

THE PRAYERS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’” (Lk. 11:1)

There was obviously something about the prayer life of John the Baptist that one of the disciples of Jesus admired. That’s why when he saw Jesus praying, he said: “teach us to pray as John taught his disciples”. Even though this statement came from only one disciple, it opens the door for us to consider John’s prayers and things of eternal significance.

The prayer life of John evidently focused on eternal matters for: **“John never performed a miraculous sign” (Jn. 10:41)**. It is logical to assume that if John prayed for earthly miracles he would have received them for Jesus said: **“Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11)**. Elijah was a man just like us and he prayed that it wouldn’t rain and it didn’t rain for 3 ½ years. Then he prayed again and the heavens gave rain (Ja. 5:17,18). In the eyes of Jesus, however, John the Baptist was greater than Elijah. Elisha received a double portion of the spirit of Elijah (2 Ki. 2:9-12), yet in the eyes of Jesus John the Baptist was greater than Elisha. In fact, John was greater than anyone born of a woman. Since John never performed a miracle and yet was so great in the eyes of God, it is obvious that miracles are not all that important in the light of eternity.

One thing for certain, John proves that just because you do not perform earthly miracles does not mean that you cannot be great in the eyes of God!

Even more significant is the fact that those who are “least in the kingdom of heaven” are greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11). This stunning fact beautifully illustrates the glorious privileges and blessings in the “kingdom of heaven”. In fact, it never entered into the mind of mortal men the greatness of our salvation (1 Cor. 2:7-10).

While many focus on earthly kingdoms, John focused on the “kingdom of heaven”. He was right to do so! Jesus said: **“What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lost his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26 KJV)**. It seems that John’s focus on the kingdom of heaven proves that he understood what Jesus was talking about.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

- Centuries before he was born Isaiah predicted that John would be a voice crying in the wilderness and preparing the way for Jesus (Is. 40:3).
- One way John prepared the way for Jesus was by preaching: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 3:2)**.
- Jesus also preached: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 4:17)**.
- The kingdom of heaven, however, is different from earthly kingdoms. Daniel predicted that this kingdom would never be destroyed or left to another people (Dan. 2:44).

- The nature of the kingdom of heaven is so different from earthly kingdoms that you have to be “born again” to see it (Jn. 3:3).
- The fact that John worked no earthly miracles did not detract from his mission. Earthly miracles pale into insignificance by comparison with eternity. Earthly miracles by definition are temporal for someday the earth and everything in it shall be burned up. The kingdom of heaven focuses on eternal rewards.
- It is incredible but true that earthly miracles can be performed by people who are not even saved. The magicians of Pharaoh, for example, could perform some miracles (Ex. 7, 8). Even the spirits of demons work miracles (Rev. 16:14). Jesus said: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”** (Matt. 7:21-23).
- The devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world, but Jesus wisely rejected that temptation (Lk. 4:5-8). NOTE! ALL OF THOSE EARTHLY KINGDOMS THE DEVIL OFFERED JESUS ARE ALREADY GONE! THEY ARE NOW ON THE ASH HEAP OF HISTORY! THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, HOWEVER, IS IN A TOTALLY DIFFERENT CATEGORY FOR IT WILL NEVER PASS AWAY!

THE KEY

Jesus accused the experts in the law of **“taking away the key to knowledge”** (Lk. 11:52). The experts in the law were laboring for food that spoils, but the key to knowledge involves food that endures to eternal life (Jn. 6:27). All of God’s physical creation groans and travails in a bondage of decay (Rom. 8:18-25). The “key” to true greatness involves something beyond that which is earthly and physical. Please prayerfully consider again these following questions:

- Why would anyone want to pray like John when he never worked a miracle?
- How did John teach his disciples to pray, and what did they pray for?
- Why and how was John greater than men like Elijah and Elisha?
- How is it possible for the least in the kingdom of heaven to be greater than John?
- All of these questions can be answered by using the “key”.
- Jesus told the Jews: **“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world”** (Jn. 8:23).
- God has raised us up to sit with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6). The “key” is to realize “where” we are “who” we are to be like!

The “key” to answering these questions is to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). It involves identifying the true nature of the kingdom and discerning the difference between earthly treasures and heavenly treasures. John the Baptist was not focused on earthly treasures, neither was Jesus, and neither should we be.

- Think about this! Jesus said: **“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”** (Lk. 12:4-7) The martyr Jim Elliott said it beautifully: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose”.
- Jesus also said: **“If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches”** (Lk. 16:11). Note the contrast. Earthly wealth is only temporal while true riches are eternal!
- As we have have said, the devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world if He would bow down and worship him. It was a bad deal and Jesus knew it! Do we know it?
- Jesus said: **“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. HE WILL DO EVEN GREATER THINGS THAT THESE BECAUSE I AM GOING TO THE FATHER”** (Jn. 14:12). Note again that the earthly miracles of Jesus were temporal. When Jesus fed the 5,000, for example, they got hungry again. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead he died again. Now, however, we can enter a new dimension of reality. Now, because Jesus died for our sins and has gone to the Father, we can do something that it was impossible to do before Jesus died on the cross. Now, we can actually help people enter into the kingdom of heaven. Because this involves eternal rewards it is a far greater miracle than merely feeding 5,000 men with 5 loaves and 2 fish.
- The thief on the cross saw this! Do you see it? It dawned on that dying thief that Jesus was not leaving His kingdom, He was entering it! Jesus was leaving behind all the temporary treasures that will someday disappear with a great noise and melt with fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Jesus was about to enter into His heavenly kingdom that would never pass away. When the dying thief believed this in his heart, he confessed it with his mouth (Rom. 10:9, 10). That’s when Jesus promised him: **“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise”** (Lk. 23:43).
- The thief on the cross was dying yet he used the “key” of knowledge and it helped him to gain eternal life. Do you have that “key”? Will you use it?

