

John Baptist

Matt. iii, 12.

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Matthew iii, 1, 2 :— ~~In those days~~
came John the Baptist, preaching
in the wilderness of Judea, and saying:
Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven
is at hand.

^{163?}
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11
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No figure in human history,
with the single exception of the
Divine Redeemer, occupies so ~~the~~ dis-
tinguished a place as the man whom
this text recalls to our attention. The
Lord himself has assigned him this
honor. The most careless reader of the
Gospel narrative can hardly fail to be

struck with the essential importance
of his part in it. In the most remark-
able, even the central period of the
world's history, events of the most
stupendous character wait on his
appearing, until his preaching. The
Redeemer of a world cannot, such
is the manifest providence ~~of God~~
of God, declare to it the surpassing face
of salvation, until the son of ~~Christ~~
Bethlehem has been born & grown to matu-
rity & filled a notable place in the
attention of the age. Yet amid this
preeminent distinction, John is as
remarkable for his character, as for his
opportunity. Mistaken by his fellow-
men — so frank is his position & work
— for the very Messiah of Israel, he
confesses & denies not, but confesses:
"I am not the ~~Christ~~" Nay, he declares
that he is unworthy to be a ~~man~~

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Matthew iii, 1, 2: — In those days
came John the Baptist, preaching in
the wilderness of Judea, and saying:
Repent ye; for the kingdom of Heaven
is at hand.

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~~1. "Those days": — the general expecta-
tion of the Messiah; prophetic times, closed,
Simeon & c.; distress of Jews; corruption &
decay of religion; exultation of~~

1. "Those days" — Herod & Rome domina-
ting; distress of nation; religion, wh. sh. have com-
forted, corrupted & decayed; temporal expectations
among heathen, & among Jews; but true time for Mes-
siah; understood by Simeon et al.

2. Marvelous birth of John; youthful wilder-
ness. (X⁵ signs need advan. of being unkn. proph., like John)

3. Moral power of wilderness

4. John's personal appearance & manner
5. Peculiarity of his doctrine - "Baptizer" -

BAPTIZM

6. His mission: to preach & teach repentance; men do not receive the joy God has for them, or, receiving, do receive a miss, unless they were first cleansed of unrighteousness, & had attention turned to spiritual things; diffic? of this then. - His humble tho' fierce ("dared not")
7. His success (no miracles to aid) - men asked what do, got no success; nevertheless, numbered at least (his noble firmness)

Lessons

1. In darkest times look for light. ("When tale of bricks is doubled Moses comes"; most earnest prayer is itself sign of prevailing faith, for who seeks in zeal where he does not expect?)
 - ~~2. Trouble time is God's blessing time, or John in wilderness~~
 2. Withdrawal fr. world is good for us, court. ("div. Ku. visit tho' acquired, busy sense life, amidst noise of folly, clamor parties, confusion opinions, allurement of vice) - world may learn much what is folly advised; but do not gain spiritual wisdom, obtain mastery over passions, & habitual love holiness, at least occasionally retire ~ world, & converse w. our own hearts & be still." - ~~Exhortation~~ Emory d. Philip. Ku.)
 3. Appearances don't make power, but work & aim
 4. Success is what God rewards, not men
 5. Above all, repentance is needed to enable us to enjoy God's gifts
- Take of great men in Bible

servant of him ³ who is preferred
before him. He meekly ~~declares~~ an-
nounces, what he might have pro-
fited to keep secret, that he must
decrease while another, unknown
in his day, shall increase. And
yet with all this ~~gentleness~~ ^{meekness} of spir-
it, he is bold in a wicked & fair-
saying generation to rebuke a
sinner, even tho' the offender
man is a prince & he must
pay the forfeit with his life. In
every light, wherever & whenever
we observe him, John the Bap-
tist appears in the gospel, even
as our Savior said of him: "Among
them that are born of women
there hath not (Matt. xi, 11) risen a greater
than John the Baptist." — But, it
would seem as tho' even his

greater had ⁴ been given him
but as it were to make him a
better helper to us, for it is added:
He that is least in the Kingdom
of Heaven is greater than he. "What
can we learn of this eminent
~~man~~ famous, sainted man, that
may make our lives better? To
dwell for a time upon his history,
may furnish us some suggestive
answers to the inquiry.

