

Joke: Three preachers sat discussing the best positions for prayer while a telephone repairman worked nearby.

"Kneeling is definitely best," claimed one.

"No," another contended. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven."

"You're both wrong," the third insisted. "The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor."

The repairman could contain himself no longer. "Hey, fellas, " he interrupted, "the best prayin' I ever did was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole."

Words Have Power ***Forerunner, Part 3***

For the past couple of weeks we have been learning about John the Baptizer the forerunner of Jesus.

Listen to what Jesus said about him,

Matthew 11:11 (NIV): Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; . . .

And then it continues with. ..

Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Let me clarify briefly what I believe the second part of this Scripture means. We have heard it a few times so far in this series but I have yet to spend time with it.

John was the culmination of the law when no one could meet up to the righteousness that God commanded. The law was based on works of which no one measured up.

Jesus came fulfilled the law by His obedience of going to the cross and because of that we, when we come into relationship with Jesus are made the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

No longer working for favor, but rather from favor. No longer under the law, but under grace.

That makes us the greater than John. Because of what Christ did. Next week we will be looking at a much greater.

Hope that helps.

Back to John. . .

Six months before Jesus was born, John, His Forerunner was born.

Here's what we know about John so far:

- This Forerunner, John, is mentioned in 23 chapters of the Bible.

There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. John is mentioned in 23 of them.

Over the last few weeks we've learned that John's life was. . .

- Was foretold of in 703 B.C. by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 40:3 and again in 425 B.C. by Malachi in Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6.

Something we haven't covered as of yet, and you might not know is that John. . .

- Is one of only four people prophesied to come:
 - a. The Messiah (Gen. 3:15; Dt. 18:15; Is. 7:14);
 - b. Cyrus the Persian (Is. 45:1);
 - c. The Antichrist (Dan. 7:24; Rev. 13:1);
 - d. And John (Mal. 3:1, Mal. 4:5-6).

Something else interesting about John is that. . .

- God's last words in the Old Testament were about him (Malachi 4:5-6).
- God's first words in the New Testament were also about him (Lk. 1:17).

400 years of silence between the two Testaments, but God doesn't forget his promise.

Numbers 6, in the OT, contains what is known as a "Nazarite vow." Nazarite's couldn't eat anything with grapes in it or drink anything that was fermented. And John. . .

- Was a Nazarite from birth.

Luke 1:14–15 (NIV): He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink

I think this is kind of ironic that at one point, Jesus observed that. . .

Matthew 11:18–19 (NIV): For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

Here you have John because of the Nazarite vow not drinking wine or anything else like that the people think he has a demon. Then we have Jesus who sat down with ones that nobody liked, hung out with the ones every one else avoided and he was a glutton.

John living right is believed to have a demon. Jesus reaching those no one else wanted to be around is called a drunkard.

I guess it goes to show you can't please everyone.

Another point is that John, like Jesus...

- Was filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb (Luke 1:17).

And John, like Jesus, came from a miraculous birth not the same way mind you because we know that:

- Jesus was born of a virgin named Mary, but John's birth was still miraculous in the sense that. . .
- His parents were too old to have children and Elizabeth his mother was called barren.

When the angel Gabriel told John's dad that he would be a father. . .

- Zechariah's mouth was shut when he doubted the announcement. (Luke 1:20)

One more thing that you should know, because it's relevant to the story we're going to look at today is. . .

- Mary was possibly present for John's birth, at the earliest she left soon before it happened (Lk. 1:40).

How do we know this?

Well, Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant when Mary herself got pregnant, and when Mary found out she was pregnant, she went to Elizabeth's house and stayed with her for the first three months of her pregnancy. So she left Elizabeth's house either because Elizabeth was about to give birth, or because Elizabeth had just given birth.

Either way, Aunt Mary was around close to the time of John's birth.

Why do I even mention that, because. . .

Most of the time, when we're reading the birth Jesus especially around Christmas, we tend to skip over the story of the birth of John.

But his story contains some lessons that will help you understand God's work in your life better, and help you learn to be a better parent, grandparent and friend to the people around you.

So open a Bible to the story of the birth of John.

