John the Baptist- a Man Sent from God

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In the book of John, the first chapter, verse 6, and following: There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came forth a witness to bear witness of the Light that all men through Him might believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

Now that is all I'm going to read, and verse 6 will take the emphasis tonight. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. So, I wish to speak about the witness of John the Baptist. And I think that I would not run into any serious opposition if I were to say that John was the greatest of all the prophets.

Our Lord Jesus did not say that in so many words, but He said a broader thing which included that. He said: Verily I say to you, that among those born of women there is not a greater than John the Baptist. I think that could be easily allowed to mean that John was at the top among the very greatest humans ever born, and certainly that would put him where at least we might venture the opinion that he was the greatest of the prophets.

Now, the greatness of the man John did not lie in himself. The greatness of the man, John, lay in his office and in his privilege. His office was bigger than John. Elijah was bigger than his office, I think. If he hadn't any office, and it wouldn't be difficult, it would be bigger than an office you didn't have. But John the Baptist, had an office, but he was himself not as big as that office. I think that this will appear as I go on, though it's in a state of blessed confusion at the moment.

Now, Abraham saw our Lord's Day and was glad, but John the Baptist lived in that day, and that made him greater than Abraham. David played his harp and sang of the coming of one who should be wounded and pierced but should rise and sing among his brethren. But John the Baptist was there and saw Him and felt Him.

Isaiah sang of One who should come born of the Virgin and should eat butter and honey and should grow up as a root out of a dry ground. But John the Baptist touched Him and baptized Him. His privilege was greater. Malachi said He should suddenly come to His temple and should sit as a purifier of silver.

But John the Baptist actually walked in that temple, and though that particular passage probably refers to the second coming of Christ, yet that same Purifier of Silver was there at His first coming, and John the Baptist was present and saw this. And John saw Him and touched Him and heard Him and actually baptized Him and gave Him, so to speak, His start, so that the privilege of John was greater than that of any of the rest. There was a man sent from God.

Now Matthew and Mark also tell about him, but this man John seems to penetrate farther in than these others. Matthew and Mark give us no pedigree. Luke gives us His

family history, tells us who His parents were and the wonder of His birth. But John rises higher, as John always seemed to do, than either Mark or Matthew or Luke, and penetrated through to the essential greatness of the man and said he was a man sent from God.

Now it might have been said of John the Baptist that he was the greatest, but John doesn't say that. It might have been said that he was the strongest. I don't know whether he was. It might have been said that he was the wisest or the most gifted or the most eloquent. But it said that he was sent, for John penetrated.

I, for my part, ladies and gentlemen, maybe I'll say more about this later on, am weary of hearing blind men preach. I mean by that, not men simply deprived of their physical sight. That doesn't take away any of the sharpness from the heart. That doesn't take away any of the brilliance from the mind.

There's one listening to me now who has not seen since she was a girl. Yet I'm sure that if you visited her home and heard her play the great album of classical records and discussed things with her, you'd see she was just as sharp as if she'd seen as you and I see. Now I pay that respect to one who has come down with her husband from 5400 north in this city to sit in this congregation tonight, and both of them blind.

But there is a blindness that is upon us, a pure blindness, a dimness that is upon us. And I'm weary of hearing dim-minded people preach and dim-minded people write hymns and songs and dim-minded people take leadership in the Church of Christ. It might have been said that he was the most eloquent, I say, or that he was the wisest or the strongest, but it says that he was a man sent, and that was John's penetration.

John saw that, as I'm talking of two Johns now, I'm talking about the John who wrote of the other John, and the John who penetrated and saw with keen vision that the main and most significant thing about John the Baptist was that he was sent of God.

Now he saw, I say, this real mark of excellence, and it was the higher honor for John than anything else to say that he was sent of God was a high honor. It was not only for John, an unspeakably high honor, but it was a treasure for the world. Have you ever stopped to do this? I think it is better for you than working out crossword puzzles.

Sometimes I go on trains, and I see people with, they look as if they were bright, if I didn't know they weren't from what they're doing. They're sitting there working out crossword puzzles. And have you ever thought that you could do a great deal more for yourself by doing something else? Now don't get mad at me. If you like to do crossword puzzles, it's all right. I don't mind. Suck your thumb or work crossword puzzles or anything like that. It's all right.

