

## He Must Increase: I Must Decrease

*"He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom: but the Friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled"*

—John 3:29

IN Luke 3, we have the ministry of John Baptist, the "voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord."

The story begins in chapter 1. After a silence of 400 years, God once again openly manifested Himself to His people, and the wonderful events which fill the Gospels begin.

The last previous Word of God had come through Malachi, who closed his prophecy, and the Old Testament, with the promise of the coming of Elijah to turn the nation back to God.

At the national hour of prayer, as an aged priest stood offering incense for the nation in the Temple, in the Holy Place, on the altar of prayer, before the veil—the angel Gabriel appeared. He had, 600 years before, appeared to Daniel, and he was to appear again soon after to Mary.

There could have been no more fitting place or time to indicate that all things are through the power of prayer. And his first words were—

*"Fear not, thy prayer is heard"* (Luke 1:13).

The priest was Zacharias, and the message was that though his wife was barren, and they were old, they should have a son.

It was to be a child of promise, a special operation of the power of God, like Isaac, Samson, and Samuel.

And he was to be a Nazarite from birth, again like Samson and Samuel.

And he was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

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WE are impressed through all the events of Luke 1 and 2—the announcements and births of John and Jesus—with the constant repetition of the theme of intense and overflowing joy in the purpose of God—both by angels and by men.

It is an aspect worthy of deep consideration. Joy is a spiritual thing, and it should be much deeper and more prevalent among us.

We do not get and keep CLOSE enough to these things. We are missing so much that we could be experiencing by a deeper and more intense application. Joy is spiritual healthiness and robust wellbeing, and we are far too weak and sickly in this respect.

**This attitude of ecstatic praise should be the rule among God's children and not the occasional and seemingly unnatural exception.**

This is manifested more naturally and freely among some of the smaller, simpler sects, who are not afraid of the ridicule of the world, and it is to our reproach that it is not more natural among us.

The Psalms of David, which are the mind of Christ, portray to us the true godly attitude. Truly they are filled with the burden of the passing sorrows of the present, but also with the unrestrainable and overflowing joy of the Spirit in all God's marvellous works and wisdom.

We do not fill our minds enough with the contemplation of eternal joys, but far too much with petty, passing, depressing present things.

*"Thou shalt have joy and gladness" (Luke 1:14).*

"Joy and gladness" is God's will and purpose for His people. All His appointments are to this end. The closer we truly get to the way and mind of God, the greater will be our joy and gladness.

**Dissatisfaction and unhappiness are elements of the flesh—inevitable accompaniments of selfishness and desire.**

The deceptiveness of the flesh is nowhere more clearly manifested than in its prompting to seek and expect joy and gladness outside the way of God. This is the essence of the temptation of Christ which he, in the wisdom of the Spirit, instantly rejected.

*"And many shall rejoice at his birth" (v. 14).*

And we must be among them! Rejoicing **MUST** be the basic tone of our lives. We must continuously rejoice in these things.

Regardless of, and in spite of, present problems and disappointments, deep rejoicing will always be our principal characteristic, **IF** our faith is real, and if we truly believe what God has said. Any other frame of mind is a reproach against God's love and goodness. We are denying by our actions our professed faith in God's glorious assurance that (Rom. 8:28)—

**"All things work together for good to them that love God."**

Paul, who said (Rom. 9:2-3)—

"I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren, my kinsmen after the flesh."

Also said (Phil. 4:4-7)—

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say. Rejoice!"

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

These statements are not contradictory, nor mutually exclusive. They are rather complementary. They make up the full pattern of godliness which Paul so well manifested.

Both are essential to true Christ-likeness, but the rejoicing and the peace must be the broader and deeper and overriding, and more inward, emotions. Until we develop this basic frame of mind in ourselves, and radiate it, we cannot do anyone any good. We drive people from the glorious Truth of God, rather than attract them to its joy and beauty and goodness.

God is good, and God is love, and good and love will finally fill the earth, and everything in its own way is leading forward to this final victory.

