

Joke: For our pastor's 50th birthday, the congregation decided to give him a new suit. He was so touched by the gift that the following Sunday he stood before everyone and with tears in his eyes, announced, "Today I am preaching to you in my birthday suit."

Forerunner - week 5 - What's the Legacy your leaving.

For the past 5 weeks we've been looking at the life of the man Jesus called, "The greatest born of a woman." We've called him the Forerunner, because he came before Jesus preparing the way for people to find Jesus.

In today's final installment of this series, John the Baptist dies. He lived well, he fulfilled his mission. And John left a legacy. His death was so moving to Jesus that the Bible says. . .

In the first part of Matthew 14 verse 13 it tells us,

Matthew 14:13 (NIV): When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

Today, John is going to teach us how we too can leave the type of legacy that he did. Before we get to that, he's going to remind us how to live well.

During this series, we've learned a lot from John the Forerunner.

Let me remind you of a few of the lessons we learned so far:

1. God just as he knew John's future, knows ours as well

We learned this from Isaiah 40, where God told us about John's coming 700 years beforehand. Why did He do that?

Well, it was a depressing time for Israel, and He wanted to encourage them that things would get better. Better tomorrow, and better a year from now. But also, hundreds of years from now.

He was saying, "Your family has a future." And He's saying that to you today too. God's mercies are new every morning, every week, every month, every year, decade and century. He knows your future, and it's a good future.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV): For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

The second thing we learned in this study was that. . .

2. God prepared John's parents to help them fulfill God's purpose for his life.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous people, which enabled them to handle the responsibility instilling into John God's purpose while raising this child who was called to introduce the world to the Savior of the world.

If you're a parent today, you to have a child of purpose. Walk in righteousness, continue to study God's Word like Zechariah and Elizabeth did, and you will be a significant influence in helping your children fulfill their purposes. – Grandparents, that goes for you too.

The third lesson we learned was that. . .

3. God answers prayer above what we can ask or imagine.

Zechariah was close to 50 years old on the day he was chosen to burn incense in the Temple of God. He had prayed for this opportunity for almost 20 years. The day it happened, he not only got to light the incense at the altar, he got a visit by an angel and news that he and his wife were going to have a son. And that son would be the Forerunner, the most important person born to date.

Ephesians 3:20–21 (NIV): Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

We learned a fourth lesson from what happened nine months later as Zechariah prayed over his 8-day old son.

4. We learned that words have power. They can help shape a person into what God is calling them do.

Proverbs 16:24 (NIV): Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

In that message we learned that our words have power to shape people too.

And lastly we learned. . .

5. John's purpose was to introduce people to Jesus. And one of the purposes for your life as well is to do the same.

John was the Forerunner. Maybe we should all be called, "After runners." We've come after the Messiah, and our job is to point people back to Him so that they to can encounter Jesus,

After John's introduction of Jesus, the Messiah and John did some ministry together. John was preaching and baptizing in the Judean countryside.

In John chapter 3, the Apostle John tells us that. ..

John 3:22–30 (NIV): After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. 24 (This was before John was put in prison.) 25 An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified

about—look, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.” 27 To this John replied, “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less.”

So Jesus’ crowds grew, while John’s crowds shrank. And the truth about that is that John was content, ok with that. He truly wanted Jesus to increase while he decreased. He wanted less of him and more of Jesus.

Can we say the same. Or do we get jealous when someone has a bigger ministry, a better worship team.

John was ok because he was fulfilling the mission for which he was sent. For two years, the two great rabbis ministered in parallel.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus records that John was imprisoned in the fortress at Macherus by Herod Antipas.

John realizes that he’s not going to get out. This was his end. So he does something very rabbi-like. He sends his remaining disciples to Jesus, so that they will follow Jesus. The rabbi-like part is how he does it.

Instead of saying straight out, “Go follow Jesus.” He assigns two of them to go ask Jesus if He really is the Messiah. Rabbis don’t give answers. They ask questions.

Here’s how Luke records the story:

Luke 7:18–23 (NIV): John’s disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, 19 he sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” 20 When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’ ” 21 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. 22 So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 23 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

John knows that Jesus is the Savior. He also knows that anyone who would be saved must decide for themselves that Jesus is the Savior. So instead of blurting it out, he sends them to collect the facts: Jesus is doing all the things Messiah will do when He comes.

The conclusion being. If He walks like the Messiah, talks like the Messiah, and acts like the Messiah, He’s probably the Messiah!

So while John was imprisoned, Herod has him beheaded.

Matthew tells us the story in flashback fashion. He writes:

Matthew 14:1–12 (NIV): At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, 2 and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” 3 Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, 4 for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.” 5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet. 6 On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much 7 that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” 9 The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted 10 and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. 12 John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

That’s where we pick up our story. . .

The rest of the gospel story is about Jesus – His ministry, His death, His resurrection, his ascension, and ultimately the birth of His church.

