

Jesus and John the Baptist

MEMORY VERSE: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

“John the Baptist was pronounced by our Saviour the greatest of prophets. Yet what a contrast between the language of this man of God and that of many who profess to be ministers of the cross. When asked if he was the Christ, John declares himself unworthy even to unloose his Master’s sandals.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 224.

Suggested Reading: *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 721–729.

1. A PROBLEM AMONG THE DISCIPLES

Sunday, Feb 9

a. What question arose among the disciples of John and the Jews? John 3:25.

John 3:25

Then there arose a question between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purifying.

“The disciples of John looked with jealousy upon the growing popularity of Jesus. They stood ready to criticize His work, and it was not long before they found occasion. A question arose between them and the Jews as to whether baptism availed to cleanse the soul from sin; they maintained that the baptism of Jesus differed essentially from that of John. Soon they were in dispute with Christ’s disciples in regard to the form of words proper to use at baptism, and finally as to the right of the latter to baptize at all.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 178.

b. How did John’s disciples express their envy over Christ’s work—and what noble answer did he give? John 3:26, 27.

John 3:26, 27

And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. 27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

“John had by nature the faults and weaknesses common to humanity, but the touch of divine love had transformed him. He dwelt in an atmosphere uncontaminated with selfishness and ambition, and far above the miasma of jealousy. He manifested no sympathy with the dissatisfaction of his disciples, but showed how clearly he understood his relation to the Messiah, and how gladly he welcomed the One for whom he had prepared the way.”—*Ibid.*, p. 179.

2. JOHN’S MISSION

Monday, Feb 10

a. How did John demonstrate that he understood his mission? John 3:28, 29.

John 3:28, 29

Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 29 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 represented himself as the friend who acted as a messenger between the betrothed parties, preparing the way for the marriage. When the bridegroom had received his bride, the mission of the friend was fulfilled. He rejoiced in the happiness of those whose union he had promoted. So John had been called to direct the people to Jesus, and it was his joy to witness the success of the Saviour's work.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 179.

b. Describe John's work—and ours. John 1:23, 29.

John 1:23

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

John 1:29

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

“Looking in faith to the Redeemer, John had risen to the height of self-abnegation. He sought not to attract men to himself, but to lift their thoughts higher and still higher, until they should rest upon the Lamb of God. He himself had been only a voice, a cry in the wilderness. Now with joy he accepted silence and obscurity, that the eyes of all might be turned to the Light of life.

“Those who are true to their calling as messengers for God will not seek honor for themselves. Love for self will be swallowed up in love for Christ. No rivalry will mar the precious cause of the gospel. They will recognize that it is their work to proclaim, as did John the Baptist, ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ John 1:29. They will lift up Jesus, and with Him humanity will be lifted up. ‘Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’ Isaiah 57:15.”—*Ibid.*, pp. 179, 180.

“Do not seek your own pleasure and convenience, but seek to know and do the will of God. Let each one inquire, Can I not point some soul to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world? Can I not comfort some desponding one? Can I not be the means of saving some soul in the kingdom of God? We want the deep movings of the Spirit of God in our hearts, that we may not only be able to secure for ourselves the white raiment, but that we may so influence others that their names may be entered in the book of life, never to be blotted out.”—*Historical Sketches*, p. 140.

3. THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Tuesday, Feb 11

a. How did the majority of the people react to Christ's message? John 3:32.

John 3:32

And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.

“The disciples of John had declared that all men were coming to Christ; but with clearer insight, John said, ‘No man receiveth His witness;’ so few were ready to accept Him as the Saviour from sin. But ‘he that hath received His witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true.’ John 3:33, R.V.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 181.

b. Upon whom is bestowed the gift of the Holy Spirit? John 3:34.

John 3:34

For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.

“We can receive of heaven’s light only as we are willing to be emptied of self. We cannot discern the character of God, or accept Christ by faith, unless we consent to the bringing into captivity of every thought to the obedience of Christ. To all who do this the Holy Spirit is given without measure. In Christ ‘dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him ye are made full.’ Colossians 2:9, 10, R.V.”—*Ibid.*

c. How is the key to receiving a greater measure of the Holy Spirit further revealed in Scripture? John 14:15–17; Acts 5:32.

