

I told you I wasn't going to do any of the parables as we went through the Lord's life, but one parable is so intricately tied to this experience that there is no way to take it out of context, so tonight we will look at a parable. But before we do, we're going to see the Lord Jesus in what is almost a farewell to John the Baptist, John the Immerser. This is on page 65 of this book (*The Life of Christ in Stereo*). It's number 50. It's Matthew 11 and Luke 7. The people John sent have just left. A crowd of people stands around, having watched this incident, and the Lord begins to talk to the entire crowd, not just to His disciples, but He addresses everyone.

I want you all to remember something. Here is, I get the impression, a thousand people at least, maybe two, maybe three thousand, I don't know. He says to them, "What did you go out to hear?" Now, I don't know if you understand what that means, but every one of those people who were following the Lord and who were mesmerized by His ministry, totally captured by it, every one of those people had heard John the Baptist.

One of the most difficult things that ever happens in the Christian faith is "beginning." There may be a man over here who has 10,000 followers, but somewhere, he had to get those first 25, and that's the most difficult you'll ever get. And John gave the Lord Jesus his followers. Tens of thousands of people went out to hear John, and they were all standing there at that moment, following the Lord.

Now we come to the Lord's tribute to John, and it has to be about the most incredible thing in Scripture in the honoring of a person. I think I've been told that the only person in the New Testament who was called good was Barnabas. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit. Maybe the only man in the Bible called good. Well, there are things said here of John the Immerser (Baptist) that are also quite incredible. The Lord says, what went you out to hear? Well, it wasn't a well-dressed man. It was a man in camel's hair. You didn't go out to hear a king. He had a beard and wasn't beautiful at all.

What did you go out to hear, then? A prophet, yes, you're right, a prophet. That's what you went out to hear. But I say to you, more than a prophet. And then this incredible statement: men born of women. Now, how many men have been born of a woman? I'll turn that around. Name all the men in the world who have not been born of a woman. And the answer is none. Of men born of a woman, none has been greater than John the Immerser. That puts him right up beside Moses, Abraham, Elijah, Elisha, and David. And that's pretty much it, isn't it? Noah, if you want to throw in Noah. It puts him up with everybody except Adam, who was not born of a woman. Of men born of a woman, there's none greater than John.

Why is John so great? I'd like to know the answer to that myself. I don't know, but maybe it's the task he was given. His task was to make way for the Lord Jesus, and sometimes we are honored by that which we honor. It's been said that a crime is punished according to how dastardly it is, and the worst of all crimes is not murder; the worst of all crimes is treason. But then there are the good deeds of life, and there are the better ones, and the greatest, but certainly the greatest of all would be preparing the way for the Lord Jesus upon this earth. So we have Mary, and we have John the Baptist, and only those two figures played such a mighty role in bringing the incarnate God into this world.

John the Baptist, who went out probably while he was still a child, possibly lived with the Essenes, began preaching around age 30 in the desert, probably to passing nomads and caravans. Yet, people were willing to go into an uninhabited place to hear him. He proclaimed the day of the Lord. Ah, that's an incredible feat. And now he dies, or he will die soon, in prison, after a very short life, his purpose done. Now, John's death is very important. If we do not realize that John dies, some of this will not make sense. You have to remember that John dies.

Now come two more incredible statements. One of them is that he is Elijah. Now, I read something once. If you ever read what I'm about to tell you, don't bother reading it. I do not think this is truer than the man in the moon. The man said, "If you have ears to hear, this is Elijah." He assumed the people didn't have ears to hear. Therefore, he was not Elijah. I don't understand that kind of thinking. That doesn't make any sense to me either: that he would have been Elijah if the people had received him, but because they didn't, he's therefore not Elijah.

The Old Testament people believed that Elijah was coming back to fulfill the last two sentences found in the Old Testament. Malachi says someone is coming who will make the way of the Lord, and they all believed that was Elijah. They were waiting for the prophet who would do that. And the Lord said, "You met that prophet, and you met Elijah." As far as I'm concerned, He said, "If you have ears to hear here," that means it literally wasn't Elijah reincarnated, but yes, the spirit of that man came back to this earth again. When you met John the Baptist, you knew what Elijah was like. You met him. There he is, standing right out there, and he is the one. He is that prophet you have looked forward to.