**There are no mistakes or failures in the triumphant divine plan.**

We must always keep the sorrow and the rejoicing in their respective relationships. One is small and passing; the other infinite and everlasting.

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*"Thou shalt be dumb, because thou believest not my words."*

The dumbness of Zacharias was a blessing in the form of a punishment, and so beautifully illustrates the wisdom and goodness of God's ways.

He would not believe without a sign, so he was given a sign that rebuked his unbelief, yet at the same time strengthened his faith. It both humbled and comforted him, and also taught him wisdom.

He was a righteous man, well-pleasing to God (v. 6). But at the moment of visitation—the great moment of his life—the moment for which Israel had been waiting 400 years—he was not quite ready. He was caught off guard.

And yet he was in the very act in which his mind **should** have been most attuned for a divine communication. He stood before the altar—before the veil—offering the incense of prayer for the whole nation.

Six months later the same Gabriel appeared with similar abruptness to a poor, obscure young girl of Israel, as she went about her own private way, but how much more maturely does the young woman react to the sudden angelic visitation and much stranger message, than the old priest!

**The lesson is to live more deeply in the world of faith, and constant consciousness of spiritual things.**

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*"And Mary arose, and went into the hill country of Judea, into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth" (vs. 39-40).*

(The term translated 'cousin' in v. 36 is a term of indefinite relationship and usually translated 'kinsman,' as in Luke 2:44).

Upon seeing Mary, Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit to prophesy and glorify God, and Mary was likewise, and the babe John leaped in the womb for joy. This is an important aspect of the whole picture concerning John and his work—joy, and the power of the Spirit. It comes out again and again.

All was of the Spirit of God for the joy of mankind. The greatest event in human history was just beginning to unfold—spoken of by the angels as "Tidings of Great Joy"—the event for which all the ages had waited—the event around which all revolved—and all the participants are deeply moved with the joy of the Spirit.

At the birth of John, Zacharias' tongue was loosed, and he too was filled with the Holy Spirit and praised and glorified God. Of John, Zacharias said (v.76)—

"Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways."

John's mission was to arouse the nation to repentance, and to introduce the Messiah to them—

"To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins" (v. 77).

**From the beginning, this aspect was emphasized—that the salvation men need is from themselves—from their own natural, death-tending characteristics and desires.**

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*"Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us"*  
(v. 78).

"Dayspring" means arising or dawning. A new day was dawning for Israel. The Sun of righteousness was to be manifested. This is a clear reference again to the last chapter of Malachi, the promise of the "Sun of Righteousness" to "arise with healing in his wings."

This reference to light is very frequent in relation to the coming of Christ, as in Isa. 9:2—

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

Light from darkness was the first act of creation.

The natural state of men is darkness, and all his natural thoughts and actions are foolishness. Only spiritual thoughts and actions are light. Paul presents this vividly (2 Cor. 4:6):

"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts,

"To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The apostle John says of the same event (John 1:6-9)—

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light.

"He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

"That was the true Light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world."

It can be our privilege and joy, if we chose, to come out from walking in natural death-tending darkness, into that life-giving Light.

*Just accepting the Truth is not in itself coming in the light. We are only in the Light when we are consciously choosing to repudiate all the thoughts of the flesh and to walk according to the principles of the mind of Christ.*

John said, at the beginning of his first epistle (1:5)—

"This, then, is the message which we have heard of him."

—this is the basic message, this is the key point, the heart of the matter—

"God is Light, and in Him is no darkness.

"If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the Truth."

And walking in light, as John goes on to show, means walking in love toward everyone. He says (1 John 2:10-11)—

"He that loveth his brother abideth in the Light.

"He that hateth his brother is in darkness."

An act that is not done in love—through, enlightened godly love, is an act of darkness—an act of disfellowship from God—no matter how self-righteous it may be. Everything we do must be tested by this test. Our "zeal for the Lord," like Jehu, is often really the flesh, when we pride ourselves it is the Spirit.

When we act, or speak, or think, in anger, or annoyance, or impatience, or selfishness, or resentment, or for any motive except kindness and love, even if it be—as we suppose—in defence of the Truth, we are in darkness, and are disfellowshipping ourselves from God Who is Light and Love and Goodness.

