

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 1- Luke 1:15-17** **7 The Greatest Man Born of Woman- Part 2**

November 30, 2008

Luke 1:15-17

Now last week, we were looking at what the angel told Zacharias about the son that He was going to give to him. In verses 15-17- we see the Promise that God makes about John- so let's read those verses again together:

15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

17 It is he who will go as a *forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Now last week- we saw how that Jesus said that John the Baptist was the greatest man born of woman. And we were looking at the three characteristics that made John to be great.

Now as I mentioned last week- there really isn't anything in John's life that we can see that would be associated with anything we might call "greatness". And that's why it says in verse 15, "He will be great ***in the sight of the Lord***." Because he was *not* great in the sight of Man- even though he did garner a small following who understood that he was a true prophet of God and who believed in him and who were loyal to his message. And they were so loyal to him that John himself had to push them away from himself and towards Christ- which didn't do anything but increase the speed with which his own star faded from the sky.

And as we studied last week- when God says that someone is great- that means that it was God Who made them great. We must understand, dear friends, that we do not make ourselves to be great in the sight of the Lord- but it is God Who makes us to be great by covering our sin and by imputing His Own Righteousness to us.

Human greatness- for the most part- is an offense to the Cross, and the effort by many today to become great in the earth is to reject the life of a bondsman that Christ has called us to.

Let me remind all of us that Christ does not call us to come to the Cross so that we can be made much of- but Christ has called us to come to the Cross to die- to give up our rights and to give up our search for importance and to give up our sense of self-worth and self-esteem and to live our lives to the Glory of God alone.

So it was Promised to Zacharias that his son would be great in the sight of the Lord only in the sense that God was going to rescue John from his own inherent sinfulness and that God was going to mercifully and graciously save John from his sins and cover his sins and impute the Righteousness of Jesus Christ to him by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone- about 33 years before Jesus even died on the Cross.

And last week we began to talk about the three demonstrations of John's "greatness" and we began by looking at John's own personal character. So let's read **Luke 1:15** again together:

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

And we talked about the fact that because this verse says that John would not partake of either wine or strong drink for the duration of his entire life shows us volumes about the man's personal character. John willfully abstained from celebrating with wine- not because anything was wrong with it- but because he took consecration to the very highest level that he could.

And I taught you last week about the difference between the two beverages that were both called wine in the Bible- one being non-alcoholic grape juice and the other being fermented grape juice mixed to the ratio of at least 8 parts of water to 1 part fermented grape juice- with

the appropriate caution associated with each one. And we also saw how that God's people always, and in all cases, were prohibited from ever touching hard liquor or strong drink except in the case of a dying man being offered comfort similar to what we do today in hospitals with morphine.

So here was a man who on the *outside* was a consecrated, devoted, and separated man. He was free from fashion concerns and free from dietary restrictions and free to do one thing- prepare the way for the Lord. So the phrase- (he) **will drink no wine or liquor** - speaks to us of his outward consecration to the ministry of the Lord- a consecration that I might add that we desperately need today in the pulpits of American Churches that have been overrun with comedians and charlatans and hirelings and men who are the most theologically inept group of men in the history of the Church- who manipulate people for their own personal gain and have been made fat and wealthy off the backs of God's people as they have fed themselves and they have not fed the sheep and they have prophesied "*Peace and Safety*" when sudden destruction is at the door.

If we are to have a revival in our day, beloved- let it be a revival of the Fear of the Lord and a revival for the hatred of sin and a revival of the rejection of worldliness and a rejection of covetousness and a rejection of worldliness and a revival of a love for God and a revival for a love for God's Word and a revival about being obedient to the Lord and of being led by God's Spirit and not driven by our own lusts.

This is what John was all about as he cried out, "*Repent- for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!*" And this is what we need to be about as the Day of the Return of Jesus to this sin cursed earth draws near.

But as dedicated as John was on the outside- look at the inside, verse 15, and it's the inside that made the outside possible.

...and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit- and that will be the pattern of his life. He not only will be a man on the outside devoted to God at the highest level of devotion, but on the inside John will be led and empowered by God at the highest level as well.

Now I realize that much is taught about being filled with God's Spirit today. But let me say to you that much of what is being taught

today is wrong- it is absolutely wrong. Being filled with God's Spirit is nothing more nor less than being empowered and directed and motivated and led and overwhelmed by God's Spirit.