But I think there's something that is better than that.And I recommend one mental exercise. It won't get you anyplace, but at least it'll be better than crossword puzzles. And it will be try to think what the world would be like if John the Baptist hadn't come. And then go on and try to think what the world would be like if Jesus hadn't come. Think out of the world, John the Baptist. Think out of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. Think out of the world, the church of the firstborn. Think out of the world, the man and his

great celestial city from which we took Jerusalem the Golden tonight. Think out of the world, the Luthers and Augustines and Wesleys and Chrysostoms and the rest of them. Think them out of the world and try to piece the world together without them. It'll be an exercise in history and in spiritual values that'll infinitely exceed any puzzles you ever might hope to work.

I say that the coming of this man sent of God was an inestimable blessing, an unspeakable treasure to the world. This stern, simple, strong man that came sent of God. I say it was a great honor to him, but greater than the honor that could be done to one man was the treasure that that honor meant to the world. And not only so, but an example and a lesson for all men.

Now God sends forth his men. I believe this. I've always believed it. I still believe it. I do not believe in too much democracy. Now some of you with a strong Baptist background will curl up like a leaf in the fall, and like the maple leaf in autumn, you will probably burn and burn. But it's all right, I'm half Baptist myself.

But I don't believe in too much democracy in the church of Christ. God has never run his church on democracy. He's run his church on spiritual leadership of men anointed of the Holy Ghost. And even those who in their church polity believe in democracy never get beyond first base unless they have leaders in their denomination who are anointed men.

Now there was a man sent from God whose name was Noah. And Noah, a just man, builded himself an ark, and saved himself and his wife and the eighth person and saved the human race from extinction.

And there was a man sent of God whose name was Abraham. And Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees, following nothing but the light in his own heart and the dimly seen vision of the God of Adam and the God of the race, and became the founder of the Jewish nation.

And there was a man sent of God named Moses, who took that nation when it was lost in Egyptian darkness and bondage and led that nation across the Red Sea and into the wilderness and guided and cherished and nursed and cared for that nation for 40 years. And when he died, there was a man sent of God whose name was Joshua. And he gathered that nation as a hen gathers her chicks. And he took that nation across the river and established them in the land that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And there was a man sent of God whose name was David. And he reached into his own heart and tore out the sounding strings and set those strings in the windows of the synagogues for a thousand years. And the winds of persecution blew across them and made song for the Jewish worshippers. And when the veil of the temple was rent and the Holy Ghost had come, those same heart strings taken from the heart of David were strung in the windows of the churches. And today and tonight in this church, you can't sing without having David sing. There was a man sent of God whose name was David. And he taught the world to sing. And the world has been singing David's songs ever since.

And there was a man sent of God whose name was Peter and a man sent of God whose name was Paul.

And when many centuries later the church had been buried under the debris and settlings of the dust of Romanism, there was a man sent of God whose name was Luther, who feared nobody. And he brought back the Bible again, translated into sonorous and musical German.

There was a man sent of God whose name was Paton, and who went to the New Hebrides. And when he went there wasn't a Christian, and when he left there wasn't a heathen. The man sent of God whose name was Simpson, and the man sent of God whose name was Roseberry.

And you can go down the line and take any list you happen to be fond of, and wherever men have done things there were men sent of God. There were men who could work with people, but there were men who always worked above people, who always were up there because they were sent of God. No higher honor can ever come to any man than this.

Here's where we draw our lesson, an example from this man John, that no higher honor can come to any man as a reward for faithfulness and service, and perhaps saving the western world from extinction. They have conferred upon Winston Churchill the title, Sir. He is now Sir Winston Churchill, and certainly none of us could possibly begrudge the man his well-earned, I don't know what you call it, what is a sirship? Well, we'll have to look that up, but whatever you are when you're a sir, he's now Sir Winston Churchill, and I'm glad.

But how infinitely much better it would have been if it could be said there was a man sent from God whose name was Winston, but it was not so said. A man sent from Elizabeth, a man sent from George, a man sent from Edward, kings and queens sent him out, but apparently God never did. Somebody said to the great Englishman, do you support the church? He said, yes, I support the church like a flying buttress from the outside.

And I do not want to detract from the greatness that is Churchill. Common sense and candor compelled me to say it would have been a greater man if it could have been said God sent Churchill. There was a man sent from God whose name was Winston.

