

“The Greatest”

December 10, 2017

Our Savior’s Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Bill Mann

If I were to ask you, “Who’s the greatest person who ever lived?” what would you say? As a Christian, you might say Jesus Christ. A Muslim, might say Mohammed, or even Mohammed Ali—he’s “the greatest”, right? Did you know, there’s a website called “RANKER” at www.ranker.com? You can go online and rank just about everything—from celebrities to the most delicious ways to eat bugs around the world. I want you to rank the top 10 people of all time. (But in case you are interested the most delicious bug to eat is the cricket—Louisiana Cajan Spiced Crickets) But back to the top 10 people of all time ... here they are according to RANKER:

(10) Charles Darwin; (9) Alexander the Great; (8) Plato; (7) Galileo; (6) Mohammed; (5) Aristotle; (4) Leonardo da Vinci; (3) Isaac Newton; (2) Albert Einstein; (1) Jesus Christ.

I’m happy that Jesus is at the top of the list. But suppose you were to ask Jesus himself the question, “Who is the greatest person who ever lived?” Who do you think he would say?

You might be surprised to learn that Jesus once gave an answer to this question. Who did Jesus think was the greatest?—John the Baptist. Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”

(Matthew 11:11) Open up your Bibles to the beginning of the Gospel of Mark on page 1063 and let's find out about John.

We call him John the Baptist, but he wasn't really a Baptist—at least not like a Southern Baptist or a Hard Shell Baptist or a Fundamentalist Baptist. Instead of John the Baptist we should call him John the Baptizer, because that is what he did. He baptized people. Mark 1:5 says, “All the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” And John was amazingly popular. He was a major celebrity. Everybody came out to see him.

And as a celebrity John was a success. Think about the celebrities today and how the paparazzi follow them around and comment on what they do and where they go and who they are with and even what they wear. We get a little bit of this in Mark 1:6—“Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.” So, basically John was a cricket gourmet with strange clothing.

But his message—his message is absolutely clear. Mark 1:7-8—“And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’” John's message was not about himself. It was about someone else—someone so great and wonderful that John didn't even count himself worthy to untie this person's shoelaces. Do you get a sense of John's humility? John didn't care about the limelight. He wasn't interested in the cult of celebrity—not for himself. John had a mission. He was preparing the way for someone else and John didn't let his own personal ambition get in the way of doing his job well.

What was John's job? The answer is in verse 2—a quote from the Prophet Isaiah—“Behold, I will send my messenger before your

face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

What was John’s job?—to tell the people that Jesus the Messiah had arrived! These were exciting times in Israel! And so the people came out—to see John and be baptized by John in the Jordan River—a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. “To baptize” means “to wash.” You wash something because it is unclean. It is dirty.

I read a devotion this week comparing the sin in our lives to a dirty oven. Here’s what it said, “Cleaning the oven it not my favorite thing to do. In fact, it usually slides way down to the bottom of my list. But we recently bought a new house. Apparently the people we bought the house from disliked cleaning ovens even more than I do. The oven had not been cleaned in a long, long time. I put it through the self-cleaning cycle, then got out the SOS pads and got to work. The gunk around the edges was caked on and I used a screw driver to scrape it off. Finally the oven was clean.”

Think about that oven and compare it to our hearts. Other people can’t see into the oven of our hearts, but God can and it can be pretty dirty. I can remember vividly times when I have asked God to come into my heart and clean it up. I confessed my sin, He forgave my sin and I felt so clean. It doesn’t take a screwdriver or a self-cleaning cycle. All it takes to make us clean is the blood of Jesus shed for us on the cross. The problem is, for many of us, we don’t spend enough time confessing our sins to God. We don’t spend enough time in prayer and repentance and reading His Word and being measured against His holiness. Instead we compare ourselves to the people around us. We think we’re good enough. We become sloppy in our spiritual lives. We worry and are ungrateful and are critical of others. Soon our lives begin to look like the baked on gunk and grease on the bottom of the oven.

The good news is we don't have to stay dirty. Sin leaves its mark, but Jesus came to take the mark of sin away—to wash away the sin that pollutes our lives. If you ask God for forgiveness, you are forgiven—all cleaned up. Here are two verses that I find are worth reading again and again:

1 John 1:9—“But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”

Ephesians 1:7—“Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either—abundantly free!”

Guilt and that feeling of dirtiness comes along with sin—those are powerful emotions. But they will never be more powerful than God's grace. This is the message the John brought. This is the reason Jesus came. The good news is that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin and that God can and does bring good out of bad situations.