And many teach that you must be filled with the Holy Spirit after Salvation- that being filled with the Holy Ghost is something that happens subsequent to being saved as a later work of Grace- when in reality- unless you are empowered and enabled by God's Spirit while you are still lost- you will never be saved to begin with.

You see, dear friends- Regeneration-the quickening of the dead sinful person- is a Sovereign Work of God the Holy Spirit that precedes Justification. God's Spirit comes to every single chosen elected soul- whom God has chosen for Salvation from before the foundation of the world- while they are still lost, and God gives them eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to believe. And God reaches down inside the body of the lost soul and God takes out of him that old sinful rebellious nature that pertains to Adam and God replaces that nature with a new Divine nature that is created in Righteousness and true Holiness.

And so with eyes that God Sovereignly gave us and with ears that God Sovereignly gave us and with a heart that God Sovereignly gave us – all motivated by a new Divine Nature- the lost soul then can hear the Gospel and choose to repent and believe.

So God the Holy Ghost goes inside the body of people before they are saved- not after and the Bible says that God doesn't "woo" them to Jesus; He doesn't invite them to come; he does not send them flowers. No, no, no- the Bible says that God the Holy Ghost *draws* those elected souls to Jesus in the very same way that fishermen draw fish out of the water in their nets- violating the stew out of their free will and gives them the Power and causes them to want do something- that left to themselves they would never do- and that is to believe the Gospel and be saved!

Another false teaching says that those who are filled with the Holy Ghost must speak in unknown tongues in order to prove that they are filled. The Bible says here that John was filled in his mother's womb and he could not speak in tongues there because he could not speak at all.

So the idea of being filled with the Spirit simply means that John would be under the influencing control and power of the Holy Spirit from the very moment that he was in his mother's womb. His life will

be under the Spirit's control. His life will be dominated by the Will of the Spirit. The Will of the Spirit, of course, is largely expressed in the Word of God, but his life will be dominated by Holy Spirit influence. By the way, the phrase "being filled with the Spirit" Luke uses numerous times in the book of Acts. It simply means God's Holy Spirit will be in control of his life while he's still in his mother's womb.

Let me just add a footnote here, this speaks to the viability of a fetus. The Bible teaches life begins at conception and here is a life capable of being controlled and dominated by the Holy Spirit before its ever coming into this world, before birth. So we can rightly conclude that abortion is a hostile attack against the life that God has created in the womb and it is murder and it is an evil of epic proportions.

Now we must remember that it is the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity who has the task of working divine power in the lives of God's people, both Old Testament and New, saving them, sanctifying them, instructing them, sending them, using them. And that control was to be exhibited in the case of John while he was still in his mother's womb- that is how special this man's life was.

Now while this may be odd to us today- John being under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb is not unusual in some special unfolding of God's purposes. Jeremiah, the great prophet, chapter 1 verse 4 says,

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

The same thing is true not only of Jeremiah, but of Paul. **Galatians 1:15** says,

15 But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased

16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,

So this incontrovertibly indicates that life begins at conception and that the fetus is, indeed, a real human being- capable of being under the controlling influence of the Spirit of God. And this is the

strongest possible way to express Sovereign Election- God's Sovereign Elective choice of John to Salvation and to Sanctification and to Empowerment and to Service before he was ever born. This child wasn't even conceived yet, and yet the Promise to Zacharias was that he would be justified, covered with righteousness, walk in personal holiness, be empowered and influenced by the Holy Ghost, and would be pleasing to God. John would live a consecrated life under the energizing of the Spirit of God which work of the Spirit began while he was still in his mother's womb.

No mention of what John wanted to do with his life, no mention about what Zacharias wanted for his own son, no mention of John fulfilling his dreams or being all he could be- but you will have a son, you will name him John, and he will be great in the sight of the Lord walking in integrity and being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb.

Now you can argue that Zacharias was pleased with this because he had prayed for many years that God would grant him a son. But what Zacharias had not prayed and what Zacharias had not imagined and what took Zacharias completely off guard and startled him so greatly that he disbelieved and argued with the angel and was struck dumb in judgment was that he would name his miracle son John and that his son would be the forerunner to the Messiah! Never in a million years did Zacharias ever dream of anything like this.

Now to give you more proof that the child was indeed so special that he was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb- over in verse 41 when Elizabeth who was pregnant at the time, six months pregnant, heard Mary's greeting, the babe John leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit! And she didn't speak in tongues either, but began to prophesy over Mary. Truly that was some kind of physical manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit. And over in verse 67- John's father Zacharias was also filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. Now that is a powerful family. Everybody filled with the Holy Spirit...everybody under the Spirit's Power and Influence.