But 25 years later, as the church was expanding into what we know as modern-day Turkey, the Apostle Paul runs into some followers of John the Baptist.

He's in Ephesus. Turkey, if you will, which is 650 miles from downtown Jerusalem. But somehow, John's teachings made it all the way there. 26 years after his death, John still has followers.

Luke tells about them in Acts 19:

Acts 19:1–6 (NIV): While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³ So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. ⁴ Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

The Bible says when John the Baptist died,

Matthew 14:12 (NIV): John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

Matthew, who was one of Jesus’ closest friends, and records this record leaves this footnote to the account where we began this message.

Matthew 14:13 (NIV): When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

Jesus loved John. He was a cousin. An inspiration. A friend. Jesus' eulogy for His friend was. . .

Luke 7:28 (NIV): I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

John lived a great life... and he died leaving a great legacy. In his passing, John taught us one more lesson, and that is,

How we too can leave a great legacy.

I want to give you four principles from John's passing that I pray will help you and I leave a legacy to be remembered as well.

Here's the first thing to bear in mind:

1. Don't compromise Biblical truth.

John didn't.

Joe Bayley, who edited the magazine Christianity Today for several decades, once said, "The older I get, the less I'm willing to die for."

I want you to understand that who I live for will always be worth dying for. Never let us get so complacent in our relationship with Jesus that we think any different.

John was willing to do that very thing. And he did.

John actually died because he shared the truth. But he shared it in such a remarkable way.

Scripture tells us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Today, people don't have any trouble being blunt. Their words aren't all that harmless. They find it refreshing almost just to, as the saying goes, say it like it is

But John wasn't blunt in his rebuke. Look what he said and how he said it to Herod:

Mark 6:18 (NIV): For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

He didn't say you heathen. He didn't say you good for nothing sinner don't you know any different. Didn't hold up signs on the street corner saying repent or He'll. He just spoke truth in love.

Romans 2:4 (NLT): Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

His brother's wife was named "Herodias." Look at the next verse this is interesting:

Mark 6:19–20 (NIV): So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous

and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him.

Not Herod who he addressed, but Herodias.

Something else we need to pick up on, listen to this. . .When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

Which brings me to point two on leaving a legacy. . .

2. Speak the truth so well that people will actually like listening to it.

Our society has gotten ugly. We say hurtful things in hurtful ways.

The book of Proverbs gives us some wisdom on how to do it a better way. It says,

Let me share this one again. . .

Proverbs 16:24 (NIV): Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Paul tells it this way to the church in Ephesus, same place he met up with some of John's disciples that we read about in Acts 19.

Ephesians 4:15–16 (NIV): 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

I suspect somehow Herod knew John loved him, even though he knew John disapproved of his behavior.

Can we too learn to love those who the culture thinks is not worthy of love?

We learned earlier from Zechariah that our words have power.

I want to challenge you today stepping forward from today, let's choose to use powerful words that are true, but with such genuine love that the Herod's of our lives like listening to us.

Philippians 4:8–9 (NIV): Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

John's third lesson is about helping others with eternal life.

Do you remember when John first saw Jesus at the Jordan River? He said to everyone who would listen, "Behold, Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins for the world!"

The day after that he said the same thing to his followers, and some of them left him to follow Jesus.

The only thing that stopped him from saying that to others was his death.

During his imprisonment, he even nudged his remaining disciples, very creatively I might add, by asking them to deliver a question for him to Jesus, but relentlessly, none the less, he pushed people to Jesus.

And that is point three.

Are we pushing people from Jesus or to Jesus. By how we live, or what we say.

1 Timothy 4:12–5:2 (NIV): Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. 14 Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. 16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. 5 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

In the words of William J. Tom's. . .

“Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some person ever reads.”

One more lesson.

During his life, John set such a good example that people far away were still imitating him a long time later. We can learn from that. I think anyway. . .

Paul said it this way. . .

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV): Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

I love how the Passion Translation says it. . .

1 Corinthians 11:1 (TPT): I want you to pattern your lives after me, just as I pattern mine after Christ.

Live like you believe in God.
Like you trust Him.
And love Him.
And believe His promises.
And respect His commandments.

Share story of Michigan adventure trip.

I want to close this series the way God opened it with John, chapter 1.

John 1:6–8 (NIV): There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

Until we meet John the Baptist ourselves, will you testify about the light, like he would if he were with us today?

- Will you live out biblical truth?
- Will you speak biblical truth to others, but in a way that they will listen? Like it even?
- Will you push people relentlessly to Jesus?
- Will you set such a good example that others will imitate you when you're gone?

Those are not easy goals. But I believe God honoring goals. And God is with you to accomplish in you and through you what he has called you to.

Psalm 33:11 (NIV): But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Proverbs 16:3 (NIV): Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV): In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

Let us pray.