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*"The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit" (Luke 1:80).*

What does it mean, to "wax (or grow) strong in spirit"?

It means, by study, and meditation, and prayer, and practice, to be strong in spirituality and control of the flesh—to be strong in the mind of the Spirit.

We cannot actually weaken the flesh, but we can continually strengthen and build up the Spirit. This is the whole purpose of our lives, and every moment not consciously engaged in this is wasted. Every time we subdue and control the natural thoughts and reactions of the flesh, we strengthen the Spirit—we "wax stronger in Spirit."

This was how John spent 30 years of preparation in the desert for his so brief, but so important, ministry—

*"The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the desert until the day of his showing unto Israel."*

Thirty years' lonely preparation in seclusion—then a brief ministry of a year or so—then imprisonment and death at the whim of a wicked woman. This was the life story of him of whom Christ said there had never been a greater born of woman.

Luke 3 records that John began his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, and mentions various local rulers of the time. As close as can be determined, this appears to have been 26 AD.

All was under Rome, but there were different degrees of semi-independence and local control. Pilate was the Roman representative, directly controlling Judea and Samaria. His period of office was AD 26 to 36, so we know all the events in John's and Christ's ministries are within that period.

"Herod, tetrarch of Galilee" is the Herod all through the ministries of John and Jesus—the one who killed John and mocked Christ in conjunction with Pilate.

"Tetrarch" literally means "ruler of a fourth part," but it was used generally of a ruler of any portion of a country.

Iturea and Trachonitis, where Philip ruled, was the area northeast of Galilee. Abilene was still farther to the north.

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*"Annas and Caiaphas being the High Priests" (v. 2).*

Actually there could by the Law be only one High Priest. Annas had been High Priest but had been removed by the Romans who used the office as a political one.

The official High Priest at this time was Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law, but Annas still controlled the office. At his trial, Jesus was taken before Annas first, then before Caiaphas. Both were evil men.

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*"The Word of God came unto John in the wilderness" (v. 2).*

There was a direct moment of divine call to go forth on the mission from which he had so long been in preparation. His message was—

"Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

"Repent" in Scripture means "to turn, to change, to **think and act differently**." It was a call to turn from fleshly things to spiritual things, from earthly things to heavenly things—to prepare for the heavenly Kingdom.

It was not understood by the people. They flocked to him; they considered him a great prophet. There was a national flurry of excitement and show of repentance but it was passing and short-lived. Jesus sums it up later when speaking to the people of John (John 5:35) —

"Ye were willing **for a season** to rejoice in his light."

Shallow, superficial, imperfect conversion—partial dedication—half-way faith—worldly godliness—is the greatest enemy of salvation.

Mark says, "All men"—that is, the generality of the common people, not the rulers —

"All men counted John that he was a prophet" (11:32).

Truly he stirred the nation. He was a "burning and a shining light." But there was no permanent national effect, for the depth of the teaching, and its **vital bearing on all daily activities of life**—which is the only true religion—was never comprehended. This is so often sadly the case in the Brotherhood today.

It was the same nation that within 3 years rejected the Messiah whom John proclaimed, and clamoured for his death.

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JOHN'S ministry filled a very important and necessary part of the plan of God. The time had come for the Law of Moses to end. Jesus said (Luke 16:16)—

"The Law and the prophets were until John."

Jesus began a new dispensation, in which the Law of Moses could not fit. The Law had served its interim purpose—

"Till the Seed should come to whom the (Abrahamic) promise was made" (Gal. 3:19).

Clearly a connecting link was necessary as a foundation for Christ's work—a divinely-appointed transition from the Old to the New.

John was that vital link. He was of the priesthood and rooted in the Law. He was universally recognized by all the nation as a true, divinely-sent prophet.

And when he had become fully established and accepted, he introduced Christ to them as the long-promised Messiah—

"The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

And then John gradually faded from the picture—

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

When we think of John, we cannot but think too of his noble namesake on the Old Testament, who in some ways filled the same relation to David as John did to Jesus—

*"He must increase, but I must decrease."*

"He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom, but the friend of the Bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice.