So the first evidence of John's greatness is manifest in his personal character.

Secondly, John's greatness was evidenced in his Privileged Calling- his Privileged Calling. First was his Personal Character and second is his Privileged Calling. Please look at **Luke 1:16-17:**

16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

17 It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Now we're going to get into this in great detail later- so we don't need to cover it all right now. But this is the high water mark of John's greatness- this is the pinnacle of his greatness- this is what made him to be great. It was his privileged calling...he will go as a forerunner before the Lord. The word "Him" here in verse 17 is Christ, Him is the Messiah, God in human flesh, identified at the end of verse 16, "The Lord their God, and it is John who will go as a forerunner before Him," antecedent of "Him" is the Lord their God. Marvelous to realize the Messiah is God, the Messiah is the Lord. Jesus is the Lord, Jesus is God. And John will go before the Lord God when He comes. John was the prophet who would identify the Messiah. That was John's Privileged Calling.

Now let's get into this further- so keep your finger on **Luke 1-** because we're going to come back to that in a minute- and let's turn to **John 1:6-8:**

6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him.

8 He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light.

Now look down to **John 1:15:**

John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”

Now when John says here that “**He existed before me**”- John is speaking of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ- that Jesus was not created- but that He is God and was always with the Father.

Now look at verse 19:

19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”

20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

21 They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”

22 Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”

23 He said, “I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

25 They asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

26 John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know.

27 *It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

So in verse 23, John said, “**I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said**”, in **Isaiah 40:3**. And then John is the one in **John 1:29** who pointed to Jesus and said, “**Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**” This was his Privileged Calling.

Now let’s go back and look again at **Luke 1:17**:

17 *It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*”

Now here in **Luke 1:17** it says that John came as a forerunner before the Messiah in both the spirit and the power of Elijah. Now that is really important because the Jews believed that before the Messiah came to set up His Kingdom- Elijah had to come. But where just did the Jews get the idea that Elijah was supposed to come before the Messiah? Keep your finger here in **Luke** and turn with me to **Malachi 3:1**:

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.

So in the very last Book of the Old Testament- **Malachi**- that was written 400 years before John was born- this prophet said that God was going to send His messenger and this messenger will clear the way for the Messiah. So before the Messiah came into the world- God would send His messenger. And who was the messenger?

Malachi 4:5&6:

5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

6 He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

So before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, before the Lord comes in great Glory- God said through the prophet Malachi- that He was going to send Elijah. So the Jews were expecting Elijah. And Elijah was the prototype of a true prophet of God- faithful, powerful, miraculous, bold, and uncompromising. He was the prophet of God who proclaimed Divine Truth unequivocally from God, fearlessly in the face of a ruthless monarch- just like John did. You can read all about Elijah by reading **1Kings 18**.

So the question is- *“Is John Elijah?”* I mean, if he's announcing the coming of the Messiah, Malachi said Elijah would come before the Messiah comes? And kings in the ancient near east would always send somebody to prepare the road for them and to prepare the people for the royal entry. Malachi said the Messiah will have a forerunner, Elijah. And so the question then arose, and it was a legitimate question that we just read in **John 1:21a&22**:

21 They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” ...

22 Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”

And according to the last part of **John 1:21**- John said,

... No.

"No, I am not Elijah...I'm not Elijah." And that is very interesting. He very clearly said, "I am not Elijah." So how are we to understand this then? Listen to what Jesus said in **Matthew 11:13-15**:

13 For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

14 And if you are willing to accept *it*, John himself is Elijah who was to come.

15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

So, I ask again, "How are we to understand this?" Jesus says, "**If you will receive *it*,**" Receive what? If you will receive John's Message, if you will receive Me, Jesus, as your Messiah, if you will receive the Kingdom that Jesus brings- then John will have fulfilled that Elijah prophecy. And if you do *not* receive John's message to repent, if you do *not* receive Jesus as your Messiah, if you do *not* receive the Kingdom that Jesus brings- then John's message to repent is not for you, and Jesus as Lord and Master is not for you, and the Kingdom of God is not for you, and you are of your father the evil one, and you have not been chosen by my Father from before the foundation of the world, and you cannot hear My words and you are not my sheep.