And there was another Englishman about whom it can be said there was a man sent from God whose name was John Wesley. When it's all in, and the records are all written, and the angel of God has okayed them and graded the papers of all historians of the world, I think that when it is said there was a man sent from God whose name was John Wesley and the man sent whose name was Winston Churchill, that Wesley will take his place high above the great statesman.

Now, young people, I want you to consider this. You being what you are as a creation of God, and God being what and who He is, to be owned of God and commissioned of God and empowered and sent of God is the highest honor that can fall upon you.

If President Roosevelt were to call you to Washington and make you an ambassador extraordinary with full plenipotentiary powers and send you anywhere, you would be proud and your people proud of you, and no one would blame you. It would mean you weren't picked at random. It would be an honor indeed.

But how much greater to be owned and commissioned and empowered and sent of God so that it can be said there was a man sent of God whose name was Bob, there was a man sent of God whose name was Warren, there was a man sent of God whose name was Charles. I say that you never can be better or more highly honored than this, for it's an honor equal to the angels. No king can bestow it, and no nation can bestow it.

When men come home sometimes, as General Dean did and was given the Congressional Medal of Honor, I think it was, he said, I didn't know I'd earned it. I didn't even know that I'd earned it, said Dean. Simplicity and humility characterized that plain soldier. General, if he was, I didn't know I'd earned it.

But when that Medal of Honor has tarnished and the man who earned it has long been dust, it will be said there was a man sent of God whose name was John. When God sends a man, he gives him a Medal of Honor high above that which any nation can possibly bestow. And I can't say anything to you young people listening to me.

Maybe for some of the old folk it's too late. You've played your time away and lusted your time away and worked your time and fooled your time away till God can't send you anywhere. If you get skinned through to heaven by the grace of God, you ought to be thankful.

But there are young people, and I recommend that you make to be sent of God your blazing ambition. I recommend that you get your values right and that you get your ambitions right and that you get your models right. There are poor, empty-headed fellows in America today that would give their right hand if they could be another Julius LaRose.

And there are women in Chicago tonight that would sell their soul and their family and desert their husband and give up their children if they thought they could get a big part in Hollywood. All this makes any godly man angry, angry not with a carnal or sinful anger, but indignant with a high indignation of God that we should so prostitute our talents and degrade our ambitions.

We who were provided with jet propulsion and aimed at the stars should burn out like a dud and come down with a thud only a little way over in the rice paddy. God Almighty has meant us to sail high and far, and we settle for these lesser things.

Young fellow, young girl, I say to you that if it can be said of you that God sent you, it will be an honor that outshines any honor that anyone could ever bestow upon you, regardless of who it might be.

Let's look at this man, John. I don't know why I suppose this is the way my mind works, but I like to know why did God do something. And instead of multiplying verses of Scripture all saying the same thing like some of my brethren who call it exposition. It

isn't exposition, it's multiplication. But instead of simply multiplying texts, which you don't have to do, if one text says it, you don't have to quote fifteen. But instead of multiplying texts, I like to get at the text of God and find out why.

So, I want to give you five reasons why God could honor John the way he did. First of all, we have a word here called, solitude. And he was in the desert until the time of his showing forth unto Israel.

Here was a man, John the Baptist, and he was in the desert until the time of his showing forth unto Israel. He'd been born to an old couple by kind of a half miracle, and now here he was put into the desert, badly adjusted this man was. And if he were living today, he would have a half a dozen goofy scientists following him around, telling him, now you ought to get adjusted, John, because you need adjustment badly.

I hate that word adjusted; I don't mind telling you so. Whenever a doctor says you need to get adjusted, I grab my hat and leave. I don't want anybody trying to adjust me. I'm not a machine. That word adjusted never came into the language used about human beings until we forgot we had a soul and began to think of ourselves only in materialistic terms.

And when John B. Watson began to say we not only had no soul, we had no mind and thought with our gut muscles, then we began to want to adjust men. And we have some weird guy with a screwdriver, screwing this one tighter and loosening this one a little and tapping that one to get people adjusted. We don't need adjustment, ladies and gentlemen. We need God in the day in which we live.

And John the Baptist would never have fit in our day, never. His suit wasn't pressed, and the language he spoke was not beautiful. He couldn't quote from the poets. I'm sure he couldn't. But he had been in the desert alone with his God in solitude, and he came out of his solitude to break the silence like a drumbeat and a trumpet sound. And all gathered to hear this man who had been with God.