"This my joy therefore is fulfilled."

In the strange beauty of the symbol, the friend of the Bridegroom, who stepped aside for him, is also part of the Bride, so his loss was eventually his gain. So with John: so with Jonathan.

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*"And he came to all the country about Jordan"* (Luke 3:3).

—that is, to the plain of Jordan, just north of the Dead Sea, near Jericho.

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of Yahweh. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (v. 4).

Of John, when his course was run, Jesus said (Matt. 17:12):

"Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.

"Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them."

And of the fickleness of the nation Jesus speaks in the parable of the children in the marketplace (Luke 7:33)—

"John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil.

"The Son of man is coming eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold, a glutton and a winebibber!"

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*"Then said John to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him:*

*"O generations of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*

*"Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance."*

*"Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."*

Gabriel had said to Zacharias (1:17) that John should—

"Make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

It was not that shallow, wavering multitude with whom his real work lay. Nor can his success be measured by its rootless natural results. He was a part of the great, unfailing purpose of "preparing a people for God."

John proclaimed no new doctrine. It was not his mission to proclaim a new doctrine. For he was sent to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers—back to the faith of the faithful fathers of the nation.

John's great message—and it was not new, but it was very necessary to be reemphasized— was that preparation for God's Kingdom required personal transformation and purification; and visible, tangible fruits of character and conduct—

"BRING FORTH FRUITS . . . Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

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*"And they asked him: What shall we do then?" (v. 10).*

—what is the fruit required?

His answer must have been a great surprise. They were doubtless prepared, in their shallow enthusiasm, to do something spectacular, like Naaman—something spectacular and self-satisfying, but that would not interfere inconveniently with their normal way of life.

His answer is so simple, and yet so searching. His answer comprehends all the essence of the Old, for both Christ and Paul say all the Mosaic Law is comprehended in one word, and John's answer is the simple, practical application of that one word.

And it comprehends, too, all the essence of the New. It is the one basic principle the Old and New have in common—

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor AS THYSELF."

—thou shalt think, and act, and live your lives, in terms of general universal welfare, and not selfish, exclusive, *personal* welfare.

It is expressed in many and varied ways in Scripture and illustrated by many and varied examples, but it is never more simply and effectively put than it was by John to the enquiring multitude.

**He puts an attractive theoretical principle in the form of an awkward and embarrassing practical challenge to sincerity—**

*"He that hath 2 coats, let him impart to him that hath none: and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11).*

Food and raiment—all the necessities of life. And we are commanded NOT to go beyond the necessities (1 Tim. 6:8)—

"Having food and raiment, **be therewith content.**"

—stop there, and turn the balance of your efforts and attention to eternal, worthwhile labours: lay up treasure in heaven where it is safe and lasting.

How many of us have more than 2 coats?—and yet there are still so many who have none. We can find them very easily if we really want to take the trouble to care.

**Is this perhaps being a little too literal?—a little too searchingly and uncomfortably literal?**

It is for each one to say what these things mean to him; for each one to work out between himself and God. But we can be assured that John was not expressing mere idle words, and that the way to the Kingdom he heralded lies only along the rarely trodden path that he points out so clearly.

Christ is the great example, and Paul a worthy illustration of following that example—

*"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."  
"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."  
"Look not every man on his own things" (Phil. 2:4).  
"Love seeketh not her own."  
"Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor."*

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IN the providence of God, John sufficiently—even though but shallowly and temporarily—cleansed and aroused and purified the nation, that God could manifest Himself through Christ among them and make a deep impression on many individual hearts that John had stirred to hope and expectation.

We are aware of the difficulty that even the sincere ones experienced in trying to fit Christ as he was into their conception of what the Messiah *should* be—

"We have heard out of the Law that Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou that the Son of man must be lifted up?" (John 12:34).

And when Jesus was asked—

"Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?"

He answered (Matt. 17:12)—

"Elias is come already, and they knew him not.

"Then the disciples understood that he spoke of John the Baptist."

