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Glory by the River

Matthew 3.1-17, Luke 3.1-22, John 1.19-34

Series: The Glory of Christ

The Village Church

March 22, 2026

I. Context

- A. Jesus' earthly ministry started with one who paved the way
 - 1. **John the Baptist**
- B. Recall where he came from
 - 1. 30 odd years earlier, the story of John began much the same way Jesus' story began
 - a. With a miraculous birth to Zechariah and Elizabeth who were advanced in years
 - 2. Zechariah, a priest, was ministering in the temple burning incense
 - a. And angel spoke to him, announced Elizabeth would have a child and they would call him John
 - b. John had a hard time swallowing the news; challenged the angel to show some proof
 - c. Angel responded by saying John would be mute until the child was born
 - 3. When Mary's own announcement took place, Gabriel told her about her cousin Elizabeth
 - a. Mary went and spent time with Elizabeth
 - b. They enjoyed wonderfully encouraging fellowship and affirmation (as women often do for each other!)
 - 4. When John was born everyone expected for him to be named Zechariah
 - a. But Elizabeth said his name was John
 - b. Zechariah confirmed the name in writing
 - c. And Zechariah was from that time on able to speak!
- C. John the Baptist was stunning in his impact on Jews in the 1st Century
 - 1. Created quite a following
 - a. Controversial among the religious leaders

II. **The Witness of John**

- A. **His message**
 - 1. **Matthew 3:1-3** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
 - b. 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 - c. 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way

of the Lord; make his paths straight.’ ”

2. So, John was a preacher, and preachers have a message
 - a. John’s was simple: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”
3. His message was a message of preparation: “Prepare the way for the Lord” (Isaiah)

B. **His office**

1. **Matthew 3.4-6** (ESV)
 - a. 4 Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.
 - b. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,
 - c. 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
2. Now, John didn’t make his mark in the fashion circles in Jerusalem
 - a. And his culinary habits were nothing to write home about either
 - b. But his clothing and his diet speak of one whose habitat was the desert
 - c. The desert was the traditional meeting place between prophets and God
 - d. And so, **John was a prophet**
3. But Israel had not had a prophet for 400 years
 - a. Not since the close of the OT – Malachi – had Israel had a prophet
 - b. Now John shows up
 - c. And he reminds people of Elijah – and that got the people jazzed up!
4. **Malachi 4:5-6** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.
 - b. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”
5. So, the coming of Elijah was meant to signal the emergence of the Messiah
 - a. The Messiah who was the object of the longing of the devout Jews
 - b. The Messiah who would restore Israel to its original constitution as the people of God
 - c. The Messiah, who, in their view, would relieve the people from their oppression of their enemies – in this day, the hated Romans
 - d. No wonder there was such energy!

C. **The response**

1. So the Jewish leaders sent a delegation to question John
2. **John 1:19-23** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”
 - b. 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

- c. 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”
- d. 22 So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”
- e. 23 He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”
- 3. So, John denies that he is either the Christ (Messiah) or Elijah
 - a. But that didn’t stop the mystery – who was that masked man?
 - b. And Jesus Himself contributes to the mystery
- 4. **Matthew 11:7–15** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?
 - b. 8 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.
 - c. 9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.
 - d. 10 This is he of whom it is written, “ ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’
 - e. 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
 - f. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.
 - g. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John,
 - h. 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.
 - i. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
- 5. So Jesus, first, says “This is he of whom it is written...” and then quotes from Malachi’s prophecy about Elijah
 - a. Then, Jesus says, “... if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come...”
- 6. Wow! What are we to make of this; the difficulty is apparent
 - a. Jesus says that John the Baptist is Elijah
 - b. John himself says that he is not
 - c. Was John the Baptist Elijah?
 - (1) Jesus – Yes
 - (2) John – No
- 7. How do we make sense of this apparent contradiction?
- 8. First, Jesus qualified His “yes”
 - a. “... if you are willing to accept it...”
 - b. And then He says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”
- 9. So, Jesus was identifying John as Elijah in a special sense
 - a. According to Jesus, John fulfilled the prophecy of the return of Elijah
 - b. But John was not actually the reincarnation of Elijah

10. Back to the birth narrative helps in the explanation:
11. **Luke 1:13–17** (ESV) —
 - a. 13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.
 - b. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,
 - c. 15 for he will be great 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.
 - d. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God,
 - e. 17 and **he will go before him 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.”
12. So, John will come in the spirit and power of Elijah
 - a. He will be, not the reincarnation of Elijah, but the reestablishment of the role of the prophet who heralds the Messiah, the King of Israel

