralizing absolutely destroys Scripture. You don't even need to be a Christian to moralize Scripture. You can have any religion, ideology, philosophy or theology, and moralize Scripture. It's one of the great errors of Bible teachers and that is, "Don't do the bad things, do the good things, now go." The way that John was able to become the greatest man who ever lived was not by moralizing, but by the Holy Spirit. You see that? As we study John from here and you look at this man's amazing life, and the legacy that he has, and the fruit of his ministry, it's not, "Well, I need to do what John did." No, you need to be filled by the Holy Spirit like John was. You need to be empowered and transformed by the Holy Spirit like John was. Through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in you so that you can live a life under the control and power of the Holy Spirit like John did. Otherwise, it's just nothing but a list of dos and don'ts. If you think you did well, you're proud, and if not, you're despairing. On neither account does moralizing lead to humble joy. John was filled with the Holy Spirit, that's how he did it. There is no secret. God's power is made perfect in our weakness. God's power enables us to be who we cannot be and do what we cannot do because it's God power.

3. HE HUMBLY PREPARED THE WAY FOR JESUS.

That leads to the third aspect of John's greatness; he humbly prepared the way for Jesus. Luke 1:76, Zechariah prayed, prophesied over his son. And emotionally, I just want you to capture this moment: Imagine you're a dad who loves God, and you've been waiting, and your wife's barren, and you've given up hope, and your son is born, and the Holy Spirit fills you, and you have not been able to say a word for nine months, and you open your mouth, and you start to prophesy about your son, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways."

John's role is to get people ready for Jesus. It's not about John, it's about Jesus. If this was a company, John would be the assistant, not the president. If this was a football team, he'd be the fullback, not the tailback. It's not about John; it's about getting people ready to meet Jesus. And he humbly prepared the way for Jesus. The Old Testament prophesied, "One is coming to prepare the way of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ." John was that man. He humbly prepared the way.

Let me tell you how this happened. John started preaching and teaching and baptizing, calling people to repentance. Thousands came out, were baptized. And you'll see in a few weeks, once he baptizes Jesus, he gives all of his disciples to Jesus and he goes to jail. Imagine if you planted a megachurch, would you want to give all those people away? You worked so hard, you suffered so much. John had no problem with that. Pastors tend to be, ministry leaders as well, tend to be a very picky petty bunch. And I'll tell you how it works with pastors. We'll just-we'll critique everyone today, we'll start with the pastors. And the way it works with pastors is when people come to our church from another church, we say, "Praise God, 'cause now they finally found a good church." And when they leave our church to go to another church, we say, "That church is stealing our people." It's plank-speck; it's an old religious game.

The truth is none of you are my people. You're Jesus' people. And if Jesus wants to move his people around, he can send them wherever he wants. If Jesus wants some of you to go to another church because it's getting planted and help it get started, praise God. If he calls you out to go start a ministry or go on the mission field or help launch a campus or maybe there's a struggling dead and dying church in your area or maybe there's a church in your area that's doing okay, but, you know what, they could really use someone with your ability, praise God. Praise God. See, as pastors, our job is to love and serve the people as long as Jesus has them under our care and when he calls them elsewhere we say, "Praise be to God, they're his people, and he has particular things that he needs them to do"-or I should say, rather, that he's asking them to do because he wants them to share in his joy. Jesus doesn't need us, but he loves to use us so that we could share in his joy. And John worked so hard to get thousands of people, and he just gives them to Jesus, and he goes to jail. That's humbly preparing the way for Jesus.

4. HE WAS AN EVANGELIST.

Another aspect of John's greatness, number 4, he was an evangelist. Luke 1:77-78, "to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God," salvation. Here's the bottom line. People belong to Satan or God; they're going to hell or heaven, that's it. Everyone who's ever lived fits in one of those two categories; race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic background, sexual preference, all secondary. The big issue is two teams: Satan-hell, Jesus-heaven, that's it. Salvation is being saved from hell to heaven, Satan to Jesus, sin to forgiveness, death to life, that's it.

And John knows that people are going to hell, he wants them to go to heaven; that people belong to Satan, he wants them to be liberated and children of God. Evangelism. And he tells them about salvation. Salvation is this: you and I have sinned against a holy and righteous God; he has come into human history as the man, Jesus Christ, to reconcile men and women to God; he's lived the life we have not lived, the life without sin; he's died the death we should have died, the death for sin; he has risen to give the gift we cannot earn, forgiveness of sin, that's it.

