**GREAT AND GODLY SUCCESSIONS IN THE BIBLE – PART 3**

**John Baptist to Jesus** Luke 3.3-18 John 3.22-30

Some years ago, when I did a major renovation on our house, I employed several subcontractors for areas like plastering, tiling, carpet laying and plumbing. And when it came to contacting them, I got into the habit of identifying them in my mobile phone contacts by their first name and then their speciality. So, I’ve got - Darren Carpet, Colin Plasterer, Dave Electrician, Glen gas Plumber and even Joe Blinds and for my boat, Cameron Yamaha, on it goes! Now you understand the name John the Baptiser (JB)! Because that is what he did! Today I want to talk about succession and purpose from the life of JB. It was Paul who wrote, *“I built on a foundation…Apollos watered…but God gave the growth!”* Whether you realise it or not, you are building on someone else’s foundation. Your life is in a succession line to those who have gone before you and those who follow you - and here is the clincher, how well you build could determine how those who follow you travel on the road to life!

**430 YEARS** Did you know that there was a400-year gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament? After what appears to be a Bible filled with communication and messages from God, suddenly nothing. No word from God through prophets, the heavens were silent. It was like God had withdrawn from planet earth and had nothing to say.Then like a bolt out of the blue comes, not a fully grown person but two pregnancies. John the Baptist was born to a childless couple in their old age and Jesus of Nazareth born to a young, engaged couple. And the significance of these two births was shown to just a handful of people. There was a longing for God to do something to rescue his people. There was a climate of oppression and joyless existence. It seemed like for generations God had done nothing but observe His people spiral downwards into an abyss of hopeless despair.

God was working like he always does underground –beneath the surface for the perfect timing to bring into the world his Son Jesus. And if the pregnancies were not jaw-dropping enough, then the arrival and births would be! JB was born to Elizabeth who was barren and an older man Zechariah who had been struck dumb for nine months and whose tongue was only loosened when he instructed the name of the baby boy was to be John! And then to top it off, Jesus birth was in a barn in a remote village with angels, bright stars, shepherds and Kings. All very bizarre! And then once again – nothing - silence for another 30 years. A blip on the screen of life with no above-ground clear outcomes. What was that all about?

This Christmas I think the succession of John Baptist to Jesus has something to teach us. Both the lives of JB and Jesus had a **clear purpose before they were even born.**

Luke 1:15-17 spells out his assignment. He will **prepare the coming of the Lord,** and he will **turn the hearts** of the fathers to their children and Malachi adds the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:5-6)

***This morning I want to suggest that JB prepared the way for Jesus by:***

**1. Preaching an Uncompromising Message** – *Repent!* – turn to God

Make crooked paths in your lives straight! God was back among his people. And he preached a radical message and baptised people by immersion and people came from far and wide. JB was an eccentric revivalist and reformer.

I think we need to learn again from JB about the power of the gospel message. The power is *in the message* itself, not us. We have somehow lost the essential message. Here is something for you to do: take a moment and write down what is the core message of the gospel in four or five simple statements. Can you do it? Your statements need to have something about sin and separation, (who are you) about faith in Jesus (who is Jesus) to bridge the chasm your sin has caused (what did he do for you), and something about forgiveness and freedom and the Holy Spirit. (what should I do now)! If you cannot do that, you are not equipped to do the core purpose of your life.

**2. Pointing the way to the Saviour**

His life purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus – like a bulldozer! There is no pretty way to do excavation!!! Big machinery, imposing and brutal. Making straight the way, levelling the hills and filling the valleys. It’s noisy, unmistakeable, messy, rearranging hills and valleys. Making straight and clear roads and a highway where there was none. You know here’s the thing that many people don’t like – they want to make faith in Jesus a kind of quiet personal thing that you can do that is hardly noticed by others. But the levelling and *rearranging* of hills and valleys in our lives is anything but!

And while JB was out there urging people to turn back to God….over the hill came Jesus to be baptised and John knew immediately – this is the One! With opportunity to maximise his popularity he chose the exact opposite to promote the favour and increase of the Anointed One and made this startling announcement, ‘He must increase, and I must decrease’ It’s not about me JB would say it’s about Jesus! We are just the curtain raisers for the main event, and the main event has arrived!

**3. Fulfilling the prophetic word to his generation**

Isaiah 9:6, Listen I am not even fit to tie his shoelaces; this was not a succession of equals. He is the Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, all in one! JB stood between the past and the future on the *axis of history* and transitioned his successor. So, in this way, JB links the Old and New Testaments, and he joins them in the person of Jesus. Many people struggle with the OT and its laws and bloodshed, and they prefer the NT, but you cannot understand the old without the new and visa versa! They need each other, and it was Jesus who quoted the OT on the day he began his public ministry.

4. **Leaving a Life Legacy for others to Follow**

Our **greatest desire** should be the success of those who follow us.

In our *home and family* life, your kids (their success is my success), The most incredible thrill for a parent – to see your kids having kids.

In our *church community*, when things go well (we all win!) So there's no protectionism and territorialism. “My patch mentality.”

What took place in the thirty year ‘gap’ – JB learned to follow the voice of God and the direction of the Holy Spirit. He became strong in his identity and calling.

God built deep character into JB for the moment in history when succession and transition was to take place. The Bible is selective in its record; it records salvation history, or redemptive history, stories from God perspective. JB was a voice. Preparing people, preaching a message of straightening up….get ready, God is coming to visit you!

When God wants to do something extraordinary, He seems to take someone and hide them away for a long time and bring them out for a moment in history where everything they have learned comes to the fore for just sometimes even a short time. And there they shine. ‘He must increase, and I must decrease’

**APPLICATION**

Here is what I think JB’s life and succession can say to us right now.

**JB’s mission is still ours.**

*To preach an uncompromising message****.***

*To point the way to Jesus.*

*To declare a prophetic message to our generation****.***

*To leave a life legacy for those following us.*

Now I’m going to ask you a really hard question…. ***Do you know what your life purpose is? It will be something to do with your unique giftings and personality mix. It is what God had in mind when he made you.***

To do this, we need to know **who we are and who we are not.** Just do what you are called to do and leave the results up to God. Don’t try too much to do Gods work for Him. I’m just a voice in the wilderness….my job says JB is to empty my church of followers and fill Jesus’ church. I’m standing in the gap between those who have gone before and those who are to come. It's not about me, I must decrease so he can increase.

I finish today with a story from my week. This week I participated in two funerals that could not have been more extreme opposites. An 84-year-old woman, unmarried and childless, who was not only ambivalent about faith but antagonistic to any who had it. She spent most of her life fighting with people and left ruined and broken relationships and friendships. Her funeral was organised by two of her nephews who are both believers, with clear instructions that there is to be no mention of faith or God. I really struggled to find anything to say – no prayers, no singing, no scripture, no hope, no resurrection, no comfort. And as her casket hit the dirt at the bottom of the hole, I thought – what a wasted life! No legacy, no purpose and no hope. The other a celebration of a life lived well. A man of faith, greatly loved and cherished, there was tears and laughs, excellent singing, great stories from his life and a legacy of a life lived with purpose and passion. That friends is the succession message of John the Baptiser and make it yours as well!