The story starts in Luke 1:57. Luke describes it this way:

Luke 1:57 (NIV): When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

Don't you love how easy it was to have a baby back then?

It says, "The time came, and she had a son." No fuss, no mess. No worries. No problems. No pushing. Just, "the time came," and "he came." Like popping out a watermelon seed.
Make that noise.

Sorry I digress. . .

Verse 58 picks up the story. . .

Luke 1:58 (NIV): Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

She posted the announcement on Facebook and got 777 likes.

Sorry again but I used that number because 7 talks about completion and perfection.

Rabbit. . .let's get back on the right trail. . .

Luke 1:59–80 (NIV): On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” 61 They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” 62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him. 67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— 72 to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham: 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way

for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

This is the story of the birth of John the Forerunner.

God recorded the story, so that we could learn from it. And in so doing we might do some things differently as a result of it.

So what lessons can we learn. . .

Zechariah and Elizabeth conceived. Six months later, Mary conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. For her first three months, young Mary moved from Galilee in the north to live with her older cousin Elizabeth in the south.

As Elizabeth went into labor, Mary prepared to go home. Whether she left a few days before John’s birth, or a few days after, we don’t know. What we do know is that six months before Jesus was born, John was born. And the time of his birth could not have been better.

Every king needs a herald. And John was Jesus’ herald.

Priests had to be 30 years old in order to take their place in the Temple. John would turn 30 six months before Jesus would turn 30. One of the things God is saying to us in this story is:

“My timing is perfect.”

So, that is lesson one. . . God’s Timing is Perfect

John's birth was perfectly timed. So that he could prepare the way for Jesus. Not only was John's birth perfectly timed. . .

But his dad's voice coming back was perfectly timed as well listen again to what Luke said. . .

Luke 1:65 (NIV): All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.

Where were people talking about him? In the hill country of Judea.

Why is that important? I love this, check this out. . .

30 years later, when John starts his ministry of preparing people for the Messiah, Mark tells us:

Mark 1:4–5 (NIV): And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. Where did John start his ministry? In the Judean countryside.

And where were people talking about him 30 years earlier? The hill country of Judea – the same place.

It's gets better look back at Luke. . .

Luke 1:66 (NIV): Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

By shutting Zechariah's mouth, and then reopening it at just the right time, God created a stir that people remembered 30

years later, which enabled John to give a message to a people ready to receive.

After all, he only had 6 months to get people's attention before Jesus would be on the scene.

Then, not only was John's birth timed perfectly. And Zechariah's mouth opened perfectly. . .

- Mary's pregnancy was also perfectly timed.

The very first verse in the next chapter of Luke says. . .

Luke 2:1 (NIV): In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

This registration meant that Joseph, who was engaged to be married to Mary, would have to journey from his workplace in Nazareth, back to his birthplace in Bethlehem.

And it happened at just the time when Mary was not too pregnant to travel, but pregnant enough to give birth soon after she arrived in Bethlehem.

Just a coincidence? I think not.

God knew all about it! 500 years earlier, through the prophet Micah, God proclaimed:

Micah 5:2 (NIV): "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

If you're frustrated with God because you think He's moving too slowly, let go of that frustration.

God isn't running late. He isn't tied up elsewhere. God's timing. Is perfect!

2 Peter 3:8–9 (NIV): But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

He's never early, and He's never late. He's always right on time to accomplish exactly what He wants to accomplish, exactly the way He wants to accomplish it, so that His children will benefit from it.

By doing what He does when He does it, He always does more than we could have asked or imagined.

God's perfect timing explains why one of His four responses to your prayers looks "slow."

Church, God answers every prayer. And He answers in one of four ways:

- When the prayer is wrong, God says, "No."
- When the prayer is right, but you aren't, God says, "Grow."
- When the prayer is right and you are right, but the timing is wrong, God says, "Slow."
- And when the prayer is right and you are right and the timing is right, God says, "Go!"

The second thing we know from this story is that John was circumcised and dedicated to the Lord on his eighth day, which fulfilled God's command given to all Abraham's descendants in Genesis 17.

During the dedication ceremony, after his voice is restored, Zechariah speaks some words over John that influence the course of history.