If they had ground him through the schools and leveled him off and made him another cookie. He was tamped out of the same cookie cutter. He'd have gone out and been one more preacher holding down a little church somewhere, taking orders from the board and helping cut cake for the Ladies Aid. But this man went into the silence and went to school to God, the stars, and the howling winds and the sand.

The trouble with us in our day is we can't get quiet long enough to do anything. We can't get quiet long enough to wait on God. We have the idea that if you're not talking, something's wrong. Somebody has to be talking. Somebody has to be talking. Somebody has to be making a noise. Somebody has to be making a rattle of some sort.

When they invented diesel whistles, they raised the devil, and they filled insane asylum hatches. And when they invented all these noisemakers, do you ever think of how Daniel Boone must have lived? Here old Daniel Boone, I killed a bar here, he said. Well, Daniel didn't hear a sound except the sweet euphonious sounds of singing birds and perhaps a wolf howling somewhere in the distance. It sounded like an old black-mouthed dog baying to the moon. And Daniel just lived in the silences. He must have really lived.

Some of those old boys didn't move so fast, but they lived a lot deeper than we do. We move too fast to be deep. For John the Baptist, God could use him because he could get hold of him. He could get him stopped. He could slow him down enough to get on board.

A lot of people never find themselves. They're not meditative. They're not serious-minded. They say, that's dull. That's dull. They won't study anything that is dull, and they won't read anything that is dull. And the result is, of course, that they have to have company around them all the time.

Old Arthur Schopenhauer said that the more you have inside of you, the less you need people around about you. That if you've got anything in your soul, you can live by yourself quite happily. But if you don't have anything inside, you have to compensate for your inner vacuity by surrounding yourself with a lot of social noise makers. And most people live like that. They can't afford to live by themselves. They can't. They can't get off anywhere and be still.

But I solemnly warn you, even though I sound like an anachronism, I sound like the voice of somebody that lived and died 200-300 years ago. I tell you that if you don't practice the art of holy solitude, you won't be worth shooting in the kingdom of God. For there's got to be this silence.

And he was in the desert until the time of his showing forth unto Israel. He might not have been adjusted to all of the world's ways. And if he came into a room, I'm sure he didn't know how to come into a room. And I'm certain that if you had set him down at a table, he wouldn't know which one of the various tools to pick up first, or utensils, or whatever you call those things. He would not have fitted in. But he had met God in the silence.

Have you ever tried it? Have you ever gone alone and taken time off and time out, and dedicated that time to just being still and listening to God? It is said in the book of Job, there was silence, and I heard a voice. Out of the silence came the Voice. Before the beginning was the silence, they said, and in the beginning was the Word. But always out of the silence God speaks.

So, I recommend take some time and get alone with God. I believe that the abrasive action of society has taken the character out of many a man and has reduced him to be one more shiny dime among the dimes of the world, shiny from much use and many contacts, lost all his milling and all his characteristics, lost it all, because there were too many, he had to be too many places, see too many people, and do what they call making contact. I love that.

So go to get out and make some contacts for Jesus. Brother, if you get alone and put that your two knees, make contacts with the ground and stay there a while, it will do you more good than these nervous contacts we make with one another. Thank God, Brother, I never had any of these fellows making contacts with me. I never stay long enough to have them do it. I know they are coming. But these contact boys.

Now remember that you can be that kind of preacher, you can be that kind of Christian, but if you do, you sell your soul to the Halloween noises, colored lights, 3-D.

Now the second is simplicity. John had his raiment of camel's hair, and his food was locusts and wild honey, and a lot of people have leaped to John's defense, and they've tried to prove that John never ate grasshoppers, but John ate grasshoppers, for the locusts that John ate were not the locust tree, they were bugs, hoppers, insects, green things. You know they were permitted in the Bible; they were permitted to eat grasshoppers if they hopped, and locusts, that was permissible.

They tell me that in France, I haven't been there, but they tell me they have salted grasshoppers in vendors, and if you can put in whatever you'd put there, nickel, it wouldn't cost a whole franc for a handful of grasshoppers, I shouldn't think.

But anyhow, whatever you'd put in, you put it in, you get yourself some grasshoppers and go away muttering in French and eating a handful of salted grasshoppers. And that's perfectly all right, they eat snails over there, they tell me too. They don't look so wise in Texas, they eat rattlesnakes. You can buy canned rattlesnakes if you know where to look for them.

