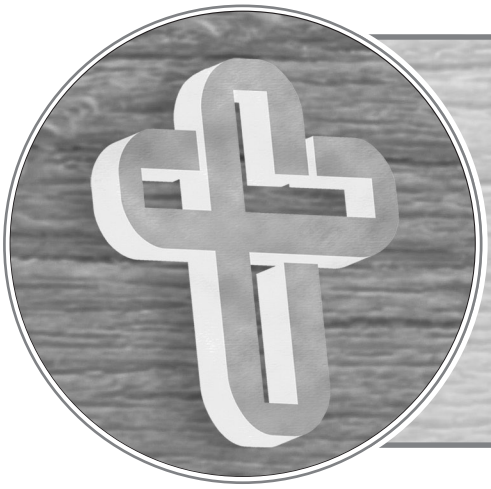


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
APRIL 26 2025

appearance versus reality

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.
Key Text: Matthew 11:11.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Israel had been waiting for their promised Messiah for a very long time. They knew that before He would come, God would send Elijah to prepare the way for Him. Even to this day, every Jew looks for the prophet Elijah. At the Seder (Passover meal) a place is set for Elijah—to show that they are waiting expectantly for Messiah (Malachi 4:5, 6). They know God will send His prophet ahead of Messiah to prepare their hearts to receive Him. It is no wonder, then, that the priests and Levites traveled outside of the Temple area into the country to find John the Baptist and ask him, "Are you Elijah?" and "Are you the Messiah?"

John stood at the dawn of a new day, announcing the rise of the kingdom of heaven. Yet even as the day began to dawn, John was eclipsed by its Light. However, he played his God-appointed role well. Although he may have been disheartened while sitting in prison knowing that his life would soon end, he was probably encouraged by the message his disciples brought back from Jesus. It affirmed the message he had been preaching, that Jesus was the Messiah, and it gave him the assurance of a life well lived. He had fulfilled God's plan for his life. He could face death with peace.

Focus the students on the contrast between God's ideal of a life fulfilled versus the world's view of fulfillment and success. John's death didn't silence the message nor stall the coming kingdom. He had the distinct privilege of heralding Christ's first advent in the same way that we have the privilege of heralding His second advent.

II. TARGET

The student will:

- Learn the story of *the* "King's herald," John the Baptist. *(Know)*
- Understand that the greatest success is in fulfilling God's plan for one's life. *(Feel)*
- Experience God's idea of success by living out His plan for their lives. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

T**he Second Coming of Christ,** Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 25: "The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times. (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section, and have a group discussion to point out the elements of success defined there. Encourage them to react to the rest of the section using these questions for group discussion.*

1. What would make you feel successful?
2. What percentage of success do you define as having money, or the things money can buy? Do you believe God looks at success that way?
3. Is there a success that lasts longer than a new car might? What are some of the elements of that success?
4. Of the 11 original disciples of Jesus who were alive after the Resurrection, all, except possibly one, met horrible deaths as martyrs. Were their lives successes? Why?
5. What kind of success are you going to aim for in life?

Illustration

Annie Rebekah Smith lived only 37 years; she was a young teacher, poet, and editor who was instrumental in helping James White edit what is today the *Adventist Review*. Her contribution during the pioneering days of the church was said to be of immense value.

At the end of her short life Annie had not amassed many of the world's riches or achieved great public position. She was, however, remembered most touchingly by her brother, Uriah, who incorporated one of Annie's favorite phrases in the closing of his letters: "Yours in *the blessed hope*."

Even though Annie Smith died at a young age, her legacy lives on: 10 of her poems are still used today as hymns in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal.* Her story is a part of Adventist history. Her enduring influence shows what young people can do when rightly using their talents to honor God and share the blessed hope of His soon return.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

We all stand on the shoulders of those who've come before us. One hundred years ago the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a much smaller movement. We are only as widespread as we are today because of the labor of thousands of people, many whose names are known only to the archivists.

While the names and stories of many who assisted Jesus in His earthly ministry are familiar from the Scriptures, many people are not named. For example, we never learn the name of the young boy who shared his lunch so that Jesus could bless and feed thousands with it.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Describe briefly what the Bible texts say about John the Baptist: who he was, what he did, and how he viewed himself within God's plan.
- This story is chiefly about . . . (choose three and explain):
  - (1) obeying God's call
  - (2) the role of a supporter
  - (3) calling people to repentance
  - (4) sharing the gospel and preparing the way for
  - (5) personal influence that makes a difference for good
  - (6) the cost of standing for truth
- On one level, John the Baptist could have been seen as a colossal failure: he didn't prevent Herod from continuing in a life of sin; instead, it was John who paid the ultimate price. Have you ever been in a situation in which you expected one result and got something totally opposite?
- And what about Herodias's daughter, identified elsewhere as Salome? Her behavior wasn't the kind a young woman should engage in; she certainly should not have asked Herod for John's murder! How can you stand against temptation and influence to do wrong?

