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Encounters With Jesus
Jesus and John the Baptist
John 1:1-39; Matthew 3; Mark 1:9-11; John 3:23-36; Matthew 14:10-14
April 3rd, 2016, Jeff Germon

This is the start of our new sermon series, *Encounters with Jesus*. I'm very excited because we have been moving to this point for the last, almost, three years. This is what the church is all about. The church is all about Jesus. He is the centre. And we, the church, are his body on earth. One day Jesus is going to return and make all things right. There is a reason Jesus is waiting to return.

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2 Peter 3:9 (NLT)

⁹ The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

God is up to something. That is what the Bible says. He is at work all around us. He is drawing people to himself through the work of the Holy Spirit. His desire is that all would come to repentance. So, our job, while we are waiting for Jesus, is to spend time with him, allowing him to so change us that our lives take on new meaning, thereby busying ourselves being concerned about things that concern him.

The big questions for each of us throughout this series are going to be, **[3] are we allowing Jesus to change us through our encounters with him?** And **[4] are we allowing him to use us to introduce others to Jesus?** We are not playing church. We don't go to church. We are the church, the body of Christ on earth.

[5]

1 Corinthians 12:27 (NLT)

²⁷ All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

There are more than twenty verses in the New Testament about the church, that is you and me, being Christ's body on earth. Jesus is the head and we are each a part of his body. That's pretty cool. We are a part of what God is doing on earth. We are a part of redemption history.

[6]

Jesus wants us to have real encounters with him so he can change our hearts and minds.

As I've said in previous sermons, we do not follow creeds and doctrines or a statement of faith, or a system of belief. We follow the living Jesus who rose from the dead, the creator of heavens and earth. We follow him because he gives our lives purpose and meaning. **[7] He is why we exist.**

So, over the next several weeks we are going to look in the Gospels at a bunch of encounters people had with Jesus. What we are going to see is that **[8] when people have real encounters with him it changes the direction of their lives.** Business cannot go on as usual. I love seeing this in people.

That's one of the reasons I love being in a Growth Group. In our Growth Groups we discuss the sermons and take a look at the Scripture and allow Jesus to change our hearts and our relationships through his Word. We walk together with Jesus as a small group, sharing our lives and discussing how we can purposefully live out the call of God. And we get to experience Jesus changing our hearts and minds and hear stories of how he is using others in our group to introduce others to Jesus. It is so exciting.

[9]

Jesus has a job for us to do while we are waiting for his return. There are people out there who are without hope and the only hope they have is to meet Jesus. Our job, as followers of Jesus, is to keep our ears and eyes open to what he is doing around us and join him. We can experience him in a very real way if we are aware of his presence. And then he will use us as channels through which others can encounter Jesus. This is what will give our lives meaning.

[10]

This is the purpose for which we exist as a church. Do not miss this. This is why we exist as a church. **We exist to follow Jesus and introduce others to him.**

Today we are going to look at the beginning of Jesus' ministry where he has an encounter with John the Baptizer, who happens to be Jesus' close relative. Luke 1:36 calls Elizabeth, John's mother, and Mary, Jesus' mother, *kinswomen*; meaning they were related. We typically assume because Elizabeth is substantially older than Mary, that she was Mary's aunt. We don't know that. We only know that they were closely related.

[11 - map]

John grew up in Judea, in the south and Jesus grew up in Galilee in the north, so even though they were closely related and were only a few months apart in age, they likely didn't spend much time together.

John, the Bible tells us, was quite the character. He lived in the desert. John was not someone who fit neatly into societal norms, even back in that day. He was a bit eccentric, to say the least. Not only did he live in the desert, apparently his attire back then was different enough that people took notice. He didn't buy name brand clothes. His diet was noticeably strange as well. He was a very unique character. He had a fiery personality and wasn't afraid to call a spade a spade.

For some reason, even though he spoke a very harsh message, people flocked to the secluded desert places where he would hang out, to hear him preach.

Let's read from Matthew's Gospel about John and then we'll take a look at some encounters he has with Jesus.

[12]

Matthew 3:1-12 (NLT)

¹ In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, ² "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." ³ The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, "He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him!' "

[13]

⁴ John's clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. ⁶ And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

[14]

⁷ But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee God's coming wrath? ⁸ Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. ⁹ Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.

[15]

¹⁰ Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹ "I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

[16]

¹² He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire."