John 14:15–17

If ye love me, keep my commandments. **16** And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; **17** Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

Acts 5:32

And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

“We are not only to say, ‘I believe,’ but to practice the truth. It is by conformity to the will of God in our words, our deportment, our character, that we prove our connection with Him. Whenever one renounces sin, which is the transgression of the law, his life will be brought into conformity to the law, into perfect obedience. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The light of the word carefully studied, the voice of conscience, the strivings of the Spirit, produce in the heart genuine love for Christ, who gave Himself a whole sacrifice to redeem the whole person, body, soul, and spirit. And love is manifested in obedience. The line of demarcation will be plain and distinct between those who love God and keep His commandments, and those who love Him not and disregard His precepts.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 92.

4. THE VALUE OF BAPTISM

Wednesday, Feb 12

a. Why is it important to understand the step we are taking for Christ when we decide to be baptized? John 3:36.

John 3:36

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

“Apart from Christ, baptism, like any other service, is a worthless form.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 181.

“No need of disputation as to whether Christ’s baptism or John’s purified from sin. It is the grace of Christ that gives life to the soul.”—*Ibid.*

“Only through Christ can immortality be obtained. Said Jesus: ‘He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life.’ John 3:36. Every man may come into possession of this priceless blessing if he will comply with the conditions. All ‘who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality,’ will receive ‘eternal life.’ Romans 2:7.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 533.

“Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Those who are baptized in the threefold name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they have forsaken the service of Satan and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 91.

b. Explain the startling words of John the Baptist which revealed the depth of real-life commitment signified by baptism? Luke 3:7, 8.

Luke 3:7, 8

Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

“John laid the ax to the root of the tree. He reproved sin, fearless of consequences, and prepared the way for the Lamb of God.

“Herod was affected as he listened to the powerful, pointed testimonies of John, and with deep interest he inquired what he must do to become his disciple. John was acquainted with the fact that he was about to marry his brother’s wife, while her husband was yet living, and faithfully told Herod that this was not lawful.”—*Early Writings*, p. 154.

“John the Baptist met sin with open rebuke in men of humble occupation and in men of high degree. He declared the truth to kings and nobles, whether they would hear or reject it. He spoke personally and pointedly.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 149.

5. A WISE METHOD

Thursday, Feb 13

a. Upon realizing that the Pharisees were trying to create a crisis between John and Himself, what did Jesus do? John 4:1–3.

John 4:1–3

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, **2** (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) **3** He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.

“Jesus knew that [the Pharisees] would spare no effort to create a division between His own disciples and those of John. He knew that the storm was gathering which would sweep away one of the greatest prophets ever given to the world. Wishing to avoid all occasion for misunderstanding or dissension, He quietly ceased His labors, and withdrew to Galilee. We also, while loyal to truth, should try to avoid all that may lead to discord and misapprehension. For whenever these arise, they result in the loss of souls. Whenever circumstances occur that threaten to cause division, we should follow the example of Jesus and of John the Baptist.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 181.

b. What should we learn from John's attitude to defuse the crisis? John 3:30.

John 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease.

“Like John's disciples, many feel that the success of the work depends on the first laborer. Attention is fixed upon the human instead of the divine, jealousy comes in, and the work of God is marred. The one thus unduly honored is tempted to cherish self-confidence. He does not realize his dependence on God. The people are taught to rely on man for guidance, and thus they fall into error, and are led away from God.

“The work of God is not to bear the image and superscription of man. From time to time the Lord will bring in different agencies, through whom His purpose can best be accomplished. Happy are they who are willing for self to be humbled, saying with John the Baptist, ‘He must increase, but I must decrease.’”—*Ibid.*, p. 182.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

Friday, Feb 14

- 1. Why did John's disciples become jealous of Christ's work?**
- 2. What did John declare to his disciples?**
- 3. For what purpose is the gift of the Holy Spirit granted?**
- 4. How does baptism fulfill its true objective?**
- 5. What did Jesus and John do when they realized the danger of a crisis between their disciples?**

Suggested Reading: *Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 721–729.*

