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## ***The Disciple-Making Minister***

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

### **Chapter Nine**

#### **Jesus' Favorite Preacher**

You may be surprised to learn that Jesus had a favorite preacher. You may be even more surprised to learn that Jesus' favorite preacher was not a Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, or Presbyterian. Rather, he was a Baptist! We know him as *John the Baptist*, of course! Jesus said of him,

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11a).

Since all people are "born of woman," this was another way of saying that, in Jesus' estimation, John the Baptist was the greatest person who had ever lived. Why Jesus felt that way is a matter of conjecture. It seems reasonable to think, however, that Jesus thought highly of John because of John's spiritual qualities. If so, we would certainly be wise to study and imitate those spiritual qualities. I've found at least seven spiritual qualities in John the Baptist that are praiseworthy. Although John's ministry best represents the ministry of an evangelist, all seven spiritual qualities are appropriate for any and every minister of the gospel. Let's consider the first of seven.

#### **John's First Quality**

And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." They said then to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said" (John 1:19-23).

John knew his calling and pursued it.

How important it is for ministers to know their callings and pursue them. If you are an evangelist, you should not try to be a pastor. If you are a teacher, you should not try to be a prophet. Otherwise, you will only find frustration.

How do you know your calling? First, by seeking the Lord, the one who has called you.

Second, by examining your gifting. If God has called you to be an evangelist, He will equip you for the task. And third, by the confirmation of others who will certainly notice your gifting.

Once you are certain of your calling, you should pursue it with all of your heart, letting no obstacle hinder you. Many are waiting around for God to do what He expects them to do. Noah didn't wait around for God to build an ark!

It has been said that the word *ministry* is spelled W O R K. Satan will surely try to stop you from fulfilling your calling, but you must resist him and forge ahead by faith. Even though Scripture doesn't tell us, you can be sure that there was one day when John *first started* preaching around the region of the Jordan. No doubt his first crowds were much smaller than his later crowds. You can be sure that people made fun of him and that he experienced persecution. But he would not be stopped. His sole aim was to please His God who had called him to his ministry. Ultimately, he succeeded.

John's first spiritual quality that is worthy of our imitation is this: *John knew his calling and pursued it.*

### **John's Second Quality**

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:1-2).

Certainly Jesus highly approved of John's simple message, as it was the same message that Jesus preached wherever He went (see Matt. 4:17). John called people to repentance—to turn away from a life of sin and turn to a life of righteousness. He knew that a relationship with God begins with repentance, and that those who don't repent will be cast into hell.

Unlike so many modern evangelists, John never mentioned the love of God. Nor did he talk about people's "felt needs" as a means to entice them to pray a meaningless prayer of "accepting Jesus" so that they could begin to experience "the abundant life." He did not lead people to believe that they were basically good people whom God wanted to take to heaven if they could only realize that salvation was not of works. Rather, he saw them as God saw them—rebels in danger of facing eternal consequences for their sins. He solemnly warned them of the wrath to come. He made certain they understood that if they didn't change their hearts and actions, they were doomed.

So the second quality that John possessed that is worthy of every disciple-making minister's imitation is this: *John proclaimed that repentance was the first step in a relationship with God.*

### **John's Third Quality**

Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4).

John certainly didn't fit the picture of the modern "prosperity preacher." They, in fact, would never allow such a man as John on their church platforms because he did not dress the part of success. John, however, was a true man of God who had no interest in pursuing earthly treasures or impressing people with his outward appearance, knowing that God looks at the heart. He lived simply, and his lifestyle caused no one to stumble, as they could see his motive was not money. How this stands in contrast to so many modern ministers around the world, who use the gospel primarily for personal gain. And as they misrepresent Jesus, they do great damage to Christ's cause.

John's third quality that contributed to his being Jesus' favorite preacher was this: *John lived simply.*

### **John's Fourth Quality**

He [John] therefore began saying to the multitudes who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Luke 3:7-8).

As John's ministry began touching more people, he obviously did not compromise his message. John may have even become suspicious of people's motives when he noticed that it was becoming quite popular to be baptized. Even scribes and Pharisees were making the journey to the Jordan (see Matt. 3:7). He feared that many people were just going along with the crowd. So he did all he could to keep them from being self-deceived, knocking over any props that supported their deception. He didn't want anyone to think that just the act of baptism saved them, or that just a profession of repentance would keep them from hell. He warned that true repentance brings forth the fruit of obedience.

