



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

The Preacher with an admirable reputation

All things that John spake of this man were true , John 10:41.

Based upon a sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, March 12th, by Rev. Ivan Foster

The Lord Jesus ended His ministry where He began it, in the wilderness area around Jordan. Here John the Baptist baptised and first announced those immortal words: "Behold the Lamb of God."

It was from this place that the Lord Jesus went forth to the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. It was from this place He was now soon to go to Jerusalem for that final conflict with the Prince of Darkness at the cross of Calvary.

It was some three years since the death of John but the people of the area still remember his preaching. The presence of Christ in their midst brings back to their minds the words and ministry of John, and of his ministry they utter the words of our text: All things that John spake of this man were true. John wrought no miracle but he told the truth about Christ. Here is a reputation to be more desired than the working of miracles. In today's religious world, the working of miracles would be deemed a most marvellous sign of a preacher's divine calling.

But in truth it would be no such thing. Miracles are no evidence of a man's godliness. The magicians of Egypt worked miracles. That is recorded for us in Exodus 7:11. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. (See also 7:22, 8:7.)

The Antichrist's companion, the false Prophet, will also work miracles. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live, Revelation 13:13-14.

The true test of a preacher's genuineness is whether he speaks well of Christ or not. To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them, Isaiah 8:20.

I. SPEAKING OF THE LORD JESUS IS THE SUM OF A MINISTER'S DUTY

All that John said centred upon the Saviour. He warred with the Pharisees and challenged the Sadducees but only to advance the name and cause of the Saviour. He rebuked Herod and counselled soldiers but in so doing pointed them to Christ. The Apostle Paul reflects this emphasis in a number of places in his writings. *But we preach Christ crucified* , 1 Cor 1:23. *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified* , 1 Cor 2:2. *Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!* 1 Cor 9:16. *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world,* Galatians 6:14.



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The Lord Jesus is the sum total of theology. He is the Truth. He is the Word, the revelation of God unto men. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person . . .* Hebrews 1:1-3. John, the last of the prophets, like all the prophets before him, witnessed of Christ. *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,* Acts 10:43.

II. JOHN PREACHED ONLY THE TRUTH ABOUT THE LORD JESUS

Some speak some truth about the Lord Jesus but add to the testimony of Holy Scripture or detract from it. There are those who would call Him the Son of God but exalt Mary to be a co-redemptrix and mediatrix. There are those who would affirm His perfect manhood but deny His deity.

This was not the character of John's preaching . He spoke only that which was true of Christ and spoke all that was true of Christ.

1. In his preaching he was directed by God's Word. When he began his ministry, we are told in Luke 3:2, that he came with the Word of God to the people. *The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins ,* Luke 3:2-3. It is only as we stick to the Word of God in our preaching that we can set forth the truth concerning Christ.

2. He depended upon the help of God's Spirit. He was filled with the Spirit from his birth. Hear what the angel who announced his birth to his father, Zacharias, said of John. *He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb ,* Luke 1:15. We can exalt the Lord Jesus only by declaring all the counsel of God regarding Him when we are helped by the Holy Spirit. Preachers, if they would be faithful and useful, need the infilling of the Spirit of God. *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,* 1 Corinthians 12:3.

3. He defied the notions of men . If we would speak the truth in Christ and nothing but the truth, it will bring us into conflict with men. So it was with John. He gave his life upholding the law of Christ. He spoke the truth to Herod regarding his adultery and forfeited his life for his faithful witness. But Herod, the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Herod did not stop there, but had John beheaded at the behest of Herodias, his companion in evil.

4. He declared plainly Who Christ was. Never man spoke more plainly of the Saviour. He has left us a library of wonderful descriptions and titles which he used of the Lord Jesus. He called Him **the Son of God** , John 1:34. He called Him **the Lamb of God** , John 1:29, 36. He called Him **the Baptizer in the Holy Ghost** , John 1:33. He called Him **the Bridegroom** , John 3:29. What a wonderful knowledge John had of the Saviour!

III. WHERE THERE IS SUCH PREACHING SOULS WILL BE SAVED



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And many believed on him there , verse 42. When we think of the place where this season of soul-winning occurred we see how faithful preaching will bear fruit in the most unfavourable of places.

1. The place was in the wilderness. The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias *in the wilderness* , Luke 3:2-3. In a day when it is widely believed that God's house must rival the Ritz Hotel for plushness, it is good to recall that the seasons of God's greatest blessing upon the gospel were witnessed in places with few of today's creature comforts. The wilderness, the heather dells of Scotland and the woods and caves of the Italian Alps and many other such places have seen mighty outpourings of God's Holy Spirit and resultant ingatherings of souls.

2. Even after the preacher is dead. In a day of the Lord's visitation, words spoken long ago will live again. Truly it may be said of John the Baptist, *He being dead yet speaketh* . Many of the great Puritan writers were little honoured in their generation and yet their literary works have since been read and rejoiced in by millions. John Flavel, Thomas Manton, Richard Sibbes, John Bunyan, John Owen, Thomas Brooks and a host of godly men live and preach the cross of Christ today in the reprinted editions of their volumes. Godly words do not perish. They are like the words of Samuel. *And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground*, 1 Samuel 3:19. God's Word will not return to Him void. It will accomplish the sovereign will of Him Who sent it forth. Praise God, the true man of God never retires from preaching. With today's technology, sermons by good men over the last 40-50 years may still be listened to via cassette tapes etc. When the voice and mind give out and physical strength is gone, preachers may still expect God to bless to the souls of future generations, sermons stored on tapes.

3. They believed what John had said of Christ. Here is how a sinner gets saved. That is what it is to be saved. And many resorted unto him, and said, *John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true* , John 10:41. You can never be saved without simply believing the testimony to Christ set down in God's Word. John had told the people that Jesus was *the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world* . The people believed that report, placed their trust in Christ the Lamb Who died in the guilty place of sinners and they were saved. That is what saving faith is. It is a hearing and believing of the gospel record of Christ; a placing of the whole trust in Him alone to take away our guilt and reconcile us to God through His death on the cross. This is what believing God entails. *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son* , 1 John 5:10-11.

Will you believe in Christ right now? Will you do as this people did?

May God help you to place your faith in the Saviour.