And this means that the prophecy of Malachi was figurative. It wasn't going to be a literal resurrection of the real Elijah- but one who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. That's what Malachi was talking about- an Elijah-like prophet- one who would powerfully, boldly, faithfully, and uncompromisingly proclaim Divine Truth fearlessly to God's people and even in the face of a ruthless king. So in that sense- he would be like Elijah.

And so the angel tells Zacharias that John will be one who will go in the spirit and power of Elijah- that his son will be the "Elijah" that Malachi promised over 400 years earlier. And John will announce the long awaited arrival of the Messiah. And Jesus says, "If you believe the message, if you believe the Gospel, if you believe Me- John will fulfill that Elijah prophecy. He will be that Elijah-like prophet."

And, of course, that leaves room for another thought- What if they don't believe- because most of them didn't believe. Well, that means

that even though John did come in the spirit and power of Elijah- to those people who rejected Salvation through Jesus Christ- there must be yet a future fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy before the next great and terrible day of the Lord. So before Jesus comes to destroy the ungodly and to set up His earthly Kingdom- there will be in that day before He arrives another Elijah-like prophet who will announce His arrival. Perhaps it could be one of the two men described in **The Revelation 11**.

So that's the significance of that and we'll see more of that as we go through Luke Gospel Account- that John would come fulfilling the Malachi prophecy of the Elijah who arrives before the Messiah comes to set up His Kingdom if they believe. If they didn't believe- then John would be just one of two Elijah-like prophets- the first one now and the next one before Christ's Second- in that day of the Lord. So this is a Privileged Calling, to put it mildly, to have the honor of pointing to the Messiah, pointing to the Gospel, and of identifying the Savior of the world. So that is the second demonstration of John's greatness- his Privileged Calling.

So the first demonstration of John's greatness was his Personal Character, the second was his Privileged Calling, and now we want to look at the third demonstration of John's greatness and that is his Powerful Contribution...his Powerful Contribution.

Now the impact of John's ministry is defined for us and it is as great a contribution as any human could ever make. Look again with me to **Luke 1:16**:

And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

What higher contribution could anyone make than that? The word "turn back" is from the Greek *epistrepho*, which is a technical term for "conversion". So there's going to be a lot of conversions under John's ministry. John is going to come- preaching conversion. By the way, epistrepho appears in the Old Testament Greek- from the Septuagint- because it's a common Old Testament word for "conversion". And this Old Testament Greek word is the New Testament word for conversion that Luke, Paul, and Peter used in their writings.

So John is going to preach- calling people to repent and to convert. And that is the general Call to all men everywhere to repent and believe

the Gospel and be saved. That is the very same message that Jesus preached and that Paul and Peter and the other Apostles preached, and that is the very same message that we are to preach- repent and be saved.

And you need to know that nobody is preaching the true Gospel unless they call on people to repent, unless they call on people to utterly forsake their sin and turn with all their heart to God. Nobody gets saved- hear me- nobody gets saved unless and until they renounce their wicked deeds and they confess their wicked sins and reject their wicked lives and turn with passion and conviction to Jesus for Mercy.

So don't come to God so God will bless you when you're lost. Don't do that. Don't come to God for God to heal you when you are lost. Don't ask God to bless you and prosper you and do great things for you when you do not love Him and you do not serve Him.

Jesus didn't die on the Cross, dear friends, to get you out of jail or to help you get a better job or to pay your light bill or to get your mortgage caught back up because you've been down at the Casinos gambling your money away or at the bar drinking your paycheck up or because you have been wasting your money snorting coke or engaging in riotous living.

Jesus didn't die on the Cross so that you can fulfill all your dreams or so you can fly like an eagle or so you can be all you can be. Jesus didn't die to make much of you or so that you will be large or so that you can have more money and a bigger car and a nicer house and finer clothes or a better wife.

Jesus didn't die to rescue you from a dead end job or a husband that doesn't mind you or a neighbor that doesn't like you. Jesus didn't hang there and bleed-screaming out, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, **WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?**", so you could reach your full potential here on earth and build up your self esteem or so you could hit more home runs or score more touchdowns or get your teeth fixed.

No, Jesus was nailed to the tree so that your wicked sins and my wicked sins could be forgiven; so that we would turn from loving this present evil world and turn from loving ourselves and turn from loving money and turn from being covetous and turn from our pride and our arrogance and our self-importance and our self-esteem and die to sin and to die to self and die to our own ambitions and die to our own

dreams and die to our own lusts and our own ways and our own rotten empty vacant vapid fallen depraved selves and be saved.