And John never gets tired of saying this. And the prophecy on John's life is that he would be an evangelist. And again, in so far as we can tell, the number is uncertain, but the commentators seem to agree that in a short period, he converted thousands of people. The Holy Spirit through him converted thousands of people. And what's curious, many of them were religious. Because, see, what tends to happen is Christianity looks at all the sinners and says, "Repent of your sin, stop sinning, trust Jesus, knock it off." And the religious people stand off to the side and judge and get very hypocritical and very self-righteous and very full of themselves and say, "Yeah, that's good, tell all those wicked people to stop being wicked," and John looks at the religious people and says, "You're the worst of all." They were very surprised to hear this. These are people who grew up going to synagogue. The guys had been circumcised on the eighth day. They had memorized verses from the Bible, if not books of the Bible. And Jesus says that repentance is for everyone, and John ultimately prepares people for the coming of Jesus saying, "And everyone needs to repent." And so he calls the religious people, the Jewish people to repent. He says, "Come on down and get baptized." Well, Jewish people didn't get baptized, that was for Gentiles, for us. That was for the non-Jews, "Oh, the filthy ones. They need to come and get baptized, showing death to their old way of life, resurrection to their new way of life, cleansing from all their sin." To call the Jews to repentance, the religious people to repentance, to call them to baptism, this was mind-bending. John called everyone to repentance because he was an evangelist. He knew that sometimes religious people are further away from God than just the average sinner. Because at least the average sinner has perhaps some awareness that they need God, the religious person is relying on their tradition, their family history, their morality, and their religiosity, not God, for forgiveness of sin. And so he's an evangelist.

And Mars Hill, let me ask you this, if you're a Christian, who in your life, family, friend, neighbor, coworker, enemy needs Jesus? Who should you be praying for, talking to about Jesus, not because you have to, but because you get to, 'cause there's still hope for them because they're breathing? One of the great joys I have at Mars Hill is seeing people become Christians. I lived the first eighteen years of my life as a non-Christian. I don't even know how I did it. I don't know what I was thinking or doing. I wasn't reading the Bible. I don't even know how I lived. And then I met Jesus and I've never gotten over that, forgiveness of sin, a new life, and the power of the Holy Spirit, amazing stuff, joyful, happy, powerful stuff. And we want to be a church, we have been a church, by God's grace, we will remain a church committed to evangelism. That means that all of the Christians are other-centered like John was. Not just coming and saying, "You know, I'm a consumer and I don't feel like I got the goods and services that I was anticipating." Coming and saying, "You know what? People are meeting Jesus, that's what I really care about." Community groups, great, praise God. Redemption groups, great, praise God. Ministry, great, praise God. People growing in faith, praise God. For what purpose? So that more people would meet Jesus, that's why, that's why. That's amazing to see people pass from death to life. So many of the leaders in this church got saved in this church, it's amazing. I've personally gotten to see someone meet Jesus in a conversation with me every single Sunday for months. I've recently seen drug dealers, wife beaters, complete imbeciles, suicidal gals, this morning a sixteen-year-old guy, and one guy who makes his living selling drugs to youth

groups-all meet Jesus and repent, recently, it's wonderful. [Applause]

So, one of the ways you know the Holy Spirit's working is the Holy Spirit loves Jesus, and when people are falling in love with Jesus, you know the Holy Spirit's been at work. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin. When people are convicted of sin, you know the Holy Spirit's at work. And John was an evangelist; he loved to see people become Christians.

5. HE MADE THE INVISIBLE KINGDOM VISIBLE.

Number 5, another aspect of John's greatness, he made the invisible kingdom visible. It's a lengthy section in Luke 1:68-75. So I'll read it to you: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel," the man Zechariah prophesies, "for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David," David was a king with a kingdom; this is all kingship, kingdom language, "as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from old, that we should be saved from our enemies," kingdom language, "and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days." As well, Luke 1:78-79 says, "the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Let me explain this. God is a King, Jesus is a King. Revelation says right now he is seated on a throne. After his resurrection, before his ascension, Jesus says all authority is given unto me. He's a King. He is a King and he rules the kingdom of heaven. It is the invisible kingdom that right now we do not see, but Jesus rules over all times, nations, places, cultures, languages, tribes, lifestyles of people. He rules over the angels and the demons. He rules over the rich, and the poor, and the living, and the dead. He's a king. And his invisible kingdom will one day be established on the earth with his second coming, and the invisible kingdom will be made visible. In the meantime, what we see are the visible kingdoms of the earth.