- Which verses do you believe convey the key lessons of this story?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: Isaiah 40:1-5; Malachi 4:1-5; John 1:6-28.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. **"Repent and Be Baptized!"** John's call for immersion wasn't new to his hearers; they were familiar with ritual bathing before entering the Temple in Jerusalem and for other purposes. Women, for example, were expected to bathe ritually once a month.

But this was different. Ritualistic baths were meant to prepare people for worship; the immersion (or baptism) that John preached was to symbolize an internal change—repent means to "turn away" from a previous lifestyle. It was to presage the approach of Jesus' followers as the gospel spread: accepting the good news meant changing one's way of life, orienting it toward God's way.

How does this relate to your understanding of repentance, change, and baptism? Is it a mere ritual, or does it symbolize something deeper and greater?

2. **A Flawed, Fatal Promise.** At the same time, the actions of Herod and his "family" spoke to the evil and corruption that John—and Jesus—would reject. Instead of ruling wisely and helping his subjects, Herod was all about pleasure and ease, conditions that would lead to a horrific crime. The murder of John was nothing more than the fulfillment of a rash promise made while under the influence

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Taking It Personally

Making the lesson personal and applicable to the student is key for making it have meaning in their own life.

- For this reason, write three words on a white/chalkboard:
  Reward
  Compensation
  Congratulation
- Ask students to write examples of rewards they received or hope to receive based upon their dedication and hard work.
- Ask students what compensation they hope their achievements bring them.
- Ask students what part congratulation plays in their motivation to work and achieve.
- Compare that with the example of John the Baptist's earthly rewards/congratulations for following his call.
- Lead them into a discussion of what it means to receive rewards of spiritual and eternal value.

cornerstoneconnections

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

of alcohol—a perfect argument for temperance if there ever was one!

This kind of pressure—and the tragic results—still affect lives today. The kids who "experiment" at a party or at a friend's home and then suffer injury, or worse, in a subsequent traffic accident are living for pleasure and not considering the consequences. And making a promise to "go along" with your friends can have life-altering results, sometimes serious and tragic ones.

What criteria do you use in choosing to "go along" with the crowd? Do you stand apart when it's necessary?

3. **A Promise for Restoration.** As you read the biblical passages provided about John's ministry (Malachi 4; John 1:6-28), you might get the idea that while Jesus was all about healing and God's love, John preached a pretty harsh, judgmental message. He said things that were quite tough to hear. I mean, let's face it, he was telling people to "shape up" and "get in line." He knew that if the King was coming, He shouldn't find a misbehaving, hard-hearted, cynical bunch of people, but rather an expectant crowd, with hearts clearly humbled, repentant, and ready to receive their King and enter into His kingdom.

Clearly, while John received a lot of attention because he was rather odd, he wasn't really popular—certainly not with the religious leaders or the regional ruler! John had a hard edge for sure, but he loved God and His people so much that he didn't want to see any of them miss the boat when the Messiah came. He did his job—prepared the way for Messiah.

Do you think you would risk being "uncool" in order to help others hear a message that would save them? Could you sacrifice the rewards of life to take a hard line?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Get students to pair off and plan how one would support the other in a public witnessing effort. It could be street dialogue ("Do you know God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?" "Why, no! Tell me about it.") or a plan to pass out literature or to invite passersby to a meeting.

Who will take the lead? Who will support them? Will you switch off? Why is the supporting person's role as important as the leader's? What lessons do you learn from this exercise?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

If you stop and think about it, there are very, very few great successes in life that are solely the work of one person. Even the most eccentric individual, if they are truly honest, will admit that someone somewhere gave them some help along the way.

While it is without question that Jesus and only Jesus could complete the mission He had—no one else could go to the cross, die, and rise again—it is also true that other people helped Him in His earthly ministry. From the disciples who accompanied Him to others who supplied items of need, to John the Baptist, who announced His mission, there are many who contributed to the life and work of Jesus.

As you consider what you've experienced in life so far, who's helped you? Parents? Siblings? Friends? Teachers? A pastor? These relationships are part of life, and part of helping others in our common Christian walk. We're here, in part, to encourage one another!

The story of John the Baptist and his role in supporting the ministry of Jesus should offer encouragement: even those of us who have small parts to play can be a key element of success in God's great plan.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*),* chapter 22.

*A special adaptation, *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
APRIL 26 2025

STUDENT LESSON

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

keytext

"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)

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).

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.

_____
_____
_____

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?

_____
_____
_____

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

_____
_____
_____

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?

_____
_____
_____

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?

_____
_____
_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

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.

_____

_____

_____

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.

_____

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

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?

_____

_____

_____

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.