Jesus died on the Cross so that we would be saved from the Wrath of God that is heading right for all mankind like a freight train running at 300 miles an hour and we are chained to the tracks, to be saved from eternal damnation in a lake of fire that burns with brimstone, to be rescued from the full and just and proper and right and correct payment for our sins, to be delivered from hell, to be saved from God's vengeance against our wickedness, to be set free from a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, to be saved from a place that although it burns bright with unquenchable fire- it is as dark as the sin that sends us there, a place that although it is as hot as anything we can imagine is the coldest place on earth and a place where we can look out and see across a wide cavern- a table spread and with Abraham sitting there and all those who were chosen to believe sitting there and feasting with Jesus while we ourselves are cast out.

True Gospel preaching begins with one word, "Repent!" Repent! Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. And nobody gets saved without a full and true turning away from all sin, a complete abandonment of self, and a heartfelt and eternal desire to live our lives for no other cause than for the Glory of God alone. Anything other than that and you are just playing Church and you will never last and you will never enter into God's Kingdom- you are yet in your sins.

That was John's message- calling the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God, back from their disobedience, back from their apostasy, back from their rebellion, back from their love of iniquity, and back from their own self-righteousness- and they killed him for it- the evil king cut the head off the greatest man born of woman up that time so that he could lust after a dancing girl! Amazing!

And this is really the primary work of all the prophets. Go through the story of Old Testament prophets and you'll find them all calling to their people saying, "*Repent... return... come back... be converted to the Lord your God.*" And what was the result of almost every single one of these prophets? The people they were sent to – to call them to repentance killed them.

You know when I compare these great Biblical prophets who walked barefoot through the streets of Jerusalem crying out for God's people to Repent, and then read about their sufferings, their rejections,

and their martyrdoms- and then I see the current crop of these self-appointed and unaccountable so-called modern day prophets- it really makes me sick to my stomach and then it makes me mad as these prima donnas prance around and entertain people with prophecies of Peace and Safety- making merchandise of the people of God and dressed like peacocks with their teams of body guards feeding themselves and not feeding the sheep and promoting their own importance while the sins of God's people go untouched. "Pillow prophets" they are and God has got their number!

Now the noun form of epistrepheo means conversion. So John was given a ministry of conversion. What higher calling than that, to be the instrument by which God produces conversion?

And down in verse 76, God gave Zacharias these words about the child,

76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;

77 To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

That's the gospel, folks, you're going to talk about the Messiah; you're going to tell people that Judgment is coming; that the Savior is coming. You're going to talk about Turning from sin and you're going to talk about Abandoning self and about Salvation and the forgiveness of sin and the Mercy of God, and you're going to talk about the sunrise- that's the Messiah- Who is going to visit us and shine His light into our darkness and guide us in the way of peace- that's the Gospel. He was a preacher of Messiah. So John was a preacher of Salvation. He was a preacher of conversion. God was going to use him that way and that's the highest privilege that anybody could ever have.

By the way, John's ministry is described in great detail in **Luke 3**- from the beginning of **Luke 3** to verse 18 it describes John's ministry- and we'll see that in detail when we get there.

Now look again at what it says in the middle part of **Luke 1:17**. It says that John is going to:

... TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN ...

And that is a direct quote from the last verse of the Old Testament, **Malachi 4:6**. But what does it mean that John will turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children? It means that John is going to come with a message that's going to cause conversions in whole families. That's what Malachi prophesied. General repentance, touching all of society- both young and old- John didn't have to have separate Churches for different age groups like they do today- everybody in the family would turn to the Lord because everybody in the family could hear the same message.

So old and young alike are going to convert because they've repented of their sins and they're going to come back to God by faith in the Messiah and families are going to be reconciled, families are going to be brought together. And that goes along with what Moses taught in **Deuteronomy 5:29** when he said:

Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!

Through John's ministry- sons and fathers and children and adults would all come back to God in repentance and conversion.

And then Luke 1:17 describes the conversion in yet another way:

... and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous ...

The angel tells Zacharias that John is going to turn the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous. Those who are disobedient- and that is a very interesting Greek word, apeithes- it's a great word. It means someone who will not be persuaded...someone who will not believe...someone who's obstinate and stubborn and refuses to believe and obey. John's Powerful Contribution is going to take those people who have stubborn, obstinate, hard hearts, and it is going to change their attitude...attitude, their thinking, their understanding, their mindset and they're going to turn toward righteousness.