Now, Zechariah, in his prophecy, refers to God's Kingdom as light, where there is love, and life, and truth, and justice, and joy. And he refers to the kingdoms of the earth as darkness, sin, and death, and depravity, and folly, and disobedience, and death. And John Calvin was fond of saying that one of the functions of Christians, in general, and the church in particular is to make visible the invisible Kingdom of God. That's what John is doing. That's the prophecy that Zechariah has for his son, that he would make the invisible kingdom visible.

So when Christians are generous rather than greedy, it is to show the invisible kingdom here made visible on the earth. When we forgive rather than become bitter, when we love rather than hate, when we serve rather than take, when we look after those who are needy and poor and marginalize and weak, when we care for the widow and the orphan, when we extend a hand of friendship to our enemies, when we bless those who persecute us, when we love those who hate us, what we're doing is kingdom work. Not just good works so that people would cheer for us and our morality-that's what religious people do-but that they would see a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven; that something of the light of the heavenly kingdom would begin to shine into the darkness of the cultures of the world; that others would see that our King is a great King and his transforming work absolutely changes us from the inside out. And the prophecy about John is that he would make the invisible kingdom visible.

And this is important. We live in a day when lots of new Christians just want to be cause-oriented and go do lots of good things. All of them may be good, providing they serve the function of making the invisible kingdom visible, not just to do good things, but to do good things that they might praise your Father in heaven. That's making the invisible kingdom visible and that's an aspect of John's greatness.

6. HE OBEYED GOD'S CALL ON HIS LIFE.

He goes on, number 6, John obeyed God's call on his life. Luke 1:17, the angel Gabriel said, "he," that is John, "will go before him," that is Jesus, "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." This is an echo of Malachi. The Old Testament prophet, Malachi, roughly four hundred years before the birth of John and Jesus, said, "The Lord is coming," that's the Lord Jesus. "God is coming into history as a man. And to prepare the way, there'll be a prophet who comes," and John is that prophet. He's coming in the spirit and power of Elijah. He's coming empowered by the same Holy Spirit as Elijah. He's the last of the old covenant prophets, preaching repentance, preparing the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus, and he obeyed God's call on his life.

If you think about this, John is a great man, but God gave him a difficult call. John would have been keenly familiar as a student of Scripture with the fact that prophets tend to get murdered. And before that, they tend to be exiled. When you stand up against a whole nation and tell them that they're all religious and wicked, and God is displeased, and is going to judge them, you tend to get kicked out. That's what happens to the prophets, they call it exiled. They're kicked out. That's why John lives in the woods. He's a lonely guy. Prophets tend to be lonely people. John is a man who accepted God's call on his life. God's call on his life was difficult. As far as we know, he didn't seem to marry, have children, because like the Lord Jesus, he knew he would die young. Unlike the Lord Jesus, his resurrection is still forthcoming. He preached repentance, "You're a sinner and you need God. Turn to him in faith." He preached to thousands in so far as we can guess. He likely baptized thousands. He fought religious people. He handed his proverbial megachurch to Jesus.

He preached against Herod. Herod was Herod "the Great," Herod the ruler, Herod the powerful, Herod who had married his brother's wife, and John said, "Herod needs to repent too. He shouldn't just build a temple; he should go there and apologize." This made John very unpopular with Herod. And so the decision was made to silence him by putting him in prison. That didn't work, so they chopped off his head. That was the only way to silence John's preaching. That's a man who humbly accepted his call. He went from megachurch pastor to imprisoned, heading into his beheading. And he was okay with that. How long did his ministry last? Do you have a guess? His preaching, baptizing-maybe roughly six months. John went off like a bomb! Six months, the greatest man in the history of the world. He punched out his to-do list in six months. [Laughter]

Say, "how did he do that?" By the power of the Holy Spirit. You don't knock out that punch list without the Holy Spirit.