Elijah truly comes at the end, before the great day of Christ's manifestation to Israel, but there had to be an Elijah for the first coming, for the first coming was a real and true offering to the Jews of the Messiah and the Kingdom.

God knew that Israel would reject Christ, and that this would not be the day of his glory to which the coming of the literal Elijah was related. It was so foreseen and foretold, and in the wisdom of God the working out of the plan of redemption depended on Christ's rejection.

But, still in the offering of Jesus to them, the promise of the forerunner must be fulfilled, to carry out God's part and to remove any justification of their rejection—

"This (John) is Elias, *if ye will receive it*" (Matt. 11:14).

*If they had accepted Christ, John would have been the complete fulfilment of the Elijah prophecy, but God knew it was not to be.*

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JOHN was sent to prepare the nation—to raise the national expectancy—to focus attention on the manifestation of Christ.

This was the principal purpose of his baptism. It was a transitional, introductory appointment, to lead to Christ, to prepare for Christ, and to provide the avenue by which Christ should be manifested.

It was a typical, national purification, because for 3 years God was going to manifest Himself intimately among them in His only begotten Son. John said, of the purpose of his baptism—

"That he should be made manifest to Israel, THEREFORE am I come baptizing with water"  
(John 1:31).

Baptism is a recognition of uncleanness and a seeking for cleanness. John's baptism was another link between the Old and the New.

The Law had its washings and purifications. The principle of symbolic cleansing by water was already established. The wisdom of God carried it a step further in John's ministry, and made it a public act and testimony of repentance from sin, and allegiance to righteousness.



The way was thus gradually prepared for the full significance of baptism as a death to the Old and a resurrection to the New—an entering into, and becoming part of, Christ and his sacrificial death and life-bringing resurrection.

To further establish the smooth continuity, Jesus—as he began his ministry—associated disciples with himself by baptism, and gradually came to baptize more disciples than John (John 4:1). Thus was the transition gently made—

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

*But baptism had still not yet been revealed in its full significance as related to Christ's great sacrifice for sin.*

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JOHN proclaimed a principle that the Jews were now going to have to see clearly—a principle illustrated and established in their own history, but which the nation had never understood.

It is a principle later greatly emphasized by Christ and Paul, and shown by them to go right back to the beginning in the selection of Isaac and rejection of Ishmael; the selection of Jacob and rejection of Esau—

"They are not all Israel who are of Israel, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:6-8).

John said to them (Luke 3:8)—

"Begin not to say within yourselves: We have Abraham to our father."

This was the national delusion, and it can be equally deluding today. Christ's brethren are not such simply because they belong to an ecclesia or a fellowship.

Membership of itself is no guarantee. It is essential, truly, and part of the required obedience, that we assemble with those of like Faith, and that we keep separate in fellowship from error.

But standing before God depends—not on mere membership—but on the character of our day-to-day and moment-to-moment activities and interests.

**We are "in Christ" ONLY if the everyday course of all our thoughts and acts are in Christ.**

The principle John emphasized is still vital:—It is not ritual and relationship but righteousness and reality, that constitute sonship to God.

*"We are in fellowship with the Father only when we are thoughtfully and consciously walking in the Spirit-Light.*

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JOHN was utterly single-minded and intense in his unsparing denunciation of wickedness, regardless of what was involved.

Because of his testimony against Herod's wickedness, Herod shut up John in prison, at the instigation of Herodias, his wife.

While in prison, John sent to Jesus, saying (Matt. 11:3) —

"Art thou he that should come or look we for another?"

This question by John presents somewhat of a puzzle. We must try not to read too much into it, nor too little. It was recorded for our comfort and admonition, and we must seek its lessons.

It is a great and helpful revelation of his inner feelings. It cannot be that John actually doubted that Jesus was the Messiah. This, he himself, on the direct evidence and testimony of God, had established. But he was perplexed. He sought assurance and reaffirmation.

It was a supreme test and trial for John to be confined to a dungeon while Jesus, whom he had announced as the Son of God and the long-promised Messiah, went about the country teaching, with no message for John, no hint of recognition of his plight, no explanation, no indication of what John could expect.

