LESSON 4

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
APRIL 26 2025

Scripture Story: Matthew 11:1-11; Matthew 14:1-11; Mark 6:17-28; Luke 7:19-28.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 22.

appearance versus reality



Photo by Colleen Cahill

flashlight

"As the Messiah's herald, John was 'much more than a prophet.' For while prophets had seen from afar Christ's advent, to John it was given to behold Him, to hear the testimony from heaven to His Messiahship, and to present Him to Israel as the Sent of God. Yet Jesus said, 'He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he' " (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 220).

key text

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

(Matthew 11:11, NIV)

what do you think?

How would you define success?

- Make a list of some ways you could affirm you are succeeding now. Finish this thought with as many descriptives as you can:
- *I would consider my life to have been successful if I . . .*
- List the names of three or four people who have had a positive influence on you.
- Next to their names, write their titles, positions, jobs, and/or relationship to you.
- Are the individuals you named people of fame or wealth? Do they meet the criteria of success you listed for yourself? If not, what qualities do they possess that you admire?

did you know?

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died so poor he couldn't even get a proper burial. He was buried in a potter's field. Yet Mozart's music has been considered the most loved and beautiful of all the classical musicians.

While Martin Luther is well known as the "German Hercules" of the Protestant Reformation, Philip Melanchthon was the intellectual, "quiet Reformer" and colleague of Luther who wrote the first great Protestant confession of faith: the Augsburg Confession.

John Weidner, a Seventh-day Adventist, helped save the lives of dozens of Jews and others who, rightly, feared persecution and death under the Nazi regime in World War II. He labored in secret, his actions unknown until after the war ended. He was among the "righteous" that the State of Israel—and others around the world—honored for his courage.

INTO THE STORY

"After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

"When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'

"Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'

"As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' "

"Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: 'It is not lawful for you to have her.' Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

"On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.' The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother."

(Matthew 11:1-11; Matthew 14:3-11, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What was John's role in Jesus' ministry? Read Luke 1:16, 17.

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John preached the coming of the Messiah. He even said Jesus was the Messiah! Why do you think while John was in prison that he sent his disciples to Jesus to make sure He was the Messiah?

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What circumstances led to John's imprisonment? his beheading?

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John was languishing in prison facing death when Jesus said these words: "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." Based on this statement, do you think Jesus regarded John as successful? Do you think the people around him did? How does this impact how you look at success in your own life?

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John was the herald of the Messiah, purposed to point people to the First Advent. We have a similar calling to point others to the Second Advent—Jesus' return to earth. What is your personal responsibility to this assignment?

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punch lines

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" **(Isaiah 40:3).**

"See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes" **(Malachi 4:5, NIV).**

"They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?'. . . John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Make straight the way for the Lord"'" **(John 1:21-23, NIV).**

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe" **(John 1:6, 7, NIV).**

"Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Messiah'" **(John 1:19, 20, NIV).**

"This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you'" **(Matthew 11:10, NIV).**

further insight

"God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 224

"And of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 224

Sabbath

Read Mark 6:17-28.

How did you do with defining success and listing people and qualities of success in the *What Do You Think?* section? Jesus paid the highest compliment to John the Baptist that any person could hope to receive. Yet instead of enjoying the privileges of being the King's herald, John was wasting away in a prison cell! He never had a visit from Jesus. He had no promise of help from his powerful cousin. In today's Bible reading, you can learn more about how John ended up in prison and find out what happened to him. Do you think John's faith weakened while he was in prison? How do you think John felt when he received word of Jesus' ministry?

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John had the solo role of heralding Jesus' first coming. We are privileged, along with our church family, to herald His second coming. "The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel" (The Second Coming of Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 25).

Sunday

Read John 1:6, 7.

Would you say John the Baptist was successful in carrying out the purpose for which God had created him? Why or why not? Does John's ending seem like that of a successful person? Why? Why not?

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Monday

Read Matthew 11:11.

Did you notice how Jesus pays John the highest honor when He says: "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (NIV). But, immediately following that, He said, "Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (NIV). What do you think Jesus meant by this?

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Tuesday

Read John 20:21.

Why did Jesus come to earth? What does He then say to us? What very essential event must take place before we can be effective ambassadors for Jesus as John the Baptist was? See verse 22.

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Wednesday

Read Philippians 2:3-8.

John the Baptist had every opportunity to draw attention to himself . . . his work . . . his calling. But he didn't do that. What lesson is there in his words and actions for us? Check out the verses written by Paul from today's reading for a further emphasis about God's ideal for success.

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Thursday

Read Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Even within the Christian community today, there is a growing teaching of the prosperity gospel . . . that if we believe and claim the promises of God, He emerges like some genie from a bottle to fulfill our desire for success, wealth, comfort. But what do we learn from John and from the Messiah whom he heralded? What, if anything, stands in the way of your waiting upon God, listening and responding to God's will and plan for you, rather than expecting Him to come and fulfill your own desires? What guidance can you find in today's reading?

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Friday

Read Revelation 11:15.

Take some time to consider how amazing it is that while John has the distinction of heralding in the advent of the promised kingdom of heaven, we stand at the dusk of an old, dying age when soon in every respect the kingdom of heaven will be a reality and earth as we know it will be gone. Jesus will soon come and take us to be with Him. We have the distinction of experiencing the other side of the cross—the mercy, grace, and transformation that come because of the sacrifice of Christ and the building of His temple (church), which cannot be destroyed. If John was a signpost of what was to come, what does that make us? What role do you (and I) have in this second advent of the Messiah?

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Read today's reading in a loud and dramatic voice. Can you picture yourself on that great day? Make a list and pray for all those you know who need to experience the mercy, grace, and transformation that comes from giving their lives to Jesus. Ask God to help you to daily show His character in your life.

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 22.

* A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.