1. The "days" in which John
the Baptist flourished, were them-
selves sufficient to attract our at-
tention to any notable figures in them.
It was no uninteresting or unim-
portant period in the world's history.
It was about that time when the
splendid Roman empire, reaching

5
over an ^{almost} incredible area of do-
main, was coming to the zenith of
its glory. Roman civilization was
spreading over the world; Roman
roads, the admiration of all ages since,
were breaking down old walls of iso-
lation & bringing races & principles
of national life into contact
which made ~~that~~ a seed time for
modern institutions. Grecian civiliza-
tion was giving a ~~language~~ philo-
sophy & a love of philosophy to
the thinking world, & accompany-
ing these princely influences with
a language to feel & use them by.
Judea, that central nation of an-
cient history, was bowing imper-
fectly & sullenly under the yoke of
Rome, & scheming & hoping to find
some escape from her slavery. The

distresses which were vexing her
had been aggravated by the ~~decay~~
corruption of her religion; & the
sublime ~~faith~~ expectation of a Mes-
siah, which had made her worthy
of the first rank among all na-
tions in the tide of time, had been
materialized into a gross worldy
~~expectation~~ ambition which would
have made an Isaiah shudder,
& did evoke the fiercest rebukes
from the wandering child of the
desert. Religion, in Israel's dark-
est day, had ceased, almost, to be
a comfort. A proud & worldy
clergy had tainted with their
traditions the very fountain
of the national health; the ho-
man oppression discouraged, with

shame, the noble hearts; only here
& there the studios, secluded
seineous & humas kept pure the
ancient hope, & waited for the
coming of the Lord.

The man who could gain the
popular ear, & move the people
to a freshening of heart, at such
a time, is worthy our most in-
terested' thoughts.

But the time was more re-
markable in the ^{midst} prevalence, out-
side of Palestine, of a singular, al-
most religious ~~enthusiasm~~ antici-
pation. Like the Xth world at the
year from Lord 7000, who confi-
dently believed that the end of all
things was come, so the heathen
world, with a mysterious accept-

and ~~the possession~~^r of Jewish
doctrine, were about John's time
anticipating that a great prophet
was to arise among the Jews
who should bring in the golden age
of the world. The visit of the ma-
gi to him but one evidence, ^{to this effect} in event,
of which there are a ~~number~~
number in the literature of that
age.

The man who, supposed to be
that great expected one, could, in
such a time, at the zenith of a
preeminent fame, acknowledge
himself to be but an unworthy
forerunner of the ~~Christ~~, can teach
us, by his life, things profitable
for our ~~thought~~.

There can be but one satisfac-
tory explanation of this great life;

such an expl⁹ nation, indeed, as
alone satisfies our sentiment often
as we read the history of mighty
men, but such as ~~human~~ secular
historians are slow & reluctant
to adopt. It is our advantage in
the Bible, as a historical book,
that the sacred writers never
hesitate ~~to~~ in this. Irving & Bau-
crop may hesitate to explain the
story of Washington by direct
reference to Divine purpose &
Almighty control; Motley may
picture the father of the Dutch
republic without the perspective
of the same far-reaching view;
Napoleon's chroniclers may stop
at the feeble notion of a "child of

destiny". But ¹⁰ the all-wise God
taught Matthew the tax-gatherer
to write John Baptist's history, &
that sacred author points us at
once, & without any uncertainty,
to the Key to his ~~own~~ first hero's
character in the fact that ~~not~~
the Supreme Being had a part
work to be done, & ~~miraculously~~
by means adapted to the greatness
of the occasion save John his
birth & his mission.

Introduced to us, thus, what a
baccination there is about the
pretellings, & the birth, of the
prophet! Seven hundred years be-
fore (B.C. 712, Is. xl, 3), the great-
est of Israel's prophets had foretold
him: "The voice of one crying in the

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miserable, prepare ye the way of
the Lord, make straight in the des-
ert a highway for our God... &
the glory of the Lord shall be revealed
& all flesh shall see it." Three hun-
dred years later, still four hundred
years before John's time, the last
of the prophets foretold him again:
"Behold, I will send my messenger,
& he shall prepare the way before
me, & the Lord, whom ye seek,
shall suddenly come to his tem-
ple" (Mal. iii, 1).

Thus miraculously heralded, he
comes into life by a miraculous
birth; the angel Gabriel proclaim-
ing his future, & the circumstances
attesting to divine purpose.