John the Baptist just lived on plain honey, which he got by fighting the bees, and slipping up when they were busy and getting a bit of honey, and then he got locusts and ate locusts, and he was dressed simply, as simply as could be.

In our day, they'd have swarmed all over him, not the bees, but the doctors, and they'd have said, you're not getting your right vitamins. Locusts and wild honey won't do, you're not getting a full round of diet in its season. You need to eat carrots in order that you can see in the dark. You need lima beans for the proteins, and meat to keep off the beriberi.

John didn't know that, thank God, so he just subsisted on the land, and lived on what he had, and after a breakfast of locusts and wild honey, he got on his knees and looked upward, and waited all day long on God in the desert, while the wind and the dust blew about him. A simple-hearted man, when he came, came all simply dressed.

Now, there's something to be said for simplicity, my listening people, very much to be said for simplicity. I know the Quakers went too far, and I never have been a Quaker, though I have admired them in some ways. I admire their simplicity. If we could just be simple again, just simple again.

I saw a little boy seven months old on Thanksgiving Day. They brought him in, plumped him down on a couch, and he sat there so stiff with clothing he could hardly move, and regaled us for quite a while. He was just simple, that's all. He wasn't trying to be anybody. He hadn't anything to hide. He didn't care who knew everything about him. He wasn't trying to show off. He was just himself. He was only seven months.

It won't take him very long to begin to pose and pretend and become like us. But instead of that, he just sat there plain, and when he felt like it, he'd lower his jaw, let the saliva drool down, while he looked around and examined to wonder, he said, I wonder what

that fellow, that old fellow with the bald head, who is he now? Let me see, he'd say. Dribble down here. Just simple, that's all. Just simple, just simple. And Jesus said, if you come, you'll be like little children. He certainly meant simplicity, and John the Baptist had it. Yet that simplicity came dressed plainly. He wasn't trying to impress anybody.

A friend was telling me about being in a meeting of religious men, and one man got up and said, what this denomination needs to do, we need to get out and brag about ourselves. Now, brag about ourselves indeed. And as soon as we begin to brag about ourselves, God washes his hands off of the whole mess and says, that bunch of braggers, I'll have nothing to do with them. John the Baptist never bragged, he just walked around simply doing the will of God.

So there we have simplicity as the second, and we have vision as the third. I said I would say more about vision.

Now, the Holy Spirit came like a dove and fell on Jesus, a dove. He descended like a dove and put down his pink feet and disappeared into the heart of the Son of God. The Holy Ghost had come.

I wonder who saw that Holy Ghost come. I don't think anybody did, only John. John said, I knew Him not, but He that sent me said to the One upon whom a dove shall descend and remain, He is the One, and he had the vision to see it. Oh, for an opening of the eyes, for an opening of the eyes, ladies and gentlemen, the man with the open eye can see what the man of dim vision can never see.

Go out into the country with a naturalist, a man whose eye has been trained to see. Go out with a hunter and he'll see things where the common fellow with the dim vision never sees. Go out with a man of the plains and the wilderness that makes his living trapping and shooting when he sees. But a city man sees nothing at all except red and green lights. And they've got to knock him in the eye to make him see, but the keen sight of the woodman sees.

Go into the art gallery with somebody who spent his lifetime following baseball averages, wondering who will come out in the first in the Big Ten, who knows nothing more complicated than the engine in his old jalopy. Take him down here on Michigan Avenue between the two lines and take him upstairs. And show him the accumulated masterpieces of the centuries into which the finest spirits that the world ever knew naturally have poured their best blood. And he'll be bored to extinction. Get out of there just as soon as he can. It's all a blob of this and that to him. He sees nothing, but the aesthete and the trained eye sees wonders there.

So come into the church of Christ, into the kingdom of God. It takes vision, ladies and gentlemen. And the woeful thing about vision is it always puts you out of gear with your time. If you can see in the middle of a blind world, they're all going to be on your back, beating your ears and saying he thinks he can see. Look at him. Think of the infinite conceit of the man who pretends to say he sees. Nobody sees. This dust, this dimness of vision, this myopia, that's natural. Now don't anybody think otherwise.

But along comes an Isaiah or a David or a John and sees, and then they condemn him. Usually the man that sees is not particularly enjoyed by his own people. A prophet is not without honor in his own country and among his own people.