Then He makes this statement, this incredible statement, but the least, or the smaller ones in the kingdom, are greater than John. Okay, He has just said that the law and the prophets were until John. This is the only dispensation I've ever found in the New Testament. And now, you know, folks, I'm not a dispensationalist. This is the only dispensation I see: something ended with John, and something began with John. He stands between two covenants. He's the centerpiece between them. The law and the prophets were until John, but the least in the kingdom is greater than John. John lived under the old covenant and introduced the new. The kingdom of the heavenlies has drawn near, but John was not in that kingdom. John was not in that kingdom. John never entered that kingdom, never saw it, and never experienced it.

Then he (John) makes this statement. That's, oh boy, what does it mean? *And those who have entered the kingdom up until now enter it by force.* They enter it joyfully, but they enter it by force. *The kingdom is taken by violent men.* Oh, what does that mean? Oh, what does that mean? All over the world, theologians want to know what that means. Any young Christian can tell you what it means. It means we have to be violent men and storm the kingdom. Now, that's what it meant to me as a young person, and I was one of those violent men who stormed the kingdom and took it. But I'm an old man now, and I don't have to get worked up over storming the kingdom. Sometimes I wish the storm would abate.

Well, I'm going to tell you what I believe, and I really believe I'm correct. This has taken me a lifetime to present to you, and if anyone else has ever taught this, I've never read it. It may be in every book in the world. I never studied this from a commentary viewpoint. It's one of those things I held in my heart and just turned over and over and over. This is my present feeling.

There is a three-year period in spiritual history that doesn't belong anywhere. It's not old. It's not new. It's the Lord Jesus Christ's three-year ministry. During those three years, nobody has the indwelling Christ in them. Nobody actually gets saved during those three years. Now, a lot of our evangelistic messages come out of it: the woman at the well, the woman with the issue of blood, the dumb man who threw off his cloak and ran to Jesus. There are sermon outlines and all that. You better believe there are. Nicodemus, Zacchaeus. You can get saved by hearing messages preached on that. But those people did not actually have the redemptive washing of the blood of Jesus Christ and an indwelling Christ coming into them.

What did they have? I don't know. Maybe they had all of that. Maybe they did, and we just don't know it. It's just a three-year period that doesn't make much sense when you try to deal

with it theologically. Well, of course, this raises the question of how Old Testament Christians get saved. The fact of the matter is that the cross is outside of time. The cross is completely outside of being affected by or limited by time and space. You can get saved anywhere, at any time, under any conditions, perhaps old and new.

Nonetheless, during the ministry of Jesus Christ, you're very locked into time, because here He is discussing the cross, talking about His resurrection. There is anticipation. A kingdom is going to come now. The kingdom comes. Well, it probably comes at Pentecost. That kingdom has always been; it's been in the heavenlies, but it extended its boundaries on the day of Pentecost. There's no longer the kingdom of the heavenlies; it's the kingdom of the heavenlies, and the kingdom has moved to earth, and now it's the kingdom of God that covers both. So now you folks know what I believe about the kingdom. I'm not a dispensationalist. Right before the cross and resurrection, if a man wants to get saved and get into the kingdom of God, how does he get there? He does it by being very aggressive. He makes a real commitment to Christ.

This brings up the other ingredient. At this moment, John and Jesus are both very controversial. John is a very controversial figure, and Jesus is becoming one. You can get in trouble, and you can be condemned and criticized for following John. John had a demon. Are you following John? I tell you, sir, be careful. That man has a demon. Those of you who are following him are following Beelzebub. Oh, yesterday I was out there in the desert, and there were 10,000 people out there following Lucifer. Well, if you spread that around to anybody, you'll lose a few followers here and there. You have to stand up against that, and you have to believe in the absence of a cross. I was about to say in the presence of a cross that's absent. There is no cross. There is no resurrection, and people are pushing and pressing their way into the kingdom of God.

If I were going to try to imagine this, I would imagine it this way. I would imagine a dear little woman who heard John, really believed him, repented, and really knew forgiveness. By the way, I'd like to say there's a little difference between repentance and legalistic righteousness. I know you've probably never thought about this, but a man who's trying not to sin in daily living, where he won't sin, is not the same as a person who repents of his sin. He gets cleansed. There is joy. There is peace. He has touched his God. Something in his life changes. He goes back and sins again, but something's changed. Whereas the legalism is: "I will not sin, I will not sin, I will not sin." And it goes on, and there's never a touch with God. That man who's not going to sin needs so much to repent and needs so much to touch God, because in his determination not to sin, he lives without ever repenting. He is a poor candidate for repentance.