7. HE AVOIDED ADOLESCENCE.

Say, "how did he do it?" Number 7, he avoided adolescence. [Laughter] Now let me preface this, and stretch, okay, let me- [Laughter]

Luke mentions women more than any other Gospel, and we've learned a lot through Mary, Elizabeth, there'll be other amazing women. This portion here is primarily for the guys. It also includes the mothers with loser sons, the girlfriends of loser guys, the wives of deadbeats and losers. Okay, this secondarily applies to you, but firstly to that other guy. I didn't say man, I said guy. Luke 1:80 is a verse that some commentators almost ignore like a little throw-away line. I think it's very important. "All Scripture is God-breathed, profitable," we'll unpack this one.

Luke 1:80, here's where we find what John was doing during his teens, during his twenties, and his public ministry started about age thirty and lasted about six months: "And the child," that is John the Baptizer, "grew and became strong in spirit," conviction, theology, holiness, "and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel." He wasn't wasting time. He was investing time, getting ready for the day when the Holy Spirit would tell him, "It's time to preach, call everyone to repentance. Go, proclaim." He avoided adolescence. Let me explain this to you. I love the guys in this church. When God called me to ministry, he said to marry Grace, plant churches, preach the Bible, train men, that's what I've been doing ever since. And I love men and I praise God that we have lots of men in our church; I praise God that the biggest demographic in our church, I think, is young single men.

But let me explain to you guys how you have been lied to. Now historically, traditionally, a guy goes through basically two phases: Boy, man. Boy, man. And the transition from boy to man happened rather suddenly and there were five sociological variables that clicked together, usually almost simultaneously or in very close succession: Leave your parents' home just like Genesis 2 says; finish your education or vocational training; (3) start into a career-track job, not a dead-end-Joe job; Number 4, you meet a woman and you make her your wife. In Seattle we got to clarify all of this. Boy-girl, that's marriage. Number 5, you have children.

So, move out of your parents' house, finish your education or job training, get a job so you can pay your own bills and take care of yourself, meet a woman, love her, honor her, court her, marry her, have children with her. These would click sometimes almost simultaneously, very short order, that's why we read about Joseph that he was engaged, betrothed to be married, and in that day I told you that you could be as young as twelve and marry as young as thirteen, engaged as young as twelve, marry as young as thirteen. And the guys would say that is a joke and Joseph would say you are a joke. [Laughter]

So you say, "Thirteen is too young," okay, true, thirty-six-probably too old. And in the middle, here's what's happened. Rather having boy-man and clicking a succession of sociological transitions, we've created something called adolescence. It's a new third life stage in the middle between boy and man. We don't know what to call them so we just call them guys. Okay, these are boys who can shave. That's the clinical definition of adolescence. [Laughter]

Adolescence starts somewhere in your teen years and it continues indefinitely. There is no potential end. That's why guys say, "I'm having my midlife crisis." No, you just went from trike to Harley. It's the same boy, just different mode of transportation. Adolescence. What kills young men is this worldly thinking that this indefinite period of extended adolescence is acceptable and natural and unavoidable. John didn't go through adolescence.

H2. MEN IN THE WORLD: CHILDISH CONSUMERS

Now, let me explain to you what adolescence is. If you walk out into the world, I would say that adolescence is marked by two things. And by adolescence, here's what I am saying: guys don't know when they're going to ever grow up and be men. Is it when you're sixteen, you can drive, eighteen when you can vote or join the military, or twenty-one when you can drink? Is it when you graduate from college after you've worked on your undergrad for seven or eight years 'cause you're a totally ambitious overachiever? Is it when you get married? Is it when you have kids? Is it when you buy a house? When do you become a man? No one knows. No one defines it, declares it, defends it, so guys don't know, so it's just adolescence. Knock out these five sociological variations at some point whenever you get to them in what order works for you and if you don't, that's okay, we'll just call it the Peter Pan Syndrome. You'll just be a grown man who wants to be a boy forever. You walk out into the world and this adolescence is marked by guys who are childish consumers, just childish, absolutely childish.

Paul says, "When I was a boy I thought like a boy, I reasoned like a boy, I talked like a boy. When I became a man I put childish and boyish ways behind me." A lot of guys don't. "I'm in high school, man. I'm in college. I'm single. I don't have kids yet," as if responsibility is a bad thing and the longer you can prolong it, the more masculine you are. That's the world. It's childish, absolutely childish, and it's consumerism.