Even our Lord Jesus Christ, who saw as never a man saw, was not appreciated by His own family. His own mother worried about Him, and His own brethren thought He'd lost his mind. The people around about Him thought He was in cahoots with the devil, that He was a seer in the midst of men who couldn't see. He was a man of vision in the midst of men who had no vision. John the Baptist had vision. He knew where he was in his times. He wasn't going to be carried away by the drift of the hour.

All you have to do is take a few magazines, listen to a few programs on the radio, and you'll know that religion has its direction. It has its vogue. The wind of religion begins to set in one direction, and every little old preacher, like a willow tree, bows his little old reverend head in one direction, all afraid to look the other way, because it happens to be that the wind of religious vogue in that hour is roaring out of that direction, and so everybody turns in that direction. The magazines take it up, the programs take it up, the preachers take it up, the laymen take it up, and money gets behind it, and songs get behind it, because the wind is blowing from that direction.

Some little old guy, partly bald, sees the mistake of it all and turns his face, and the wind's in his face. And every man that ever has any vision is looking into the wind and saying, don't give up to the trend of the times. Stand for God and New Testament Christianity in the hour when everybody's blowing in the same direction, and that figure of the wind isn't so bad after all.

Job said he filleth his belly with the east wind, and not a lot of stuff I've ever heard is just east wind blowing. But it's popular, it's the vogue, publishers make their money at it, and we get crowds, and away we go.

We need to have a few men. If I could get 100 men, I'd have settled for 50 men who would dare to stand up and face out this sirocco. I mean that hot wind that blows. If we dared face that out, we might set the drift in another direction altogether. But right now, it's all running in one direction, and everybody's afraid to get up and do anything about it.

Oh, for a few Irishmen, for a few non-conformists, for a few that would oppose, would say, now wait a minute, we've got to have New Testament religion, we've got to have God and Christ in this thing--simplicity and solitude and meditation and individuality. We're not all going to run the same way, cut our hair the same way, wear the same kind of this and that, and be like everybody else, but we're going to be like Christ and stand in the middle of an adulterous and sinful generation whether the world likes it or not. John had that kind of vision. He would be what he would be in that hour.

And that leads us then to courage. John had courage. He stood up there and said, you generation of vipers, no poetry there, brother, no poetry there.

Remember when I was a young preacher? In fact, I wasn't a preacher yet. One of the greatest shocks I got was shaking hands with a minister of a certain church. I shook

hands with him every Sunday. He was the pastor of the church. And I was one of the sheep of his burnt-over pastor field.

And I shook hands with him. I was out of the factories. My hands had calluses right on there to this day. And he didn't have any. I got a thumb there that's crooked from working in a factory. And I don't think he'd ever been anywhere but the seminary, and probably his mother-in-law paid his way through because I know that he'd never done anything. And to stand at the door and reach out my rather horny hand and shake that soft feminine paw that had been bathed in Italian balm, brother, it was a little too much for me. I reacted from it. And I've never liked soft-handed pastors from that hour to this. Never liked them because they always kind of frightened me. There was a fellow, he had no courage.

I remember once he preached on a harp of a thousand strings. He had a man present with a big harp, and the fellow played the harp. That was pretty nice. And then when he was through playing on the harp, one of those big things, you know, that you just stroke. And after he was through, he preached on the harp of a thousand strings. And he said, and so I conclude that the soul of man is a harp of a thousand strings. Yes.

But I know that fellow, and I know he didn't have courage enough, he didn't have courage enough to meet a good, live mouse head-on. He'd have dodged the other way if he'd met one.

Now, many of us will never be sent of God because we haven't the courage to be sent of God. We just don't have it. We just haven't got the courage. We're afraid of being different. Preachers, they're afraid of losing something, afraid they'll lose their pull, afraid they'll lose their job, afraid they'll lose public esteem and be criticized.

Christians are afraid of losing friends, afraid of losing reputation, afraid of losing income. They believe in religion all right now, don't get me wrong, but I believe in that text: be not righteous over much. You know, that's a wonderful text, be not righteous over much.

And as soon as you tell them they ought to get up on their hind legs and make a noise like a man, they say, be not righteous over much. And they settle you back down with that text, which they don't understand. And excuse themselves, hypocrites, hiding behind a text.

But the reason they don't do it, they're afraid of losing something, afraid of losing their income, afraid some boss won't like them, afraid their wife will smile at them and go this way when there's company, afraid, always afraid, afraid. God Almighty called His sheep, but He didn't call His mice.