The fact that so large a number are associated together in the church at Battle Creek, and that so many important interests center there, makes it pre-eminently a missionary field. People from all parts of the country come to the sanitarium, and many youth from different states attend the college. That field demands the most devoted, faithful workers and the very best methods of labor in order that a strong influence for Christ and the truth may be constantly exerted. When the work is conducted as God would have it, the saving power of the grace of Christ will be manifest among those who believe the truth, and they will be a light to others. **(5T 721.1)**

But there is at Battle Creek a sad neglect of the many advantages at hand to keep the heart of the work in a healthy condition. Vigorous heartbeats from the center should be felt in all parts of the body of believers. But if the heart is sickly and weak in its action, all branches of the cause will be enfeebled. It is positively essential that there should be a sound, healthy working power at this central point in order that the truth may be carried to all the world. The knowledge of this last warning must be diffused through families and communities everywhere, and it will require wise generalship both to devise plans and to educate men to assist in the work. **(5T 721.2)**

As year by year the work extends, the need of experienced and faithful workers becomes more urgent; and if the people of the Lord walk in His counsel, such workers will be developed. While we should rely firmly upon God for wisdom and power, He would have us cultivate our ability to the fullest extent. As the workers acquire mental and spiritual power, and become acquainted with the purposes and dealings of God, they will have more comprehensive views of the work for this time and will be better qualified both to

devise and to execute plans for its advancement. Thus they may keep pace with the opening providence of God. **(5T 721.3)**

A constant effort should be put forth to enlist new workers. Talent should be discerned and recognized. Persons who possess piety and ability should be encouraged to obtain the necessary education, that they may be fitted to assist in spreading the light of truth. All who are competent to do so should be led to engage in some branch of the work according to their capabilities. **(5T 722.1)**

The solemn and momentous work for this time is not to be carried forward to completion solely by the efforts of a few chosen men who have heretofore borne the responsibilities in the cause. When those whom God has called to aid in the accomplishment of a certain work shall have carried it as far as they can, with the ability He has given them, the Lord will not allow the work to stop at that stage. In His providence He will call and qualify others to unite with the first, that together they may advance still further, and lift the standard higher. **(5T 722.2)**

But there are some minds that do not grow with the work; instead of adapting themselves to its increasing demands, they allow it to extend far beyond them, and thus they find themselves unable to comprehend or to meet the exigencies of the times. When men whom God is qualifying to bear responsibilities in the cause take hold of it in a slightly different way from that in which it has hitherto been conducted, the older laborers should be careful that their course be not such as to hinder these helpers or to circumscribe the work. Some may not realize the importance of certain measures, simply because they do not see the necessities of the work in all its bearings and do not themselves feel the burden which God has specially laid upon other men. Those who are not specially qualified to do a certain work should beware that they do not stand in the way of others and prevent them from fulfilling the purpose of God. **(5T 722.3)**

The case of David is to the point. He desired to build the temple of the Lord, and gathered together rich stores of material for this purpose. But the Lord told him that he was not to do that work; it must devolve upon Solomon, his son. David's large experience would enable him to counsel Solomon and encourage him, but the younger man must build the temple. The weary, worn minds of the older laborers may not always see the greatness of the work, and they may not be inclined to keep pace with the opening providence of God; therefore weighty responsibilities should not rest wholly upon them. They might not bring into the work all the elements essential to its advancement, hence it would be retarded. **(5T 723.1)**

For the want of wise management the work in Battle Creek and throughout the State of Michigan is far behind what it should be. While it is necessary for us to understand the situation and the needs of foreign missions, we should also be able to comprehend the needs of the work at our very doors. If rightly improved, the advantages which God has placed within our reach would enable us to send forth a much larger number of workers. There is need of vigorous work in our churches. The special message showing the important issues now pending, the duties and dangers of our time, should be presented before them, not in a tame, lifeless manner, "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." 1 Corinthians 2:4. Responsibilities must be laid upon the members of the church. The missionary spirit should be awakened as never before, and workers should be

appointed as needed, who will act as pastors to the flock, putting forth personal effort to bring the church up to that condition where spiritual life and activity will be seen in all her borders. **(5T 723.2)**