Here's where you've been tricked. They've created an age called adolescence and the real glorious demographic is young men, teens, twenties, maybe up to about thirty-four, the sweet spot is like eighteen to thirty-four for demographics because what they do is they know that you guys don't know what it means to be a man and so they tell you that being a man is defined not by what you produce but by what you consume. "Drink this beer, you'll be a man. Drive this truck, you'll be a man. Play these video games, you'll be a man." Really? Seriously? And a bunch of guys are like, "Oh, I want to be man," so you buy the junk they sell you. You extend college, you go in to massive debt for school, you rack up credit card debt. You don't know what it means to be a man so you let marketing and advertising define masculinity and you think if you buy the right things, then you're a man. No you're not, you're not. And it's all about consuming. Absolutely self-absorbed men.

Men are supposed to be producers not consumers. You're defined by the legacy and the life and the fruit that comes out of you, not what you take in, So most guys, they're just consumers. They consume women, porn, alcohol, drugs, television, music, video games, toys, cars, sports, fantasy leagues.

Ridiculous! As if being a man was defined by how much meat you can shove through your colon and how many beers you can pound, and how fast you can drive, and how stinky you can fart, and how far you could spit, and how loud you can belch, and whose name is on your underwear, how big the mud flats are on your truck. I mean, you should be drinking beer out of a sippy cup too. [Laughter]

It's ridiculous. I mean, it's unbelievable. It's unbelievable. And you know what enables this? Mothers, girlfriends, wives, your mom. I mean, it's unbelievable. See, the goal, gentlemen, is to get a house and when your mom's old, she moves in with you. Not that your mom would get a house so you can move in with her. That's totally not the way it's supposed to go. There are guys who go to college, get out, "I'm going back to my mom's house." Great. Great. 'Cause that's what every woman is looking for. A man with a well-employed mother. That's her hope. Her aspiration. "Oh, thank you, Jesus, his mother is employed. That's what I was hoping for." Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Consumers, takers, not givers. And you know what happens? Guys don't know what it means to be a man and so marketing and advertising defines it through the products that they consume and then they let their buddies define manhood. So you have hazing rituals at frats and you have initiation rituals for gangs and do you ever wonder why guys do horrible things to one another? "Here, drink this. Let me kick you there." [Laughter]

"Really? Why?" "Cause you'll be a real man." No, a real man's smart enough not to get kicked there. [Laughter]

Just so weird. Do you ever wonder why twenty-year-old guys, they're all stupid? You say, "I know one that's not." Well, just give him time. They're all stupid. They do stupid things. Stupid, dangerous activities, crazy recreation, drugs, alcohol, violence, sex. They're trying to impress the other guys. The other guy is saying, "Boy, you're a real man." No, you're not. You're a boy who can shave. If you walk into the world, you get no definition of what a man is or does because this indefinite, extended period of adolescence. And moms coddle guys and girlfriends coddle guys. "Oh yeah, well you know, he's having a hard time so I help him pay his bills." Seriously? "Well, yeah, he can't pay the rent so I moved him in with me." Oh, my goodness. "And his beater car keeps breaking down so I drive him around." Seriously? You're kidding me. You want a guy you can marry and have babies with. You don't want to marry a guy who's a baby. It's unbelievable. I mean, I keep waiting to go to the mall and just, I'm waiting for the day when guys are in strollers. [Laughter] Just with meat binkies and sippy cups full of beer. [Laughter] And the girlfriends are like, "Oh, he's nice. He's got potential. I think he's got a lot of potential." [Laughter] [Applause] "Oh, I messed. I messed." You know, I mean, it's like- [Laughter]

I mean, it's really sad. And some of you gals are here with those guys-a few of them got dumped today, and you're next, gentlemen. [Laughter]

And sometimes it's wives. "Well, honey, we can't have babies 'cause then, you know, I'd have to get a job and you know how I feel about work and I prayed about it." Really? Really? You prayed about it to whom? You dialed the wrong number. [Laughter]

I mean it's unbelievable. So you walk out into the world and guys are encouraged, "Just enjoy your adolescence." Twenties, thirties. You know what's grotesque? You start seeing forty- and fifty-year-old men still in adolescence, seriously. It's unbelievable.

