

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Greater than John?

(Jerry Fite)

Jesus said, “*Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*” (Matthew 11:11-12).

John the Baptist was not greater than all who were born of women if we grade according to sin, for Jesus, born of a woman, was sinless (Galatians 4:4, John 8:46, 2 Corinthians 5:21). Was John sinless? John the Baptist arose above others in greatness in that he was more than a prophet: he was the subject of prophecy - the voice crying in the wilderness preparing people for the coming of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 3:1-3). He fulfilled his roll with exemplary humility, which is a mark of greatness in the eyes of the Lord (John 3:28-30, cf. Matthew 23:11-12).

While John was highly exalted among men, Jesus says even one who is “little” by comparison, is greater than he if he is in the kingdom. How can this be true?

It is surely not because

one in the kingdom is saved. Does anyone think for a moment that John, fulfilling his role as God’s servant, and even dying for the truth of God’s law, was not saved? The same blood of Christ was made available for John as for those who were translated into the Kingdom beginning in Acts 2 (Romans 3:25).

The one in the kingdom is surely not greater because the Spirit of God now indwells each citizen. Did not John have the Holy Spirit? He was filled with the Spirit even from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15). He was infallibly guided through the Spirit to proclaim the prophetic message for which God appointed him to reveal.

A lesser one, even the least is greater than John in the sense that he or she is in the kingdom, while John could only prophecy of it coming in the near future. Repent ye! The kingdom of heaven is at hand (cf. Matthew 3:2)! He looked forward to the kingdom, spoke of its demands and prophesied of its nearness; but the kingdom of heaven was

not here yet, and he died before God’s rule through the resurrected Son began.

A comparison might be made in our day comparing minorities today with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. whose famous “I Have A Dream” speech still rings in the ears of many. There have not been many speakers better than he, but there are many today enjoying the realities for which he could only dream. In this sense they, by enjoying the reality of his dream, are greater than he who died before he could live his dream.

Jesus’ statement points to the importance of being in the Kingdom Jesus rules over and for which John prophesied. Peter provided the keys into this kingdom through his preaching of the Gospel beginning in Acts 2 (Matthew 16:18-19). This spiritual kingdom ruled from heaven is the church headed by the enthroned Christ (Hebrews 12:22-23, 28). Men and women redeemed from their sins are translated into this kingdom (Colossians 1:12-14). Where are you?