

Text: Luke 3: 15-17; 21-38

Theme: Just a Voice?

Sermon delivered by Iyabo Agbelusi during Holy Communion Service on 10/01/2016 at 10.30am

There had been no prophet in Israel for over 400 years. There was an expectation of the Messiah. When John began to preach, many people were excited and began to question if this powerful, politically incorrect and fearless prophet was the long-awaited Messiah. John had many reasons to be proud, yet he was humble. Of a miraculous birth, a prophesied destiny, and a wonderful calling to personally fulfil great prophetic promises; it was clear he was a powerful preacher, and a man with a great following. In John, we see an all-too-rare combination of both strictness and humility. Naturally people began to wonder whether John was the Christ or not.

John must have faced the temptation, not to claim that he was the Christ, but perhaps at least to think that he was someone pretty special. If the people thought he was the Christ, they must think he was pretty good. How do we deal with this temptation to succumb to pride and arrogance? The best way to resist this is to point people to Christ. To remove our attention from self and any accomplishments and turn our eyes upon Jesus. To get people to look past me and turn their eyes upon Jesus also. His task was to urge people to prepare for and turn to Christ and he fulfilled his task.

One of the secrets to John's success in ministry was that he knew what he was supposed to do, and he did it. When asked by the people, "Are you the Messiah?" he told them, "No, I'm just the one who baptises you. I'm just the herald, a voice. I'm just the one to prepare the way for the Messiah."

He didn't look for praise or celebrity status for himself, he pointed people back to Christ. In other words, he says, *"Don't focus on me, because One mightier than I is coming. However great you think I am, when the Messiah comes, I am not even worthy to lose His sandal strap."* **John humbles himself and lifts up Jesus. Later in his ministry, some of John's followers leave him to go and follow Christ. Some people ask him, "Aren't you jealous? Aren't you upset that your followers are going after Christ?" Not at all, that brings John fulfilment.**

That is how our lives should be focused too. It is not about us, but about Him. It's not about our glory and fame. Our life is about Jesus' glory and His name. Whenever we try to do things our way and try to get our own recognition and our own fame, we really are competing with God for His position. We actually are attempting to replace Jesus Christ. John's ministry was preaching, and he preached Christ faithfully. **A Question for us:** Are you and I bringing attention to Christ or to ourselves in our life's walk?

Jesus reforms our life through repentance. He also wants to do an ongoing work of transformation in our daily life. But this will never happen except we let Christ be Lord and Saviour. **We will never be successful Christians in God's view unless Christ is the focal point, the source, the reason, our enabler, the centre, the heart of all that is done. Like John, each of us should pray that in our lives, Jesus would become greater, and we would become less. We must point people to Christ.**

In vs 17, John is telling his audience that when Jesus comes, he will surpass him, John, by far. He considers that he, John, is not worthy to unlace Christ's sandals; and that although he baptizes people with water, Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This means that for

anyone who opens his heart for Jesus to come in, He will fill them with the Holy Spirit and purify them thoroughly, like fire so believers have the power to do God's will.

The picture John uses here is of a threshing floor. Grain was harvested, and piled on a threshing floor outside where there might be a light cross breeze. They would take a type of shovel called a winnowing fan and use this, to toss the grain in the air. It would create a draft of air to blow the chaff off and because grain is heavier, it would fall back down into the pile, but the chaff blew off to one side. Once the grain and chaff were adequately separated, the grain would be bagged and carted off for storage in a barn and then, the chaff which had piled up in places, would be set alight. Because it was so light, it burnt very quickly. Those who refuse Christ are likened to the chaff that is burnt. With these vivid images, John was urging them then, and us today, to turn to Christ wholeheartedly.

Dr Luke helps us to see Jesus' baptism in Vs 21 as the first public declaration of His ministry. Rather than head for Jerusalem to identify with established religious leaders, Jesus goes to the River Jordan and identifies himself with those repenting of sin. Like Jesus says elsewhere, *'He has come to seek and save the lost.'* Jesus did not receive baptism because He was a sinner needing to repent and be cleansed from His sins. He did it to completely identify Himself with us sinful people. This was the same heart that would lead to His ultimate identification with sinful man on the cross.

As Jesus prayed, (v22) the three Persons of the Trinity were all manifested at once. The Holy Spirit came in bodily form like a dove. The voice of God the Father was heard, and the beloved Son was baptized. The voice from heaven left no doubt. This wasn't just another sinner being baptized; this was the sinless, Eternal Son of God, pleasing the Father by His identification with sinful man. God spoke, confirming His decision to break into human history through Jesus the Christ.

Why did Jesus, sinless as He was, come to be baptised? I read from somewhere that *'That day when Jesus stepped into the River Jordan, He was stepping into the fullness of God's purpose for His life. Those waters were teeming with the sins of mankind. John had baptised multitudes of converts there; their sins figuratively passing from them into the sea of God's forgetfulness, just like the waters of the River Jordan end up in the Dead Sea. He went to be baptized to set us free from sin.'*

*Are we appalled at the idea of Jesus wading into sin? But He was doing it to fulfil the purpose of God – redemption for us. Jesus was exactly where God wanted Him to be, doing exactly what God wanted Him to do. That's why His Father announced, **'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'***

A lesson we can learn from this is that **doing God's will sometimes means stepping into messy situations and troubled waters.** But when we obey God and do what He says, He will lead us in what to do and say. **As we seek to obey and honour Christ in all we do or say, He will give us the ability and provide resources needed because we're obeying Him.**

God is looking for people who will flow with His plans and purposes. He is searching for people who will make His purposes a priority. He is looking for people He can use, who submit under His authority and become useful for the Kingdom. Will you be one of them?