

“Powerful Living” [Matthew 11:11]

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I assure you that John the Baptist is greater than any man who ever lived. [GN]

I think a lot of us here today have had the experience in one form or another. I drove into a gas station in Barry’s Bay early one morning to top up the gas tank as we had about another hour’s drive ahead of us. *Fill it up*, I said. The young attendant replied with a big grin as though full of enthusiasm, *Can’t do it!* And I countered, probably with a sense of shock and discouragement, *don’t tell me you are out of gas!* The young man responded, *oh we have plenty of gas but don’t have any power. The hydro’s off!*

There have been a few other times in my life when I have had a similar problem. All the resources needed for an assignment were ready; the opportunity to minister or to serve had presented itself. The gas was there but the power was off. Perhaps the circuits were overloaded, or maybe I had become unplugged. Whatever the reason, I was trying to operate without being connected to my power source.

John the Baptist is the outstanding example of a life lived in the power of God. Although his life ended in its prime, he powerfully accomplished his purpose. Jesus said, *I assure you that John the Baptist is greater than any man who ever lived.* The Apostle John in his Gospel introduces John the Baptist in the opening chapter:

And the king was sorry; but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given: he sent and had John beheaded in the prison and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. {Matt 14:9-11 KJ}.

John the Baptist lived with power and he died with power. His purpose in life was achieved through power. The cost was nothing less than everything that he had. What was the secret of John’s power? Did he possess supernatural qualities? No. He lived by three certainties that defined the course of his life.

1: John was certain he was sent from God.

In the prologue to his Gospel, John the apostle introduces Jesus as, *the Light of the World*, the Light that shines in darkness and cannot be put out. Anticipating the difficulty his reader would have in understanding this, the writer at once brings John the Baptist into the story. He is a man who was born to explain the Light. Because he is a human person, people will be able to understand the message. It seems apparent that John the Baptist never strayed from his firm belief that God had sent him to witness. Among his followers were many who never accepted his witness. They accepted John but not the message. He constantly proclaimed before them that he was not “The One” who was coming (Christ) and not even a prophet but a mere voice crying in the wilderness, a voice sent from God.

While he was a lonely herald without credentials, he was in touch with God all the while. He was a man obsessed by light when others were content to live in darkness and ignorance. He was a person willing to renounce the securities in which others thrived, in order to be dependant entirely upon God to vindicate the message.

2: John the Baptist was certain he had a singular purpose.

He was not sidetracked by the issues or events of the day. His sole purpose was to point beyond himself and declare the Promised One who was greater than he was coming. He

was preparing the people to expect Jesus. His only message was repeated over and over again: *...he came to tell about the light. This light was the real light – the light that comes into the world and shines on all...* (Jn. 1:8-9 GN). Surviving on locust and honey, John might have been excused if he had delayed his preaching to have lunch. Called before the Hebrew leaders to explain himself, his ambition might have been acceptable if he had assumed a major religious role. In light of the prominence of Herod and Herodius, surely no one would have condemned him if he had ignored the flagrant sins of the king. Perhaps he could even have become the court chaplain. Considering all else as insignificant, John gave himself whole heartedly to his life's purpose. This is seen best in his encounter with the official delegation from the Jewish religious leadership in Jerusalem. Christians today who labour under opposition or persecution can take courage from John's unflinching, powerful confession under pressure. Repeatedly he negated himself and kept pointing them toward the one person to whom he was preparing them to meet.

3: John was certain of his commitment.

Toward the end of his ministry John was confronted by his followers. With wounded pride they told him that all the people were going to see Jesus. Why? John himself had baptized Jesus. John began his work first. How easy it is for our best efforts to become competitive spirits. Then ever true to his purpose of bearing witness to Jesus, John lovingly witnessed to his disciples:

You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom: the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice: therefore this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease. (Jn. 3:28-30).

All John had, he brought into the service of the Lord. God who called him provided him with the power that made up the difference between what he had and what he needed. John was committed to receiving and using the power that was available.

Have you experienced that kind of power in your life? Would you like to? It is possible. It comes from the same strong conviction that God himself has called and commissioned you. It is strengthened by a dedication of His purpose for you that superseded any other opportunity that might come. It requires no less than whole hearted 100% commitment. The result is, powerful living! Amen.

Prayer: God, you have founded your Church upon the earth and have revealed your loving kindness and truth in every age. With the spirit filled people who you have called and anointed to point us toward the Light of the World, we pray that you will embrace your people everywhere making them rich in your grace. Keep them true to the heritage of faith received from those who have journeyed here before us, those who have received the Light and have passed it for our seeing. Without selfish purpose or competition, may each of us be willing to turn towards the Light that you send us in your Son, our Saviour. Amen.