THE FOOL

“Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied,“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he

said to them, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”** And he told them this parable: **“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ‘Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”** **“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ‘This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”** (Lk. 12:13-21) Note that the “successful” farmer whom most would admire was considered a fool by God! Was John the Baptist “successful”?

There is nothing wrong with “having” earthly wealth, but there is something wrong with “trusting” in earthly wealth. Jesus said: **“Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!”** (Mk. 10:24 KJV). Jesus also said: **“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money”** (Matt. 6:24).

Would you rather be the rich man living in luxury every day, or the poor beggar named Lazarus outside his gate longing for the crumbs that fell from his table? (Lk. 16:19-31). Your answer to this question is of eternal significance!

John the Baptist was not a fool:

- His ministry was predicted by the prophets centuries before it came to pass (Is. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:5,6; etc.)
- He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth (Lk. 1:15).
- He went **“before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”** (Lk. 1:17).
- **“The Lord’s hand was with him”** (Lk. 1:66).
- He was **“to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins”** (Lk. 1:77)
- John was **“strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel”** (Lk. 1:80).
- **“John clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey”** (Matt. 3:4).
- He warned the Jewish leaders to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:7-10).
- He baptized Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17).

- John said about Jesus: **“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him” (Jn. 1:32).**
- All the people were persuaded that John was a prophet (Lk. 20:6).
- John testified about Jesus: **“He must become greater; I must become less” (Jn. 3:30).**
- John was the Elijah who was to come (Matt. 11:14).
- John was imprisoned because he rebuked Herod for taking his brother’s wife (Matt. 14:3,4).
- From prison John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He the one who was to come, or should he expect someone else. Jesus told them to go back to John and tell him what they saw: **“The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear the eead and raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Lk. 7:16-23).**
- After John’s disciples left, Jesus said again: **“I tell you among those born of women there is n o one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Lk. 7:28).**
- John was beheaded by Herod in prison and his head was given on a platter to the daughter of Herodias (Matt. 14:1-13).
- **“John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus” (Matt. 14:12).**
- John lived a “successful” life yet he never worked a miracle. As far as we know, he owned nothing but the clothes on his back. All of his treasures were in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt and where thieves cannot break through and steal.

THE LORD DOES NOT SEE AS MAN DOES

When Samuel anointed David to be king he said: **“The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).** David had seven brothers that were apparently considered more important than he was. His brothers were consecrated and invited to the sacrifice in Bethlehem but David was not invited. David was outside of town tending the sheep. Against all human wisdom, however, it was David who was chosen by God to be king. The reason was because David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22).

Remember! **“The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him” (2 Chron. 16:9).**

John the Baptist was a man whose heart was fully committed to Christ. He was commissioned to prepare the way for Jesus and he did! Nothing would or could distract him from his mission. The friend of the bridegroom should do nothing to distract from the bridegroom Himself. John was content to be the friend of the Bridegroom. He did nothing that would detract from the exaltation of Christ (Jn. 3:22-36). Remember! Whoever humbles himself God has promised to exalt (Matt. 23:12).

- We must emphasize that there is nothing wrong with praying for earthly things! Jesus taught us to pray for our “daily bread” (Lk. 11:3).
- Neither is there anything wrong in praying for earthly miracles. Jesus did so throughout the entirety of His ministry. Moreover, the Bible specifically commands us to **“confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed” (Ja. 5:16).**
- In fact, the Scriptures teach us to pray about everything! Note: **“In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6).**
- The point is, we are to seek FIRST His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).
- The FIRST and most important command in the Bible is to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind (Matt. 22:37).
- If and when we lose focus on the priority of God, then “life’s worries, riches, and pleasures” can choke our spiritual life and keep us from spiritual maturity (Lk. 8:14).
- When you decide to put God first in your life He will know it!

GODLY EXAMPLES FROM HISTORY

Even though among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11), history still reveals that there have been heroes and heroines of the faith in every generation. God has never been a King without subjects.

- Enoch was so spiritual that God took him away so that he didn’t die (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5).
- Job was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil (Job 1:1). It didn’t matter what God allowed the devil to do to Job, he still testified: **“Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15 KJV).**
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego preferred the fiery furnace over disrespecting God (Dan. 3:6-18).
- Daniel put God first even if it meant being cast into a den of lions (Dan. 6:10-23).
- Paul wrote: **“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil. 3:7-11).**

- Saving faith involves being certain what what we cannot see (Heb. 11:1). Moses succeeded because he saw “Him Who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). “Seeing” this helps us to understand John the Baptist!
- Throughout history there have been many righteous men and women, none however were greater than John the Baptist.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps this prayer of Paul summarizes the way John prayed and the way all of us should also pray:

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph. 3:14-21).

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