The Latins called these words by Zechariah, “The Benedictus,” which means, in English, “The good words.”

Zechariah says,

Luke 1:76–77 (NIV): And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

How did Zechariah know this? The angel told him, and he studied Scripture. John had never heard this before. He was only eight days old, and he wasn’t there when the angel spoke to his father 9 ½ months earlier.

Some of you would love to hear encouraging words like these from your fathers, but let me say this your Heavenly Father has only good plans for you, He only speaks life over you.

Remember that. . .

Psalms 139:17–18 (NIV): How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

Let me try and bring this message home by sharing point number two

Which is this. . .

- Words have power.

I think words can shape ones reality

Read this out loud with me:

Proverbs 18:21 (NIV): The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Tell a child he's stupid, or that he'll never amount to anything, what happens to him? What happens to Bobby when he hears a parent say, "You can't, you can't, you can't" all his life? He becomes emotionally crippled. He becomes a person who feels like he always has to prove himself.

On the other hand, when someone who matters says something uplifting, it shifts mindsets.

At eight days old, John can't understand his father's words. But they're part of the shaping process that makes him into one of the greatest man who ever lived:

Luke 1:76 (NIV): And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

What can you speak over others, over yourselves even. . .

Psalms 139:14 (NIV): I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

What about. . . .

Philippians 4:13 (NIV): I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Words matter. Words shape the world. The Bible says that in the beginning God *spoke* the world into existence.

Romans 4 instructs us to call things that are not as though they are.

Let me read a few of those verses from the Message translation

Romans 4:17–18 (The Message): We call Abraham “father” not because he got God’s attention by living like a saint, but because God made something out of Abraham when he was a nobody. Isn’t that what we’ve always read in Scripture, God saying to Abraham, “I set you up as father of many peoples”? Abraham was first named “father” and then became a father because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he couldn’t do but on what God said he would do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, “You’re going to have a big family, Abraham!”

Words can shape a life, and. . .

- Words can steer a destiny

Zechariah said,

Luke 1:76–77 (NIV): And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,

...because that’s what the angel told him about his son.

Every Scripture tells a story, and every Scripture teaches a lesson.

With the first chance he has to speak, Zechariah does two things that you and I can do to shape our children's or even our children's children destinies:

1. Speak Scripture over them.

That's what Zechariah does. From verses 68 to 79, Zechariah quotes portions of 11 different verses to John.

Parents, grandparents, friends – what if we made a habit, every time we found an encouraging Scripture, to speak it over someone we loved.

Zechariah speaks Scripture over his son. We can too.

The second thing we can do is use our words to. . .

2. Claim God's promises over them, I would propose in front of them as well.

It's one thing to claim God's promises for our children when we're praying privately. It takes it to a whole new level when we claim His promises in front of them.

In 2 Samuel 22:30 David claims this for himself:

2 Samuel 22:30 (NIV): With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

Or once again Philippians 4:13 says,

Philippians 4:13 (NIV): I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Romans 8:31 says,

Romans 8:31 (NIV): What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

You could say, “Kyle, with God’s help, you can leap over a wall. You can do this.”

“Lincoln, you’re able. You’re able buddy. You can do things like this with the help of him who strengthens you!”

“Don’t be afraid, Avery. If God is for you, who,, can be against you?”

Here’s the principle:

Let Scripture guide your behavior. And Let Scripture guide your words.

The Scripture will shape your perspective. And Scripture will shape your world.

Words matter. They shape reality and influence destinies.

Church, speak edifying words over your children. Over your friends.

And prepare to speak words of praise to our God.

Let me close with sharing just a few things that God speaks over us. . .

- I am a child of God
- I am a friend of Jesus
- My old self has died I am a new creation
- I have been set free from the law of sin and death
- I have been accepted by Christ
- I have been adopted into his family
- My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which lives in me
- I am the righteous of God in Christ Jesus
- I am no longer a slave to sin

- I am more than a conqueror
- I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places
- I am chosen
- I am redeemed
- I am forgiven
- I am loved
- I am God's workmanship
- I have been made complete in Christ

Let me close with this. .

Our true identity can only be found when we stop being who we or others say we are and start being who we were created to be.