This madman came along, and he rebuked the soldiers, the tax collectors, the adulterous women, and the Pharisees. He was supposed to stop before he did that (the Pharisees). It's okay to rebuke the soldier who takes people's cloaks and makes them carry his baggage for a mile, because Roman law allowed it; the tax collector, the dirty thieves, and the adulterous woman. "You Pharisees! You snakes! You vipers!" Who told you to repent? God didn't, and I didn't. How insulting can you get? So he made many enemies, and if you were going to follow this demon-possessed man, you were going to run up against opposition.

This woman went through all that and still repented, had a touch with God. Then she heard Jesus, and she wept. She believed He was the Messiah. Then one day she heard that He was crucified, and she was stunned and horrified, and she was disillusioned and did not know what to do in her—say, but something in her still held out. And then the story came back to her little village. "Have you heard? There's a rumor that He's risen from the dead." She raises her hands and says, "Blessed be God." And she is saved...by faith; she's already exercised it

three years before. Perhaps at that moment, the Holy Spirit comes into her.

Now that's a supposition, brothers. If that be correct, here is a woman who took the kingdom violently—took it at a time when it wasn't to be taken, took it at a time that was not seasonal. The season is Pentecost and thereafter. Men and women took it joyfully, and they took it violently. They took it out of season. They grasped it and would not let go, and I think that's what this passage means. But I will promise you I will never keep you out of the fellowship and out of my fellowship if you believe something else. That's the best that I understand it to mean: that violent men take the kingdom violently and joyfully. Speaks of a three-year period.

Now, you must know that John the Baptist never had the experience that little woman I just described had. Do you understand? He died before the crucifixion. He died before the resurrection. I assume that anybody who died during those three-year periods who repented under John, believed in Jesus, gets classified with John the Baptist. They never saw the kingdom. Their spirits were never brought into unseen realms while they were on this earth... while they were on this earth. Who knows what happens after that, because the cross is effective in both directions, past and future, but perhaps that all of those glorious things had to take place after their death. Whereas the little lady lived long enough to say, "Bless God," when she heard the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. Therefore, she belonged to a new covenant and a new age. It's almost like John stands in that three-year vacuum, and he's part of this and part of that, but he himself did not, in time, in space, enter the kingdom of God.

"Well, Gene, what is the kingdom of God?" Well, for you and me, it's the church. The church is a colony from heaven. It is part of the heavens now on this planet. It's a village that got put on the wrong planet. It belongs to another planet, but it got put on this planet, and it's where people from that other planet live while they're on this planet.

There are many other nations and many kingdoms, but this is the kingdom of God, and it belongs to the other realm. The other realm, plus the village in this realm—you put them together—it's no longer the kingdom of the heavenlies; it's the kingdom of God. Until Pentecost, the kingdom was relegated to the heavens. Now it belongs to heaven and earth. Now it's the kingdom not of the heavenlies, but of God. It didn't just come near; it landed.

Well, now we have the parable, and I think we see an angry Lord, a disgusted Lord, something like that. Here's what I see: a young man, about 29, taking a repaired table back to some old lady. As he comes back toward his carpenter shop, he passes through a large and busy marketplace, and there are two groups of kids. One group of kids sits over here on these steps, and another group sits over here on these steps, and these kids over here began to play a funeral dirge on their flutes. They holler to the other kids across the street, "Mourn for us! We'll play the flute, you mourn. Beat your breast."

Other kids: "No, I don't do that." "Well, you were talking about wanting to play something. Here's something to play." "Well, I don't play that." So, the little kids with the flute begin to play a merry wedding tune. "Well, dance, dance then. Dance to the wedding. You want to play? Here's something fun to play. Dance to the wedding tune."

"No, I don't want to play that either. Don't want to beat my chest and wail, and I don't want to dance." This young carpenter looks at that and says, "Yeah." He hears a Pharisee walk past him right about that time, when the Pharisee says, "Have you been out to the desert? There's a demon-possessed man out there. He fasts. He teaches the harshest of things I've ever heard in my life. That man is possessed of a demon." The Lord said, "Yes, I wonder what you'll say about a year from now, about me." So today he remembers the two groups of children in the marketplace. Someone has supposed that children play games, and if you think that this is not true, I was in the jungles of Thailand with the Hmong, and I watched the children playing

there in a refugee camp, and those kids had a disc. All of them had a disc and one stick. They had that little disc, and they'd chase that disc around with that stick. They played with that all day long. A child will find something to play with, and he doesn't have to know that there are so many toys in the 20th century over here in America. He can play with almost anything.