MEN IN THE CHURCH: COWARDS AND COMPLAINERS

So then you walk in the church, try to find out, okay, what does a man look like? Well, first of all, you're not gonna find a lot of guys in most evangelical churches. Sixty percent of church attendees are female. There are 11 to 13 million more women than men in church-we say praise God; the women love God. The least likely person to see in church is a single, twenty-something male.

And in the church, what you tend to find are two kinds of guys predominantly prevailing in evangelicalism: cowards and complainers. In the world, it's children who are consumers. In the church, it is cowards who are complainers. Cowards-so many Christian guys are so lacking any courage at all. A buddy of mine calls them evangellyfish with no spiritual vertebrae. They just have no backbone at all. And these guys, they have no courage at all. They don't declare a major. They don't declare a ministry. They don't declare a theology. They don't take any initiative. They don't go up to their boss and say, "I want to get married someday and provide for a family. What do I need to do to get there?"

I get it all the time, even from guys in this church. Guys in this church. Guys that have been yelled at repeatedly. [Laughter] "I can't meet a nice girl." Oh, my goodness. Are you kidding me? Just, look, just turn in a circle and at any point, stop, and there's one, right? You know- [Laughter] Like, what? I don't get that. I've talked to guys lately, they're like, "What if she says no? What if she doesn't wanna go out with me? What if she's not-?" Well, of course, she'll say no. Look at you. You have no game at all. [Laughter] You have no game at all.

Guys who can't even look you in the eye, can't shake your hand. Just total cowards. You know what you do? You look her in the eye. "Hi, I have a Bible, I have a job. Interested?" "No. Next." [Laughter] [Applause]

You know, just cowards. I had a guy recently, he's like, "Well, you don't know how hard it is." Well, I said, "You know, it's not gonna get easier if you wait. It's not like if you wait to grow up, like in ten years, it's gonna be really easy." Just blowing time.

Cowards or complainers. A lot of guys that are Christians, they write those books, they read those books, and they'll say, "I hate the church. The church stinks. The church is a bunch of hypocrites. The church just wants my money." Oh, yeah, you're so loaded, that's what we want. We want half of all your Xbox games so we can hawk them- [Laughter]

So that we can hock them at the pawnshop and get enough money for a cup of coffee. Not a big cup, but a cup nonetheless. You know, like, come on.

I had a guy recently, he's like, "Well, I think you just want my money." Dude, look at you. You came here on a bike. [Laughter] Obviously I'm not in it for the money. "Money"-ha!

Just complaining all the time. "I didn't like that church. I didn't like that Mark made fun of me." Mark makes fun of you 'cause you're a joke, okay?
[Laughter]

That's why. And he loves you-I love you. Talk about myself in the third person. Mark loves-no, I don't, but Mark totally does. [Laughter] I'm sick of you, but Mark, he's got hope. He's got a lot of hope for you. [Laughter]

But it's cowards and complainers, guys that don't take initiative. 'Cause Christian guys don't want to fail and if they don't try then they can't fail. And by definition, that's a failure. Gotcha.

BE A REAL MAN LIKE JOHN: CREATORS AND CULTIVATORS

So what does it mean to be a man? And what does this have to do with John the Baptizer? No coward. "Herod, come on down and get baptized."
"Really? I built the temple." "Yeah, but you forgot to repent." He's not a coward and he's not a complainer. John just doesn't have meetings talking about, "Here's what everybody needs to do." He does something. It's a lot harder to do something than complain about those who are doing something. And the notorious sin of Christian guys is complaining about guys who are doing things rather than doing something.

So where do you go? Go to Scripture. Go to Scripture. First Corinthians 11:7, Paul says a man is "the image and glory of God." He is. He is to reflect the truth and the goodness and the love and the mercy of Jesus, his God and Savior. He is the glory of God. And I still have hope for the guys. When I see a guy, I don't see a porn addict, an Internet junkie, a World of Warcraft freak, one of those guys who gets, you know, an apartment with twenty-seven other guys and they all share a studio and pay 5 dollars a month and split a pizza and call that their bar mitzvah.