So, there you have it. I wonder how long I would last if I preached like that? Can you imagine if I called you to the front to pray and then pointed my finger at you and yelled,

[17]

"You brood of snakes!" "Who warned you to flee God's coming wrath? ⁸ Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. ⁹ Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are Baptists and we've been members of this church for decades.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create baptists from these very stones."

Now, I'm sure, that either you or I wouldn't be here very long if I did that. But, that was the way John spoke to the religious elite. He saw through their charade. He knew what was in their hearts. He knew their religion had blinded their eyes to the workings of God. He knew they had set themselves up as everyone else's judge. He knew they were play acting and that they hadn't allowed God to change their hearts — and he wasn't afraid to call them on it.

JB was quite the guy. And he had gained a huge following. People flocked out to the desert to hear him preach and be baptized by him. Some people thought he was the Messiah. Others called him the prophet Elijah.

Now, I would imagine it would be very tempting, if you were that popular, to want to make your life and ministry all about you. That would be the natural thing to do. I'm sure we could all tell stories of pastors and evangelists who started out well, then gained a huge following, and became accustomed to people singing their praises and then begin to believe their own press. They started to think that it was about them. "Look at *me*. Look at *my* ministry. Look at what *I* am doing." And of course, we have seen what happens.

[18]

Proverbs 16:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.

We have seen the mighty fall so many times. That could have happened to JB, but it didn't. There are a few interesting encounters John and Jesus had. Even though they didn't know each other that well, they had a huge respect for one another and John, for the most part, knew who Jesus was.

[19]

He knew he was the Messiah and he continually pointed to him.

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John said to his audience,

¹¹“I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals.

He continually humbled himself and pointed to Jesus. Now, there were times when John did wonder if Jesus really was the Messiah.

[21]

Luke 7:18–19 (NLT)

¹⁸ The disciples of John the Baptist told John about everything Jesus was doing. So John called for two of his disciples, ¹⁹ and he sent them to the Lord to ask him, “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”

John was concerned. He had heard the rumours of Jesus. He wanted to know for sure that Jesus really was the Messiah. John was a man of integrity and didn't want to be leading people astray. “Are you really who you say you are?”

And so, John's disciples go and talk to Jesus and ask him if he is the Messiah. How does Jesus respond? He says in essence, ***“Look at the fruit. Lives are being changed.”*** Jesus talked a lot about the fruit of our lives in his ministry on earth.

[22]

Luke 6:43–45 (NLT)

⁴³ “A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. ⁴⁴ A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. ⁴⁵ A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.

He also said, if you are following him it will show by how you love each other.

[23]

Are you allowing Jesus to change you? Is there real fruit being produced? Are you more loving today than you were last year at this time?

After Jesus showed John's disciples all the fruit that was being produced through his ministry and they went away, he went on to build John up in front of the crowd.

John and Jesus had a very symbiotic relationship. They both lifted each other up. Neither of them was threatened by the other. They knew they weren't in competition. Look at what Jesus says about John.

[24]

Luke 7:24–35 (NLT)

24 After John's disciples left, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. "What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? 25 Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people who wear beautiful clothes and live in luxury are found in palaces.

[25]

26 Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. 27 John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say, 'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.' 28 I tell you, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of God is greater than he is!"

Jesus lifts John up. Now, John was not exactly in the cool group. He did not fit in. He went against the current of society and especially against the current of the religious system of his day. He did not fit in at all. But, he did not care one bit. He cared more about doing the will of God and being a conduit for God to turn people's hearts towards his kingdom.

So, Jesus says, "Yes, John is great, but even the least person is greater than he is." In other words, there is hope for me and you. But, the way is humility.

[26]

The way up is down in God's Kingdom. The pressure is off, friends. We simply need to give up and give our lives to Jesus.

[27]

Luke 7:24–35 (NLT) Cont'd

29 When they heard this, all the people—even the tax collectors—agreed that God's way was right, for they had been baptized by John. 30 But the Pharisees and experts in religious law rejected God's plan for them, for they had refused John's baptism. 31 "To what can I compare the people of this generation?" Jesus asked. "How can I describe them?

[28]

32 They are like children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends, 'We played wedding songs, and you didn't dance, so we played funeral songs, and you didn't weep.' 33 For John the Baptist didn't spend his time eating bread or drinking wine, and you say, 'He's possessed by a demon.'

[29]

34 The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!' 35 But wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it."

Do you notice the difference between the overly religious and, those the religious would call "sinners?" ***"Even the tax collectors—agreed that God's way was right..."*** Not so with the religious. Those who thought they were good enough, those who went around judging everyone

else were like children play acting in the public square. They thought *they* were the standard by which everyone else should be judged. They looked at others contemptuously, even at John the Baptist and Jesus.