It's been assumed that children played two games. One was the wedding; one was the funeral. If you played funeral, you would...you're imitating your parents, and if you were playing wedding, you'd go...and some of the kids didn't want to play the one. And the Lord says, "That's the Pharisees. Nothing that God can do will satisfy them. Nothing God can do will satisfy them."

I want to talk for a few minutes. John came preaching an ascetic gospel. The Pharisees said, "He's got a demon. He's ascetic." Jesus came, having a good time, drinking and eating, and they called him a drunkard and a friend of criminals and sinners. They said that he was a drunkard and a glutton, and there was nothing God could do that could please them. They would not respond to either one, and the question is, what on earth is going on with these men that they will not respond to the very God to whom they are totally devoted?

I'm going to get off of the indwelling Father, and I'm on meddle for a few minutes. In my judgment, what will prevent a devoutly religious person who has faith in the Hebrew God and obeys everything about that God is that he will no longer respond to that God because he's locked into personal dogma. That when you denominate yourself, you thereby say, "I cannot have fellowship with anybody, not even God, if he does not conform to the dogma that I have set up." I wish I could tell you I've never seen illustrations of that, but within the Christian faith, when we get structured in what we believe, I have seen brothers call other brothers demon-possessed because they did not believe in that particular doctrine.

The Methodists used to say that the Baptist idea of once saved, always saved had come right out of the pits of hell. The Baptists used to say the Methodists believed that you can fall from salvation, and that was born right in the pits of hell, and they could get pretty mean about it. You start confining Methodists to believing things right out of the pits of hell, and the Baptists right out of the pits of hell...one of them has got to be wrong, but they both are married to their doctrines - a vitalist doctrine that has grown greater than God himself.

I have to ask myself: Here are the Pharisees, here are the doctors of the law, here are the scribes, here are the Sadducees, and here are the priests. And there's John the Baptist. What could he have said that would have made them happy, and say that man was of God? Now think about it. What could he have said to make them happy? There's only one thing...those were arrogant, arrogant, pride-filled men...there was only one thing a prophet could say, especially a prophet that mean. The only thing he could have said that would have made them happy...

Let's say today a big delegation goes out—the authoritarian, authoritative delegation that's going to decide what John is. They've come out from Jerusalem, and John is preaching to these people, and he's saying, "You soldiers are robbing people, and you're forcing old women to carry your luggage for you. You tax collectors are getting more Roman money from the people—the Roman money from the people—than Rome ever wanted, and you're putting it in your sacks, and you're getting fat from the money of the poor. And those of you who are committing adultery and stealing and lying and cheating, the wrath of God is going to fall on you."

If he had turned and said, "If you want to know how to live and what God expects of you, be like the Pharisees. The Pharisees are there, and they've opened their doors, and you ought to go join them." "That's right, that man's of God; that man's of God," because he would have

agreed with their dogma. You can become so straitjacketed in what you believe that if God doesn't believe it, and if one sent from God does not approve it, you will miss your reward, and that is not only true of the religious Pharisee; that is true of the Christian. That is rampantly true all over the earth, because it's not just salvation; it's so much of the blessings of God that our sectarian nature prevents us from hearing the riches of other brothers and sisters, because their dogma is different from our own. If you have a very aggressive religious movement or Christian movement in our day, and it's taking people from you and your group, woe be those people when your wrath turns on them.

I want to ask you a question; I want this recorded now and forever. Do people in cults have rights? Do people who belong to cults have rights? Sure. More or less rights than you have? A few less, don't they? They need to stay in their place, right? That's right. Well, dear brothers, that's not true in this country. In this country, occultists are supposed to have the same rights as everybody else, but they don't get them because of community pressure.

Do a Hare Krishna, a Maharishi Ji, or a Jehovah's Witness have the rights that you have? Those people are all going to go to hell...but you've got no right to persecute them. That's between them and God, and it's not your place to make their lives miserable. "But they're winning converts, and they're taking people from salvation." That's not any of your business either. It's really not. "You mean you're going to let all those cults grow and send all those people to hell?" If I have to choose between that and persecuting those people, I think I'll just let them succeed. "But can't you warn against them?" Yeah, but I think I'll probably knife my spirit to death while I'm doing it. And I'm going to hurt a lot of Christians and make them very, very prejudiced while I warn them against some group.