D. **His warnings**

1. John’s role as the herald of the King is made clear
 - a. And is most apparent in the kind of warnings he made to the people
2. **Luke 3:3–6** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
 - b. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
 - c. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,
 - d. 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”
3. **Luke 3:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”
4. **Luke 3:15–18** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ,
 - b. 16 John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
 - c. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor

and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

- d. 18 So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.
5. John’s preaching spoke of the immanence of the coming of the Kingdom of God
 - a. “His winnowing fork is in his hand...”
6. And the message was one of judgment when the King would come
 - a. “The axe is laid to the root of the trees...”
 - b. This would be a time of crisis
 - c. It’s not that the King was preparing the axe; nor that He was sharpening the axe; nor that He was starting to chip away at the bark
 - d. No, the axe was laid to the root of the tree; the tree is about to come down
7. Also speaking of the immanence of the judgment, “His winnowing fork is in his hand...”
 - a. Speaks of the harvest, the separation of wheat from the chaff
 - b. The fork lifts the grain into the air, and the wind would blow the lighter chaff away from the wheat
- E. **His method**
 1. So, what to do?
 - a. The time of crisis is at hand
 - b. What was John’s prescription for this time of immanent crisis?
 2. **Repentance and Baptism**
 3. Baptism is interesting
 - a. John didn’t invent baptism – even though we call him “the Baptist”
 - b. The Jews had a rite of baptism – **proselyte baptism**
 4. Proselyte baptism was designed for Gentile converts to Judaism
 - a. Gentiles were considered unclean
 - b. In order to be considered full-fledged Jews, they had to undergo a cleansing
 - c. They needed to be purified
 5. But that’s what made John’s method so troublesome to the Pharisees
 - a. John had demanded that Jews submit to this cleansing, purifying ritual
 - b. The message was clear: “You Jews are unclean. You are not fit for the coming of the King. Unless you want to end up like the chaff at the harvest, you need to be cleansed, purified
 6. **Luke 3:7–8** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”
 - b. 8 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is

- able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”
7. Owe! That’s striking pretty close to home!
 - a. “You Jews can’t hide behind your supposed relationship with Abraham”
 - b. “God can raise up sons of Abraham from these stones”
 8. Wait, what stones?
 - a. Literal stones? Maybe
 - b. But maybe the stones were these nasty Gentiles!
 9. Either way, John’s message and method was meant to offend
- F. **His recognition**
1. On another occasion, the Pharisees pushed John to explain this baptism thing
 2. **John 1:25–27** (ESV) —
 - a. 25 They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”
 - b. 26 John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know,
 - c. 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”
 3. The next day:
 4. **John 1:29** (ESV) —
 - a. 29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”
 5. Here is when we finally get a glimpse of the glory of Christ through the ministry of John the Baptist
 - a. Here is the Messiah!
 - b. Here is the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 53
 6. But then, there is this shocking development
 - a. Jesus comes to John and asks for John to baptize Him!
 7. **Matthew 3:13–15** (ESV) —
 - a. 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.
 - b. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”
 - c. 15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.
 8. This was stunning
 - a. John’s baptism was a baptism for cleansing and repentance
 - b. The last Being in the universe that needed either cleansing nor repentance was the Lamb of God!
 - c. How could Jesus submit to this?
 9. John said, “I need to be baptized by you!”
 - a. John recognized Jesus’ superiority
 - b. If anything, John should be baptized by Jesus!
 10. Jesus’ reply: “Let it be so now...”

- a. In other words, “Trust me in this, John. Later it will become clear to you”
 - b. “I can’t explain everything to you now”
 - c. Other translations: “Suffer it now”; “Permit it to be so now”
11. And then Jesus says, “... for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”
- a. So, Jesus is careful to do everything required by God to fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law
 - b. John’s prophetic ministry added this requirement to the covenant, that in order to be prepared for the coming of the Kingdom, they needed to be cleansed
 - c. So, whatever Israel was required to do, the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, would do, fulfilling every detail
 - d. So Jesus, the Lamb of God, would carry the entirety of the people’s responsibility – including the requirement of baptism
12. And this, as we have seen in our series so far, was an example of the humility of Jesus in His identification with humanity

III. **The Witness of God**

- A. Now, it’s one thing for John to be a witness for the person of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, as the Servant of Yahweh, and the King of the Kingdom
 - 1. But beyond question, when God Himself bears witness, it is a powerful demonstration of the glory of Christ
- B. **Matthew 3:16–17** (ESV) —
 - 1. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;
 - 2. 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”
- C. A portal of heaven was opened
 - 1. A visual sign of His glory was revealed – a visible manifestation of the Spirit of God, descending on Him like a dove!
 - 2. We call a visible manifestation of God a Theophany, a visible manifestation of the Son of God before the incarnation a Christophany
 - a. Not sure what you call a visible manifestation of the Spirit?
 - b. A “Pneumanophany”?
 - 3. But not just a visible sign – an audible one as well
 - a. A voice from heaven – God Himself!
 - b. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased!”
 - 4. This is just one of three times that the voice of the Father is audibly expressed in the NT
 - 5. Imagine how the bystanders reacted to that!
- D. This recognition of John, and the witness of God to the person and ministry of Jesus, marks a major threshold in the earthly ministry of Jesus
 - 1. He turns in his notice to Joseph’s carpenter’s shop, and decides to become

a fisherman

2. So, now Jesus becomes full time in His ministry
 - a. His Messiahship becomes all-consuming
 - b. He turns His attention to building His church, not houses and shelters for sheep
3. But, He's not quite ready for prime time
 - a. There is the temptation
 - b. Which we'll consider in the next session of our series