Wow! John is going to actually cause people to convert to God! He's going to cause people to repent of sin. He's going to cause people to turn from harden unbelief and disobedience to a love of righteousness. That's some kind of powerful life.

And of this is going to happen so that the end of **Luke 1:17** will come to pass:

... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

John is going to get people ready for Messiah's arrival!

So we can see then that John had a real ministry of Old Testament conversion and he got people to turn from their self-righteousness and their sin and turn back to God. So John was going to bring people to the recognition of their sin and produce repentance. He was going to bring them to the recognition of their hard hearted disobedient attitudes and God was going to use John to change their mindset so they would pursue righteousness. Literally he was going to be used by God to bring about conversions so you would have a group of people ready for the Messiah's arrival.

And I am convinced that those who did believe in Jesus Christ, many of those who did believe in Jesus Christ when He came, many of those who believed in Jesus Christ after He died and rose again, many of those people had been prepared hearts under the ministry of this great man, named John.

So John's great contribution to the Kingdom of God was to bring a body of people to spiritual conversion so they would be ready to receive the Messiah when He arrived. To make ready a people. Luke uses the word "people" sometimes for Israel, sometimes for the nations. And here it certainly includes Israel because that was the area where John did his ministry, but we know that this Gospel would extend to the world.

Such was the child that the angel describes to Zacharias in his Personal Character, His Privileged Calling, and in His Powerful Contribution.

And I want to close with something that is really mind boggling. Turn over to **Luke 7:28** for just one comment on this verse.

I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

And that's the statement that Jesus made about John. But now look at the very next statement:

... yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

So what is that saying? That is saying that contrasting the Kingdom of God with something else- John's greatness is not spiritual. John's greatness was, in a sense, although his message certainly was a message about the Kingdom of God, John's greatness was in the task that he fulfilled humanly. John's greatness was in the fact that he was given the greatest task that any man had ever been given and that was that he could literally point to and identify the Messiah for the very first time.

John's great contribution was to point to Christ, to point people to Christ. No man before John had ever had that privilege; no man had ever had that honor; no man had ever been at that level of greatness in terms of human calling.

But you have to keep that in perspective. As great as that is in the human realm- Jesus said that even the least person in God's Kingdom is greater. The bottom line is that spiritual greatness exceeds human greatness every time. Even the least amount of spiritual greatness that we get by being saved by Grace through faith in the finished Work of Christ alone exceeds any human greatness. So in the spiritual kingdom of redeemed souls- everybody ranks at the top- right underneath Jesus.

So John was great from the human perspective- he had the greatest job any person could ever have. But when it comes to the spiritual realm- John was just like the rest of us- he was a sinner who was saved by Grace- because in Heaven- even the least will enjoy the same eternal life.

So as you think about the greatness of John- I want to let you know that you're in the Kingdom and spiritually we're all great in the sight of God because we've been covered by the spotless Righteousness of Jesus Christ. But even humanly speaking- we on this side of the

Cross can approximate the greatness of John. You say, *"What do you mean, Brother Blair?"*

This is what I mean- personal character wise- we all can live at that very same high level of spiritual commitment, can't we? We can all choose to take the high ground. We can choose to live a consecrated, separated, devoted, Christ-like, God-honoring, holy life like John chose to live. And even though we not have the privilege of being filled with the Spirit of God in our mother's womb- nonetheless- are we not all promised that the Spirit of God would take up residence inside each of us? And are we not continually enjoined to the New Testament to be continually filled with the Spirit? We like John can enjoy the highest level of spiritual devotion and the greatest expression of spiritual power in the indwelling Holy Spirit.

And we not only can share John's Personal Character- but we can also share John's Privileged Calling because we are in this evil sinful world. John was given the ministry of conversion- and according to 2Corinthians 5- you and I have been given the very same ministry of reconciliation- to call men as ambassadors to God- to be reconciled to God- to repent and believe the Gospel and be saved. So we have the very same honor of pointing souls to the Savior who takes away sin. We can say like John, *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

And in the end- we can also have a Powerful Contribution just like John did. God can use us for conversion. God can use us to bring people to repentance. God can use us to cause people to turn from obstinate, hard-hearted, disobedient unbelief to the love of righteousness and to obedience to God. And God can use us to prepare a people who will be ready when Jesus comes- the second time.

What a great calling and so has God called us to this greatness as He did John.

Will you accept your calling?

Let's come and pray?

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.