You know, I think the greatest tragedy that ever took place in the Christian faith is when we stopped being the persecuted and became the persecutor. We began to persecute instead of being persecuted, and it was the same attitude of the Jewish leaders: There's nothing you can do, and there's nothing you can say that will please me. I oppose anything you do. When Christians did that, and they gained political power in 325 A.D. with Constantine, things have never been good since then. We ought to be a minority religion. Very small, with a very small following, because, if the truth were known, that's exactly what we are. The Christian faith has got, what, 400, 500 million adherents, but if you got down to those who really meant business, I don't think it would be any bigger proportionately than it was in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

Now then, I want to describe to you...I hope when the Lord comes, He comes in glory. How many of God's people today are ready, willing, and excited about receiving the Lord when He comes in the air? Just think about it. The skies are going to burst open, and Jesus Christ is going to come forth out of the clouds, and we're going to see Him with His myriads of angels, and we're all going to be called up together—glory, glory, glory. Sometimes I think that's the coward's way out. Don't faint; please stay with me a minute.

What if that same Lord in glory decided to make one more little visit to this planet as an ordinary man, and what if He came to the United States, and what if He began performing miracles by the tens of thousands? What would us Baptist preachers say? What would the Methodist preachers say? What would the Lutheran preachers say? What would the fundamentalists say? They would hear about Him: He claims He was to be the Lord. Well, He can't be the Lord. His name is Jehoshaphat, and everybody knows Jesus' name. And that guy who was preaching before He came along said he was coming; his name is George, not John. That doesn't work. But they would all go out to hear Him. We would all go out to hear him. We would judge if he were the Lord.

If He said, "You Democrats and you Republicans and you dope pushers and you drunkards and adulterers," all of us good Christians would go, "That's right." But when He said, "You Baptist preachers"—and write off the Baptists. "You Methodist preachers"—and write off the Methodists. What if He did that, and then He turned and said, "But the fundamentalists - that's who has the truth?" I believe the fundamentalist ranks would split right down the middle. I think half of them would say He's crazy, and the other half would join Him hook, line, and sinker. Maybe they all would, but they would receive Him only if He bragged on.

There is only one way the Baptists would follow Him. I believe this. I may be mistaken, but I don't think so, and that is if he said the cooperative program is the thing, and the Baptists were the ones with the truth, and the rest of you were wrong. Because that's the only way a Baptist thinks. He doesn't think in terms of an intimate relationship with Christ; he thinks about the fact that he's got a belief that's 500 years old, that precedes the Reformation, and it probably was passed on through the other 1,500 years, and we got the truth. And you don't have the truth...not like we do. We got it, and God is with those who have the truth. It doesn't matter whether we have the right heart or not. It is the truth. It is the correct interpretation of Scripture where God puts His blessing, and if this man will bless our interpretation, He will prove that God has blessed us. If he fights us, that's proof he doesn't know what he's talking about...even if he's God.

I have a word for all of you. When your dogma causes you to judge another Christian and makes that other Christian somewhat second-class, the chances that you would reject the Lord Jesus if he were on this earth are excellent, because the chances of the Lord agreeing with your doctrine and coming out and saying those specific words are virtually non-existent.

I tell you, my God is not a theologian, and neither is yours. He wouldn't come saying, "Oh, let's look at your creed. Hmm, you got 50%. Hmm, 60%. Hmm, 2%. Hmm, 90%. Where are these people? Your name down here? Oh, Southern Baptist. Raise your hands. Well, now, I'll join your church. You have kept the faith throughout the centuries." No such God exists in this universe, brothers. He didn't exist like that in the first century; He would not exist today, but these are the things that keep us from one another. And if they keep us from one another, they keep us from Him. Keep your doctrines to a minimum and keep your dogmatism toward even them to a minimum.

I've seen too many brothers in my lifetime who would make one statement one day about a brother. If his conduct shifted, he would take the absolute opposite end of the pole and say something negative about Him this way - two things utterly irreconcilable. "He is too authoritarian." "That man doesn't have any leadership ability whatsoever, and everything is chaotic." Same man...period of 24 hours...same two lips. There's only one thing that can be said about that: He is opposed to that person, regardless.

Someone said that the Pharisees couldn't make up their mind. Oh, I think they had their minds made up perfectly. They were against anything that wasn't a Pharisee; all they had to do was give their minds enough time to come up with the same logic to justify it. They just needed a few minutes to think of a good reason, and when circumstances shifted, then their logic shifted.

This causes us to lie to our own hearts; this causes us to lie to God. We do anything to follow our doctrines, and we will not even allow the approval of God on this Earth if he does not conform to what we believe. I have watched too many Christians do this; be very careful about what you believe. What you believe can stand in the way of you knowing the Lord. I want us to be able to receive Him not only in the clouds, but also on the Earth, even if He's not a Baptist or whatever you are. Your doctrines just aren't that precious.