Much talent has been lost to the cause because men in responsible positions did not discern it. Their vision was not far-reaching enough to discover that the work was becoming altogether too extended to be carried forward by the workers then engaged. Much, very much, which should have been accomplished is still undone because men have held things in their own hands instead of distributing the work among a larger number and trusting that God would help them in their efforts. They have tried to carry forward all branches of the work, fearing that others would prove less efficient. Their will and judgment have controlled in these various departments, and because of their inability to grasp all the wants of the cause in its different parts, great losses have been sustained. **(5T 723.3)**

The lesson must be learned that when God appoints means for a certain work we are not to lay these aside and then pray and expect that He will work a miracle to supply the lack. If the farmer fails to plow and sow, God does not by a miracle prevent the results of his neglect. Harvesttime finds his fields barren—there is no grain to be reaped, there are no sheaves to be garnered. God provided the seed and the soil, the sun and the rain; and if the husbandman had employed the means that were at his hand, he would have received according to his sowing and his labor. **(5T 724.1)**

There are great laws that govern the world of nature, and spiritual things are controlled by principles equally certain. The means for an end must be employed if the desired results are to be attained. God has appointed to every man his work according to his ability. It is by education and practice that persons are to be qualified to meet any emergency which may arise, and wise planning is needed to place each one in his proper sphere, that he may obtain an experience which will fit him to bear responsibility. **(5T 724.2)**

But while education, training, and the counsel of those of experience are all essential, the workers should be taught that they are not to rely wholly upon any man's judgment. As God's free agents, all should ask wisdom of Him. When the learner depends wholly upon another's thoughts, and goes no further than to accept his plans, he sees only through that man's eyes and is, so far, only an echo of another. God deals with men as responsible beings. He will work by His Spirit through the mind He has put in man, if man will only give Him a chance to work and will recognize His dealings. He designs that each shall use his mind and conscience for himself. He does not intend that one man shall become the shadow of another, uttering only another's sentiments. **(5T 724.3)**

All should love their brethren and respect and esteem their leaders, but they should not make them their burden bearers. We are not to pour all our difficulties and perplexities into the minds of others, to wear them out. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." James 1:5, 6. Jesus invites us: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30. **(5T 725.1)**

The foundation of Christianity is Christ our righteousness. Men are individually accountable to God, and each must act as God moves upon him, not as he is moved by the mind of another; for if this manner of labor is pursued, souls cannot be impressed and directed by the Spirit of the great I am. They will be kept under a restraint which allows no freedom of action or of choice. **(5T 725.2)**

It is not the will of God that His people in Battle Creek should remain in their present condition of coldness and inaction until by some mighty miracle-working power the church shall be aroused to life and activity. If we would be wise, and use diligently, prayerfully, and thankfully the means whereby light and blessing are to come to God's people, then no power upon earth would be able to withhold these gifts from us. But if we refuse God's means we need not look for Him to work a miracle to give us light and vigor and power, for this will never be done. **(5T 725.3)**

The Lord has shown me that men in responsible positions are standing directly in the way of His work because they think the work must be done and the blessing must come in a certain way, and they will not recognize that which comes in any other way. My brethren, may the Lord place this matter before you as it is. God does not work as men plan, or as they wish; He "moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform." Why reject the Lord's methods of working, because they do not coincide with our ideas? God has His appointed channels of light, but these are not necessarily the minds of any particular set of men. When all shall take their appointed place in God's work, earnestly seeking wisdom and guidance from Him, then a great advance will have been made toward letting light shine upon the world. When men shall cease to place themselves in the way, God will work among us as never before. **(5T 726.1)**

While extensive plans should be laid, great care must be taken that the work in each branch of the cause be harmoniously united with that in every other branch, thus making a perfect whole. But too often it has been the reverse of this; and, as the result, the work has been defective. One man who has the oversight of a certain branch of the work magnifies his responsibilities until, in his estimation, that one department is above every other. When this narrow view is taken, a strong influence is exerted to lead others to see the matter in the same light. This is human nature, but it is not the spirit of Christ. Just in proportion as this policy is followed, Christ is crowded out of the work, and self appears prominent. **(5T 726.2)**