Of his early years, as of the early

years of him ¹² Whom he fore-
told, we have no account, further
than that (Luke i, 80) "he grew &
waxed strong in spirit, & was in
the deserts till the day of his
showing unto Israel."

But how suggestive, & instructive,
these few words! Like Moses, he
was in the desert; like Israel, who
for forty years studied in that great
~~and~~ school of God the lesson of
~~character~~ ~~truth~~ truth & char-
acter; like Paul, three years in Asia-
via; like his Lord, forty days in the
wilderness. Ah! if God, who main-
festly devised & conducted all this
marvelous life, sent John Baptist
into the deserts "till the day of his
showing" — how significant the con-
trol suggested in that word! — "unto

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Israel"; - what profit is there not
in our times of retirement, our sick-
nesses, our bereavements, our solitude,
our Sabbaths!

The lesson was evidently learned,
for which the young prophet
was withdrawn from the busy haunts
of men, & it is not difficult to read.
He learned there to look first of
all things, not to himself, not to
the world, but to God; to know
truth, & love it, & serve it, not to
crave evil, nor to ~~serve~~ put
earthly pleasures before godly en-
deavors. The meekness which con-
cealed his true mission, was de-
veloped in those solemn soli-
tudes. The manliness which made

him a de-
 sin to herod, nor taught him by
 the divine spirit in that remo-
 val from noisy clamors. There
 Elijah heard the still small voice,
 & Paul saw visions that man
 could not utter, John Baptist
 was named for his great mission.
 Happy the man, whom God choose,
 to teach! Blessed is he, who con-
 sents to desire that wisdom which
 sends him away such as the
 angels, not men, call great!

~~Returning from the wilderness,~~
~~John appeared in the ^{way} roads of the~~
~~Jews,~~

Ready now to fulfil his mis-
 sion, the son of Elisabeth was

begins to be a preacher of
 righteousness. Men are thinking,
 all over Judaea, of the old pro-
 phesies of Daniel. The students of
 the book declare, that the time
 is fulfilled. Foreigners indicate a
 curiosity in the matter which in-
 creases the general interest. ~~Men~~

The miraculously-born youth has
 not been ~~lost~~ forgotten, or is
 at once remembered as he is
 heard of on the desert border of
 the Jordan. His hard ascetic
 life, his vehement, almost fierce
 manners, above all, his remarka-
 ble work, bring multitudes to the
 spot where he chooses to remain.

The preacher, in a luxurious,
 corrupt age, as a man who believes
 in God & His truth, & cares for nothing
 else; as he, in our ~~own~~ more
 enlightened yet still unhappy time,
 have heard the evangelist Moody
 preach, putting religion back, in
 public opinion at least for a season,
 where it belongs, into the first &
 most honorable place. Soft rei-
 nement is only in John's thoughts to
 be laughed at. Kings' houses are
 places he regards only as adopted
 to illustrate, not to delight, life.
 Fashionable people & easy-going
 preachers, Pharisees, scribes, all
 the men & women of the world, of
 his day, he looks upon with the
 fondest contempt: - need, shaken

by the mind!" '7 He is no rhetorician.
He is no scholar. He has no re-
commendations, no influential friends,
not even ~~for~~ the entrée of
a Synagogue. He dresses & eats as a
woodman, & neither will nor can
comment himself to the polite
tastes of the cultured. Yet, "all Ju-
dea, & they of Jerusalem" (Mark i, 5)
go out to hear him; nor do they stop
with hearing, they honor him. Why?
Ah! because, in that degenerate, needy
age, he has the truth! he glories in
the truth! he can tell the truth!
He knows, not much of the laws
of business, not any thing of ~~social~~
& social sciences; but he knows that
the cause of every evil that men-
ber is only one, is sin, & that it is in

the great lov^{ing} heart of Is-
rael's God to eradicate that evil!

He has one singular, impressive
custom. He baptizes. - Must we stop
here, my hearers, & lose our interest
in the commanding narrative of
this fore-runner of X^c, to ask how
he baptizes? whether with much
water or little, whether by one
motion or many? I believe, betw-
ven, to be too much delayed with
such inquiries is to weaken the
force of the whole grand story. Let
us go on. He baptizes. ~~For what? Not~~
Not that he invents the rite. The
Jewish fathers baptize; but they, only
proselytes to Judaism from the pagans.
He baptizes all whom he approves,
Jews & Gentiles alike. The reason for
his ceremony must be found in

his general aim. He ~~says~~ tells men but one, simple truth; he wives them to accept it; & that they may be thoroughly committed to it, & own it up before all, he avails himself of an existing, familiar custom, & baptizes all who come. His baptism is the public recognition & profession of his doctrine.