They looked at John and judged him for *not* feasting and eating and drinking and then at Jesus because he *did* hang out with the sinners, drinking and feasting. They called him a drunkard and a glutton.

Jesus ends this little speech with this zinger;

³⁵But wisdom is shown to be right by the lives of those who follow it."

It's all about the fruit produced. We will all produce fruit. Every single one of us. If we hang out with Jesus and stop judging others we will produce fruit of righteousness: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Or, if we are like the religious people Jesus was referring to, and hold *ourselves* up as judges and don't stop for a minute to think that maybe the Bible is speaking to the ugliness in *our* hearts, we will produce rotten, ugly fruit: bitterness; anger; jealousy; rage; lust; self-righteousness; and a whole bunch of other equally appalling rotten fruit.

[30]

Which kind of fruit would you rather produce?

We all have a choice, but we are going to have to allow Jesus to change our hearts and minds. Let's take a look at a couple more encounters of John the Baptist. I love this one.

[31]

John 3:23–36 (NLT)

²³ At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. ²⁴ (This was before John was thrown into prison.) ²⁵ A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing.

[32]

²⁶ So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us." ²⁷ John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.'

[33]

²⁹ It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. ³⁰ He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. ³¹ "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else.

[34]

³² He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! ³³ Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. ³⁴ For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands.

[35]

³⁶ And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

Talk about humility. John's disciples look at Jesus and his disciples as if they are in competition. John, says, "No, Jesus is not the competition. I'm just the warm up band. He is the main event. I am the one who points to him. I am a subplot in his story." Over and over again, John pointed to Jesus. Even when it looked like his ministry was failing, John didn't let it sway him. He just kept pointing to Jesus. ***"Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."*** Even when John's disciples left him and followed Jesus, it did not sway him one bit. He knew he was not the main character in the story.

[36]

That is the same thing we are called to. **We must decrease. He must increase.** Don't worry if it looks like you are trailing behind in someone else's shadow. It's okay. It's not about you. It's about Jesus. It's not about me. It's about Jesus. We, the church, are his body on earth.

That is why we work together with the other churches of Campbell River. That is why every Sunday we pick one church in our community to pray for. They are not our competition. They are the body of Christ, just like we are. That is why when someone asks for my blessing to serve and minister at another church in town because they feel like God can use their gifts there, I give them my blessing. That is why when I hear reports of people slandering me or the leadership of the church, we give it to Jesus. This is his church not ours.

Our job is to continually point to Jesus so his name becomes famous. That is how we are called to live. It's not the easy way, or the natural way, but it is God's way. It's the way to enter into the supernatural kingdom of God kind of life; and it is the only way life will make sense. We have an opportunity from this day forward to live our lives on purpose with Jesus.

[37]

1 Peter 3:15-16a (NLT)

¹⁵Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a gentle and respectful way.

Communion



***Encounters with Jesus
Jesus and John the Baptist
Week of April 3rd, 2016***

Objective of this study: To understand more completely the overarching goal of our lives, to have encounters with Jesus that would transform us so others could, in turn, meet him.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 138** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

Who is the most famous person you have met? What was it like?

Word (30 - 45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Break up into smaller groups or pairs and read the following passages: John 1:1-39; Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:9-11; John 3:23-36; and Mathew 14:10-14. What character qualities do you notice in Jesus and John, and what do you notice about their relationship?

Work (30- 45 minutes)

Sermon Quote: "**Jesus has a job for us to do while we are waiting for his return. There are people out there who are without hope and the only hope they have is to meet Jesus. Our job, as followers of Jesus, is to keep our ears and eyes open to what he is doing around us and join him. We can experience him in a very real way if we are aware of his presence. And then he will use us as channels through which others can encounter Jesus. This is what will give our lives meaning. This is the purpose for which we exist as a church.**"

3. The two main questions from this sermon are: a) Are you allowing Jesus to change you through your encounters with him? b) Are you allowing him to use you to introduce others to Jesus? Take a couple minutes of silent meditation praying about these questions.
4. Think about the people God has placed in your life right now. He wants you to be a channel through which they meet Jesus. Take the remainder the time discussing this and praying for these people. Remember, your job is not to convert, persuade, or debate. Your job is simply to point to Jesus when they his image reflected in you.

1 Peter 3:15-16a (NLT)

¹⁵Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a gentle and respectful way.