And the figure of sheep doesn't hold when it comes to prophets and soldiers and warriors in a day of declension and sin. God sometimes straps a buckler on his sheep and stands him up on his two hind legs and turns him out and by some miracle changed him from being a sheep into being a roaring lion, sends him out to be a Luther or a Finney. He said, oh you generation of vipers, I could give John a book that would have settled his ash, prove that you don't dare talk that way to people, that if you do, they

won't come back. And furthermore, you don't dare offend people like that and insult them. You can't talk that way to people, and that's so. John did, and they came back.

Then my fifth point through is humility. Yet his love of solitude, simplicity, his vision, his courage, and his humility, he allowed Christ to displace him completely. And it's very important you get this. He allowed Christ to displace him in everything. He said, I am not the Christ, I am not Elijah, I am a voice sounding in the wilderness.

There lived a generation ago, not far from here, a great man. He was a great man, gifted man, great man. He was greatly used in prayer. He used to pray for the sick and they'd get well. And he gathered around him a colony and became a great religious leader. So far so good, but slowly that began to eat into him. He began to feel he was somebody, and pretty soon he said, I am Elijah, come back. And he got a robe and put on him, tried to be like Elijah, and moved around saying, I am Elijah, returned.

John the Baptist said, I'm not Elijah, I'm not Christ, I'm not one of the old prophets, I'm just a voice sent crying in the wilderness. And I'm not even talking about myself, I'm talking about another one who is to come after me. And when He comes, He'll be seen to be so great by comparison that I'll be happy to get down and I won't even feel worthy to loose His shoes. That was John.

And so, when his ministry was over, Jesus came and John said, behold, the Lamb of God directed all the eyes away from himself to Jesus and then faded out of the picture, and said, I must decrease while He increases.

Well, brother, there's something. How about you Sunday school teachers? You think you'd be up to it spiritually, to let somebody else take over the class you've worked so hard for? The minister that can do a great work and then quietly fade out of the picture and let somebody else take over? He's a rare one among men. John the Baptist was that kind of man.

He didn't want anything for himself. It was said of him, just to be present and hear the bridegroom's voice is all I want. I am not the bridegroom, I am only one of the best men, one of the men around the bridegroom. And just to see the happy face of the bride and to hear the bridegroom's voice is all the joy I want. There was the humility of the man John.

No, my brethren, we do not want people to start bragging on themselves. We want people to stop talking about themselves and begin to talk about the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. And if that Lamb of God gets all the glory, they delight in it. They delight in it.

They ask no glory for themselves, only to be present and hear the bridegroom's voice. That was John. And I say to you that if you want God to send you and want the high honor of having it said, there was a man sent from God whose name was, or a woman sent from God then, you must be humble indeed, for only the humble does God send. The proud send themselves, and the obedient are sent of men, but the humble are sent of God.

I wouldn't want to be engaged in religious activity if I did not know I was sent of God in a small, inconsequential fashion compared with this great man we all would be or are. But unless I knew I was sent of God, I would not want to be engaged in the activities of religion.

Can you imagine, ladies and gentlemen, can you imagine taking orders from some bloated fellow with a pipe in his mouth, sitting back of a mahogany desk somewhere, beating out on a typewriter or dictating to a secretary what I'm to preach about next Sunday? Can you imagine? Can you imagine my scanning the slick magazines for a text to know what I'm to preach on next Sunday, looking at Harper's and Atlantic and the Yale Review, trying to find something to talk about? Can you imagine it? No, never.

I'd get a snow shovel and go around from door to door and say, Lady, would you like to have your walk cleaned? And I'd shovel on this snow with an honest shovel and go in tired at night, look in the glass and see a haggard, tired man, but a man I wasn't ashamed of.

But to run and not be sent, or to be sent by somebody else other than God, how horrible can it get? But John was sent of God because he had the five virtues. He loved solitude, he loved simplicity, he had vision and courage and humility. And the God of John is the God of this hour. And nothing has been changed.

His qualifications have not been altered. God hasn't found out anything new from the day He made those five qualities to mark his man. And what marked His man back there will mark His man now.

I do not say it, and I do not want to be misunderstood as having anyone think that I said, that in order to be like John, we had to go to the woods and eat locusts and wild honey, forego all education, and go back like Daniel Boone to the wilderness. That would be foolish.

It's the heart that's to be simple. It's the heart that's to love solitude. It's the heart that's to be courageous. It's the heart.