The principles that should actuate us as workers in God's cause are laid down by the apostle Paul. He says: "We are laborers together with God." (1 Corinthians 3:9) "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, *as to the Lord*, and not unto men." Colossians 3:23. And Peter exhorts the believers: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 4:10, 11. **(5T 726.3)**

When these principles control our hearts, we shall realize that the work is God's, not ours; that He has the same care for every part of the great whole. When Christ and His glory are made first and love of self is swallowed up in love for souls for whom Christ died, then no worker will be so entirely absorbed in one branch of the cause as to lose

sight of the importance of every other. It is selfishness which leads persons to think that the particular part of the work in which they are engaged is the most important of all. **(5T 727.1)**

It is selfishness also that prompts the feeling, on the part of workers, that their judgment must be the most reliable and their methods of labor the best or that it is their privilege in any way to bind the conscience of another. Such was the spirit of the Jewish leaders in Christ's day. In their self-exaltation the priests and rabbis brought in such rigid rules and so many forms and ceremonies as to divert the minds of the people from God and leave Him no chance to work for them. Thus His mercy and love were lost sight of. My brethren, do not follow in the same path. Let the minds of the people be directed to God. Leave Him a chance to work for those who love Him. Do not impose upon the people rules and regulations, which, if followed, would leave them as destitute of the Spirit of God as were the hills of Gilboa of dew or rain. **(5T 727.2)**

There is a deplorable lack of spirituality among our people. A great work must be done for them before they can become what Christ designed they should be—the light of the world. For years I have felt deep anguish of soul as the Lord has presented before me the want in our churches of Jesus and His love. There has been a spirit of self-sufficiency and a disposition to strive for position and supremacy. I have seen that self-glorification was becoming common among Seventh-day Adventists and that unless the pride of man should be abased and Christ exalted we should, as a people, be in no better condition to receive Christ at His second advent than were the Jewish people to receive Him at His first advent. **(5T 727.3)**

Jews were looking for the Messiah; but He did not come as they had predicted that He would, and if He were accepted as the Promised One, their learned teachers would be forced to acknowledge that they had erred. These leaders had separated themselves from God, and Satan worked upon their minds to lead them to reject the Saviour. Rather than yield their pride of opinion, they closed their eyes to all the evidences of His Messiahship, and they not only rejected the message of salvation themselves, but they steeled the hearts of the people against Jesus. Their history should be a solemn warning to us. We need never expect that when the Lord has light for His people, Satan will stand calmly by and make no effort to prevent them from receiving it. He will work upon minds to excite distrust and jealousy and unbelief. Let us beware that we do not refuse the light God sends, because it does not come in a way to please us. Let not God's blessing be turned away from us because we know not the time of our visitation. If there are any who do not see and accept the light themselves, let them not stand in the way of others. Let it not be said of this highly favored people, as of the Jews when the good news of the kingdom was preached to them: "Ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." Luke 11:52. **(5T 728.1)**

We are taught in God's word that this is the time, above all others, when we may look for light from heaven. It is now that we are to expect a refreshing from the presence of the Lord. We should watch for the movings of God's providence as the army of Israel watched for "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees"(2 Samuel 5:24)—the appointed signal that heaven would work for them. **(5T 728.2)**

God cannot glorify His name through His people while they are leaning upon man and making flesh their arm. Their present state of weakness will continue until Christ alone shall be exalted; until, with John the Baptist, they shall say from a humble and reverent heart: "He must increase, but I must decrease." John 3:30. Words have been given me to speak to the people of God: "Lift Him up, the Man of Calvary. Let humanity stand back, that all may behold Him in whom their hopes of eternal life are centered. Says the prophet Isaiah: 'Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.' Isaiah 9:6. Let the church and the world look upon their Redeemer. Let every voice proclaim with John: 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'(John 1:29)" **(5T 729.1)**

It is to the thirsting soul that the fountain of living waters is open. God declares: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." Isaiah 44:3. To souls that are earnestly seeking for light and that accept with gladness every ray of divine illumination from His holy word, to such alone light will be given. It is through these souls that God will reveal that light and power which will lighten the whole earth with His glory. **(5T 729.2)**