What, then, is his doctrine?

It is capable of statement by a single word, the great word in his preaching: "Repent." He bids men turn now, at last, from their corruptions, their worldliness, their blasphemous comminations of religion & ambition, in a word, from their base & unhappy ~~point of observation~~ ^{notion of the ends} of life. In the age of that enervation

must have to endure a long
 man enslavement, in the age of
 the Pharisees — "when" (as Dr. Schaff,
 Ex. Ch., i, 52) remarks) "the fairest flowers
 of science & art had withered, &
 the world was on the verge of
 despair" — he cries: "Repent!"

The cause & reason for his cry is,
 in the good Providence of God, that
 the set time has come to favor
 Zion, the good news of salvation
 is now fully ready to be made known;
 & men must prepare themselves
 for it. Else shall they be like John's
 father Zacharias, who was so stag-
 gered by the features of the revela-
 tion which God sent him, that he
 could not receive it. — But men
 do not know the reason, as he
 preacher; that is the privilege of

21 ^{accomplished} they ^{history}, not
in who read theirs who were making the history.
They were hoping for a divine King,
not a savior. So John adds his
reason: "For the Kingdom of Heaven
is at hand."

Wonderful power must have been
this man's, who, - thus briefly stating
his whole errand, which ~~not for a~~
men did not understand for a
generation, almost even under his
own teaching, - could do work upon
men's consciences, that they would
consent to do as he bade them, &
whatever it was! They came in
multitudes to the Jordan & were bap-
tized, confessing their sins. Then
saw him the name of John the bap-
tist - John the baptizer, would be a
more literal & significant form of the

now — because he required
 all men without any distinction
 whatever, to repent, & show it by
 submitting to the ceremony he
 chose to perform over them. What
 mattered it to him or them, just
 what he did? But he required it of
 all. A savior for all was about to
 appear; it was John's to prepare
 the way, to cast up a highway for
 that savior, by turning men atten-
 tion away from the world & to
 their sins, that when the savior
 should come they might be believ-
 ing in him enough to re-
 ceive him. Alas! how was he de-
 spised & rejected of men! "He came
 to his own, & his own received him
 not." But that rejection only shows

in, as he survey²³ the whole
history, how deep ~~was the~~ humili-
versal ~~was the~~ need of the fore-
number, & that his preaching should
be vehement & convincing.

The power of John's preaching
is shown us by one of the records.
Men of all classes came to him ask-
ing: What shall we do? Despised but
prosperous taxgatherers did this; sol-
diers, ~~accustomed~~ impatient of
rebuke & accustomed to license;
selfish citizens, unused to any such
appeal as his to their moral
sense. Where shall we look for
such reception of preaching, or
of any effort at influence, com-
monly now? These men who have
so moved multitudes are few &

far between. Mar ²⁴ it not a mighty
work of the holy Spirit of God, work-
ing thro' John as an instrument,
which was preparing, with a di-
vine might, the hearts of a genera-
tion for the coming of their
Savior?

Still, thro' this is the true
way in which to regard the mar-
velous success of the preaching
of John, the Forerunner:— we
need never lower our admiration
of this grand hero ~~of God's~~ of a
long past age, because we can
see that God signally helped him.
The success of all great men, great
in whatever department of life, comes
from God. He builds up one, & puts

down another; ²⁵ but because
the Bible goes behind the
scene in one case, & does not
in many another — because it
explains the secrets of John's suc-
cess, & leaves us to study out for
ourselves those of Demosthenes,
or Antony, or Webster; — it neither
follows, that God did not give the
latter their success, nor that
John, because so signally aided,
is any the less worthy to be called
great, than they, or others. If
never well, did we read the holy
Scriptures often with a similar
attention & enthusiasm to that which
we bestow upon ~~the~~ secular tales
of great men; — often, ^{only} ~~not~~ ^{truly} great,
rather than usefully & nobly great.