I still have hope for those guys because they are the glory of God. They are the glory of God. Now, it needs some work, to be sure. But you men are the glory of God. And God wants his glory to shine through you. God wants his kingdom to be made visible through you. God wants you to be his sons. God wants you to follow, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the example of Jesus and in the example of John. I don't care if you buy a truck, and you can play some video games and rock out on your guitar, I don't really care. But the issue is when those are prevalent, predominant, and preeminent in your life, some of you guys would argue with me and say, "It's not a sin." No, but sometimes it's just stupid. It's just dumb. You got fired 'cause you were up trying to get to the next level and become a guild leader. That's dumb. That's totally dumb. Right? You work one part-time job so you could play more guitar. That's dumb. That's really, really dumb. You spend all your money on a new car or truck, or toys, or gear, or gambling, or fantasy football. Dumb. Some of you say, "Well, it's not a sin." Neither is eating your lawnmower. It's just dumb. [Laughter] Just dumb. Just doesn't do anything. There are a lot of things that guys that are Christians do that aren't evil, they're just dumb.

You're the glory of God. What does it mean to be a man? John is a great example. He doesn't waste his teens and his twenties downloading free porn, racking up his credit card debt, spending seven years to knock out his undergrad degree, trying to be the king of the fantasy football or baseball league, determined to pound more beers at happy hour and conquer more women than all the other guys to show he's a real man. That's no man at all. It's a boy who could shave.

John shows us what a real man is. He's filled with the Spirit. He humbly prepares the way for Jesus. He's an evangelist who makes it his life work to introduce others to Jesus. He's a man who ultimately is a giver and not a taker. He's a producer, not a consumer. See, men, you are to be creators and cultivators. If you want to image God, your God is a creator and a cultivator. You create a marriage and you cultivate that woman. You create a child with her and you cultivate that child. You create a new family legacy for generations and you cultivate it. You create a business and you cultivate it. You create a ministry and you cultivate it. You want to be a man? You're a creator and a cultivator. You're a producer, not a consumer. You're a giver, not a taker. You bring life, not death. You're not looking for the path of least resistance. You're looking for the path of greatest glory to God. You take it like John did.

And ultimately, what I want for you men is to be filled with the Holy Spirit like John, and I want you to be fathers like Zechariah who are filled with the Spirit, and I want you to marry women like Elizabeth who are filled with the Spirit. I want you women to be filled with the Spirit like Elizabeth. And I want you to love and serve one another and God like Zechariah and Elizabeth did and then I want you to give birth to children who are filled with the Spirit and serve Jesus like John did. And I want your life to be one of production not just consumption, one of fruitfulness and faithfulness, and not foolishness.

You say, how does this happen? Well, John will tell us later, repent and be baptized. And with a sense of urgency, put your sin to death and show your faith in Jesus, his death, burial, resurrection that takes away sin and live a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. You have sin to repent of. Some of you need to become Christians right now. I've seen a number of people become Christians today, men and women. Some of you women, your sin is enabling the men in your life to be godless. And some of you men, the sin in your life is extending your adolescence and not being filled with the Spirit, but being drunk and stupid, with no sense of urgency, a high self-esteem and a low self-awareness. No plan and no urgency, that's not what the Spirit births. He births urgency, repentance, humility, hope, courage, steadfastness, all the way to the end. That's the example of John. Are you ready to give your life to Christ? Are you ready? Are you ready? Are you ready to yield to the power of the Holy Spirit?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God, I pray for my friends. God, I pray for the guys in this church. God, I love them with all my heart and some of them absolutely frustrate me, I confess it. God, there are guys that have heard the gospel preached a lot of times. Some of them have been here for weeks, months, years. Lord God, I pray that my words would be accompanied by the Spirit's power, that ultimately, Holy Spirit, you would convict of sin, that you would reveal Jesus,

that you would regenerate new life. God, I pray for the young men who call this church home and the men who listen in online. I pray, Lord God, that they would not be childish consumers, that they would not be cowards and complainers, that they would be creators and cultivators. I pray for the women, Lord God, who would enable the weakest and the worst of men, that they would repent of trying to be God and Savior and get out of the way and let Jesus do his job. I pray, Lord God, for the children that will come out of the marriages in this church. I pray that the mothers would be like Elizabeth. I pray that the fathers would be like Zechariah. And I pray that the children would be like John. To the glory of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, God, we ask this for your glory, our joy, and others' good, in Jesus' name, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.