We are so strikingly reminded of Elijah himself when, after his so courageous stand on Mount Carmel, he fled in disappointment and despair before Jezebel.

John did not lose faith, but he seemed to lose heart and hope. The weak human flesh was spiritually exhausted by the long intensity of the struggle. John was mortal. He needed to be strengthened and comforted, and reminded of the glorious and unchanging realities.

In this perplexed appeal of John from the dark dungeon to the one whom he had joyfully and courageously hailed as the long-awaited Messiah, we feel a closer fellow-feeling with John than in any other part of his life. He was truly one of us, though he looms so great in the purpose. He struggled against the same mortal frailty, and out of weakness was made strong. Like Job, he could not understand and he agonized for an explanation of a seeming contradiction.

*Jesus did not give him any explanation. He did not even answer his question. John must, like Job, endure his unexplained testing in faith unto the end.*

But Jesus did give him this—fresh, powerful, conclusive evidence to strengthen his faith and encourage his patience, and he reminded him there were great blessings for those who held fast to assured realities in spite of passing appearances, and who did not weary or stumble at unexplained problems that lay behind the veil of God's wisdom.

We can not really say Jesus was rebuking John for being offended or stumbling. Rather it would seem he spoke to strengthen John's obvious struggle against the natural temptation of the flesh to be impatient under trial. His message was to help in the trial without hindering its purpose.

Jesus himself required and received angelic strengthening in Gethsemane. In the extremity of the trial there, he asked a question—"Can this cup pass?"—that it is not easy for us to fit into the pattern of his complete knowledge of what was before him, and his unreserved self-yielding to it.

But there is no question of his faithfulness, obedience, or sinlessness.

The record of these things is to help US to overcome—to encourage us with the example of others who have overcome. It helps us to realize that there are many things about temptation, about the flesh, about the ways of God, about others, about ourselves—that we can not understand.

*It is well we DO realize the pitiful limits of our understanding in so many things.*

Jesus did not send one word of direct encouragement or approbation to John by the messengers. There was just the calling attention to the miraculous, beneficial manifestation of the Spirit in works of life and healing, and a reminder of the blessedness of a patient, trusting faith unmoved by any stumbling-blocks—

"Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

The wisdom of Christ's reply lay in the fact that John's real need was not an explanation, but the realization that true blessedness consists in a faith that will joyfully and thankfully hold fast through anything, without explanation.

This alone is really faith at all. Jesus knew what John needed and that he would overcome, for as soon as the messengers were gone, Jesus spoke to the multitude of John's true greatness —

"Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

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WE are told no more about John's thoughts, feelings and sufferings. A little later on they all came to an end, at the hand of Herod's executioner.

It seems sad that a righteous man like John should be cruelly cut off by wicked hands, but in the wisdom of God he had done his work.

We **must** get GOD'S viewpoint, and we must get a true view of the purpose of this present life as simply a brief preparation for an eternal reality. It was not suitable that John should continue, once Christ had been introduced to the nation, and begun his ministry.

*John's work was done.*

John's whole purpose was to prepare the way for Christ. He was the last of the prophets of the old dispensation. If he had lingered on when his work was finished, it would have detracted from the power and success of that work, and hindered the transition from the Old to the New.

The sword of Herod, rather than a calamity, was a wise and merciful provision of God to clear the way for the new, and to give His beloved rest. And, as the forerunner, he must precede his Master in this also. Of John's death, Jesus said—

"They did unto him whatsoever they would:  
"Even so shall the Son of Man also suffer of them."

The picture at the beginning is joy, and at the end it is sorrow, but it is not the sorrow of those who have no hope.

Rather it is through the sorrow that the promise of the joy is fulfilled, and we meet now in rejoicing to commemorate an event that at its occurrence plunged all God's people into sorrow and despair.

Looking back, now it is all past, we see the sorrow as a passing and necessary factor in the wisdom of God's love to produce the final joy. And so— in the end—all sorrow will be seen to be.

—G.V.G.

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