Sent: 10/15/2014 12:40:52 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time  
Subj: Last Nite's MOB Session--Lesson #5

Men--It was great to get together again last nite to share what we're learning from the Gospel of John!  John wrote to establish beyond doubt that Jesus was, in fact, the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, the very Son of God, sent by the Father to become the "Lamb of God" and die for the sin of the world.  He established this fact by recording selected "eye-witness" accounts of what Jesus did and said--including seven special "signs" or miracles that Jesus performed; the seven "I am" sayings depicting, in His own words, who He was and is; and the seven "witness accounts" confirming His identity!  Last nite we considered the first witness--John the Baptist, covered in John 1:19-34, but also linked and discussed in more detail in other parts of John, as well as in the "synoptic" gospels.

So who was John the Baptist?  John includes in his "prologue," which we got into last week, that he (John!) was "sent by God" (1:6), and that he came as a "witness" to "that Light"--the "Light of men" (1:7) that shines in the darkness that all might believe in Him and have eternal life!  He's the one (again speaking of John) who, up-front, identified Christ as of a "higher rank" than himself--and therefore "preeminent"!  And someone who "existed before him" (even though it was well known that he, John, was born in this world before Jesus!)  Thus the inference, at the very least, that Jesus "pre-existed" as God Incarnate!

Well, there's lots more to the story of John the Baptist's life!  Remember his birth as recorded in Luke?  His parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, too old to have children?  Gabriel announcing his birth as the "forerunner" of Christ--prophesied in Isaiah 40?  The visit by Mary with Elizabeth and how the "baby in the womb of Elizabeth (that would be John!), "leaped for joy"?  Then the birth of John and later Mary giving birth to Jesus--and all that went with the rest of the story!

Mark picks it up in the beginning of his gospel with the prophecy of Isaiah and how John was sent to "prepare the way of the Lord."  And we see John later preaching in the wilderness of Judea, calling the people to repentance and cleansing; and baptizing those receptive to the message in the Jordan River.

Mark then records (in 1:9) that, at some point, Jesus Himself "came from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized," over the initial objections from John!  And then, a remarkable thing happened!  "Immediately, the heavens opened and the Spirit like a dove descended upon Him, and a voice came out of heaven saying: "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased"!  Imagine the astonishment of John, and others who may have witnessed the event!  For the first time John recognized who Jesus was, and that undoubtedly shaped the rest of his ministry!

The question was naturally raised, including by some last nite: why was Jesus baptized?  Wasn't that only for sinners who needed to confess and repent?  Many answers are clear, in retrospect!  Jesus came from heaven as a man to identify Himself with sinners and to take on their sin.  John MacArthur writes that it was a "necessary part of the righteousness He secured for sinners."  Matthew (in 3:11) records Jesus Himself saying that "it was fitting to fulfil all righteousness."  Luke speaks of how it symbolized His coming death and resurrection!  And, of course, it provided the opportunity for Jesus to begin His earthly ministry with a "public affirmation" from God the Father as to who He was and is!

Well back to John the Baptist and his witness and testimony--recorded at three different times to three different groups!

The first witness was to the "priests and Levites" who came from Jerusalem to find out who he (John) really was and what he was up to--and maybe somehow to put a stop to it!  They had all kinds of reasons for not liking what he was doing!  John called them a "brood of vipers"!  Showing a bit of their "head knowledge" of the Old Testament, they asked him whether he was Elijah--who was "taken up in a whirlwind" and thus never died--and was prophesied to return "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5).  Or maybe the "prophet"--some believed the Messiah--who Moses said (in Deut. 18:15, 18) the Lord would "raise up to speak His words."  John responded (in 1:23-27) that he was "the voice crying out in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord"--and he was merely baptizing "with water," but that "among you stands One (speaking of Jesus) whom you do not know...the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

John's second witness account occurred the "next day," according to John 1:29-34, when John saw Jesus coming to him and proclaimed: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"!  He was obviously testifying based on what he himself had witnessed at Jesus' baptism, as discussed above!  But where did he come up with the name "Lamb of God"--identifying Jesus as not only the Christ, the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, but now the ultimate "sacrificial Lamb"--who had come to die for the sin of the world!  It can only be explained as having been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit!  Inspired by God, as is all Scripture!  For the Jews it must have brought back references to the night of the Passover, and the "exodus" of the Jews from captivity in Egypt, recorded in Exodus 12, when the father of every household was told to offer up a spotless lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and lintel, with God's decree that "when I see the blood I will pass over you"--thus sparing the first-born who would otherwise perish!  Or the imagery of Abraham (in Genesis 22) readying himself to offer up Isaac on the altar when God interceded and "provided" a lamb!

Well, there's a third witness account of John's in verses 35-37 when "on the next day" (again!) John was standing with two of his disciples (Andrew and probably John, the son of Zebedee) and looking at Jesus "as He walked" and saying once again: "Behold the Lamb of God!"  And the writer John records that "the two disciples heard him speak, and that they followed Jesus!"

But there's still more that we need to say about John the Baptist!  He continued preaching and baptizing, but his ministry was greatly diminished as people began following Christ.  Some of John's disciples were disturbed about that!  But John continued pointing people to Jesus noting, as recorded in John 3:30, "He must increase but I must decrease!"  Again giving "preeminence" to Jesus!

Well, John's ministry was soon "cut off"!  Among other things, he spoke out against the scandalous life of Herod the tetrarch and soon found himself in prison.  While there he must have suffered depression and even doubt about Christ--as evidence by the message he sent to Jesus by one of his disciples:  "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"  Jesus' response is recorded in Matthew 11:2-11. And yet, not much later, John is beheaded!  One wonders why Jesus didn't somehow intervene on John's behalf.  We don't always understand the ways of God--and often have such a short-sighted view of things eternal!  But here's how Jesus summed up John's life (in vs. 11): "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!"  Wow!

The bottom line?  O to be more like John the Baptist!  He had little of this life's stuff, from an earthly perspective!  He knew and grasped his calling and was faithful to it!  He was totally usable by God!  He demonstrated true humility and gave Jesus all the preeminence!  He pointed people to Jesus!  He confronted the shallow hypocritical religiosity of his day and stood up to the all-powerful Herod!  He gave his life for his convictions!  He fully fulfilled his mission!  He got the highest conceivable acclamation from Jesus Himself!  His eternal reward is awaiting!

This is the testimony and witness of John the Baptist!  What more could we say?

Well, let's not forget this one!  Now, on to Lesson #6 and "The First Disciples"!

Have a great week, men!

Lowell Mininger