Moreover, because many Jews considered themselves to be saved due to their physical lineage from Abraham, John exposed the fallacy of that hope.

John's fourth praiseworthy quality is this: *He loved people enough to tell them the truth. He would never assure an unrepentant, unholy person that he was on the way to heaven.*

### **John's Fifth Quality**

John would not baptize people who didn't appear repentant, not wanting to bolster anyone's self-deception. He baptized people "as they confessed their sins" (Matt. 3:6). He warned those who came:

The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.... And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:10, 12).

John was not afraid to tell the truth about hell, a subject that is often avoided by preachers who are trying to win a popularity contest rather than win souls for God's kingdom. Neither did John fail to proclaim the same theme we discovered in Christ's Sermon on the Mount—only the holy inherit God's kingdom. Those who don't bear good fruit will be thrown into the fire.

If John were alive today, he would no doubt be castigated by many professing Christians as a "hellfire and brimstone preacher," a "gloom and doom prophet," "not seeker-sensitive," or worse, "negative," "condemning," "legalistic" or "self-righteous." Yet John was Jesus' favorite preacher. His fifth quality: *John preached about hell and made it clear what kinds of people are on their way there.* Interestingly, Luke referred to John's message as "the gospel" (Luke 3:18).

### **John's Sixth Quality**

Although John was mightily used of God and became very popular with the multitudes, he knew that he was nothing in comparison to Jesus, and so he always exalted His Lord:

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11).

How John's self-appraisal stands in contrast to the arrogance that is too often flaunted in our day by "ministers." Their color ministry magazines contain photos of them on every page, while Jesus is scarcely mentioned. They parade like peacocks across church platforms, exalting themselves in the eyes of their followers. They are untouchable and unreachable, filled with their own self-importance. Some even command angels and God! Yet John considered himself unworthy to remove Jesus' sandals, what would have been considered to be an act of a lowly slave. He objected when Jesus came to him to be baptized, and once he realized that Jesus was the Christ, he immediately pointed all to Him, declaring Him to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 29). "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30) became John's humble motto.

This was John's sixth quality that helped make him Jesus' favorite preacher: *John humbled himself and exalted Jesus. He had no desire for self-exaltation.*

### **John's Seventh Quality**

Modern preachers often speak in vague generalities lest they offend anyone. How easy it is to preach, "God wants us to do what is right!" True and false Christians alike will say "Amen" to such preaching. Many preachers also find it quite easy to continually harp on the scandalous sins of the world, avoiding any mention of similar sins within the church. They, for example, might rage against pornography, but dare not mention the R-rated and immoral videos and DVDs that are viewed and even collected by many of their parishioners. The fear of man has snared them.

John, however, didn't hesitate to preach *specifically*. Luke reports:

And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" And he would answer and say to them, "Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise." And some tax-gatherers also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." And some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:10-14).

It is interesting that five of the six specific directives John gave had something to do with money or material things. John was not afraid to preach about stewardship as it relates to the golden rule and the second greatest commandment. Neither did John wait several years until the new "believers" were ready for such "heavy" concepts. He believed that it was impossible to serve God and mammon, and so stewardship was of primary importance from the very beginning.

This brings up one other point. John did not major in the minors, continually harping on dress codes and other issues of holiness related to outward appearance. He focused on "the weightier provisions of the law" (Matt. 23:23). He knew that what is most important is loving our neighbors as ourselves and treating others just as we want to be treated. That means sharing food and clothing with those who lack such basic necessities, dealing honestly with others, and being content with what we have.

This was a seventh quality that endeared John to Jesus: *He preached not in vague generalities, but cited specific things people should do to please God, even things related to stewardship. And, he focused on what was most important.*

### **In Conclusion**

A pastor or teacher's ministry would of course be characterized by a broader range of subject matter than was John's. John was preaching to the unrepentant. Pastors and

teachers are supposed to be primarily teaching those who have already repented. Their teaching is based on those things Jesus said to His disciples and that are written in the New Testament epistles.

We often fail, however, to rightly identify our audiences, and it seems today that sinners are often preached to as if they were saints. Just because people are sitting in a church building does not mean our job is to assure them of their salvation, especially if their lives are essentially indistinguishable from those in the world. There is a crying need today for millions of "John the Baptists" to preach from church pulpits. Will you rise to the challenge? Will you become one of Jesus' favorite preachers?