John died, as most men do, as he had lived. Despising the world's prizes in his days of growth, he held the beginning of his confidence steadfast to the end. There have been great preachers and great leaders who were severe, or even ascetic, at first, but who succumbed at last to the blandishments with which an admiring world ~~tempted~~ degraded their success: ^{Mahammad, Erasmus.} Not so the forerunner of K. He endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Perhaps, indeed, it was no easy task. Possibly this is the explanation of that fierce unbending demeanor of his — that severe disposition, those unceremonious & uncompromising utterances. It

may have been ²⁷ the very severity
of the inner conflict, which left
upon the surface of that humblest
holiest of men, that manner
which, as in so many whose ap-
pearances are disparate from their
hearts, disadvantages with observers,
tho' it is a sign of good purpose.

For whatever else is notable
about John the Baptist, not-
ing in his history stands out
more glorious than the humil-
ity of his heart. He rebuked sin
vehemently; he had scant cour-
tesy for conventionalism; but
it was not pride that ruled him,
nor one trace of self-seeking.
He was a child of the Kingdom.
There was one thing God had

shown him ²⁸ to be food; to
seek that, as a plain servant of
the Most High, receiving the na-
ges which he would concede, was
all this man's desire; & he read the
world a lesson in that he found
entire content in the mere con-
sciousness of being found faith-
ful. And that he was; & thro' he
lost his head at the call of a pri-
vate girl, in the dungeon of the
king, later ages have acknow-
ledged & honored his name as it
deserved.

And yet again, we can hardly
conceive of John the Foreman-
ner, as possible to have been any
other than just what he was,
his peculiar type of preaching,
his personal bearing, everything

individual & ²⁹ characteristic
about the man, strikes us at once,
when we look at him critically,
as impossible to be severed from
the whole man & history. Tho'
he is the herald of the Gospel of
peace — of the meek & lowly Jesus,
— yet we would not, if we could,
remove one single emphasis of
his vehemence. God chose just
this man; ay, & used him too.

Humility is of the heart, not
of the manner. Usefulness is
not in appearance, but in fact.
By their fruits ye shall know
the servants of God, not by their
tally or discrepancy on human
reckonings. He who wishes to
do the good work; who says to
the adversary within: Hence!

30
who devotes his life to a
~~true purpose, shall in the meas-~~
true purpose, ought to have the
love of men, & shall, in the meas-
ure of God's purposes & times, re-
ceive the crown of divine bles-
sings.

If John the Baptist was great,
if God glorified him and men
remember & praise him — is
not the one concern of his
life worthy to command our
lives? He lived for X's sake. He
is in everlasting remembrance
for one word of his, one favorite
constantly uttered word: "Repent!"
Making all allowances for differ-
ence of epoch, of birth, of histori-
cal nearness to the Son of Man; is

31
there, after ^{all, any thing}
of his story ~~that~~ may not be
ours, ~~that~~ we may not covet,
~~that~~ ought not to be ours? We
can live for ~~It's~~ sake, as he did;
we can make ours, his favorite
word: "Repent!" many a one
has, moved by such examples as his;
how it would please the heart of
his Lord & ours, the loving Saviour
who died for us & for him, if
we all would! for He has said, that
we might be persuaded to consider
how possible it is, how desirable,
how holy: "Among them that
are born of women there hath
not arisen a greater than John
the Baptist; yet he that is but
little (R. V.) in the Kingdom of Heaven

32
is greater than ~~he!~~ "Grant
as his position was, ours is yet
greater; yet not of one degree,
~~that one among us should be~~
preëminent in our epoch, as he
was in his; greater all we than
he, as to our fullness of sight
& possession of the Divine Gospel!
Why should not this word: "Re-
pent!" be often, nay, be constant-
ly, on our lips or at the least be
in some way vocal from our
lives? how can you live, a
professed disciple of the Saviour,
never invite any one to aban-
don sin & love your Lord?
Every Israelite had this for his
duty (Levit. xix, 17): "Thou shalt in
any wise rebuke thy brother & not

suffer sin upon him" (or, "that thou bear not sin for him"); how then shall we hold a place in the spiritual, X^u Israel, and say not as did John: "Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" to every one to whom we may say it; & O! the felicity of heralding salvation to a soul in the perils of sin! Consider it, in the candid solitude of your own Sabbath; let nothing dismiss it until your mind shall have fairly determined; & tell me, is there any thing so worthy of your desire, your use, any good so surely within your reach, as this — to do, in your time & place, such a work

as John the ³⁴ son of Elizabeth
did in days of old: herald
the Saviour to those to whom
He will show Himself?
This one reflection would
suffice to close & render of
value our brief review of the
life & work of John the Baptist.

— " —