

Changed by the
MASTER'S
TOUCH

F. B. Meyer



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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PREFACE

The lives and characters of these men of faith have always held a great fascination for me, and I am thankful to have been permitted to write this book. But I am even more thankful for the hours of absorbing interest spent in the study of their portraits as given in the Gospels. I know of nothing that makes so pleasant a respite from life's pressures and strains than to bathe mind and spirit in the waters of Scriptural biography.

As the bridge between the Old and New Testaments—the close of the one and the beginning of the other—John the Baptist compels our admiration and respect. His spirit of humility and courage, his devotion to God, and his uncompromising loyalty to truth inspire us to be filled with the spirit and power of Elijah as he was.

Peter comes nearer to us than any of the other apostles. He is so human, so like ourselves, that we are encouraged that perhaps the Lord may also make much of our simple lives.

Paul's first conception of Jesus was in His risen glory. The radiant vision could never be erased from his memory, and it gave depth to his faith. For us, too, that vision waits.

When we battle against the lusts of the flesh, the fascinations of the world, and the power of the devil, no position has more certainty of victory than our resurrection standing and privilege. If the Master could do so much for these men, what may He do for you and me? By virtue of our union with Him, we must pray that the great Potter will make something even of our common clay.

—F. B. Meyer

Part 1

JOHN THE BAPTIST: THE
FORERUNNER

PROMISE OF THE PROPHET

In six brief months, John the Baptist became the center of all Judea. Pharisees, Sadducees, soldiers, and publicans were amazed by his ministry. The Sanhedrin was forced to investigate his claims, the petty kings of Palestine trembled on their thrones, and he left a name and an influence that will never cease.

Few studies can better demonstrate the supreme glory of Christ than a thoughtful consideration of the story of the forerunner. Jesus and John were born at the same time and were surrounded by the same sacred traditions. But the parallel soon stops. John the Baptist is a representation of the noblest characteristics of the Jewish people, but Jesus is the Son of Man—there is a universality about Him. Each man's life was strenuous and short, bursting forth as they announced the kingdom of God. In each case, a handful of disciples bitterly mourned their master's death and took up the desecrated corpse to lay it in a tomb.

But there the parallel ends. The life purpose of the one culminated in his death; with the other, it only began. John's death was a martyrdom; Jesus' death was the sacrifice that put away the sin of the world. For John there was no immediate resurrection, but

his Master saw no corruption. John's influence on the world has diminished as men have gotten farther from his age, but Jesus is King of all ages. John was a burning torch lifted for a moment in the murky air, but Jesus *was the light!*

To read the picturesque pages of the Gospels apart from some knowledge of contemporary history is to miss one of their deepest lessons—that such piety and goodness were set in the midst of a violent and dangerous age. Those times were by no means favorable to the cultivation of a spiritual life. The flock of God had long left the green pastures, and the wolf was coming. The national life reached its climax in the fall of Jerusalem, of which Jesus said there had been nothing—and would be nothing—like it in the history of the world.

Herod was on the throne. The temple that bore his name was the scene of priestly service and sacramental rites. The great national feasts of the Passover, Tabernacles, and Pentecost were celebrated with solemn pomp and attracted vast crowds from all over the world. Synagogues were maintained with formal care, and crowds of scribes were engaged in a microscopic study of the law. But beneath this flowery surface was a desperate corruption.

Herod extorted immense revenues from the poorer classes and squandered them on his palaces and fortresses. He introduced Gentile customs and games everywhere and dared to place the Roman eagle on the main entrance of the temple. He pilaged David's tomb and set aside the great council of their nation. Religious leaders, men like Caiaphas and Annas, winked at the crimes of the secular power as long as their prestige was secured.

But the darkest hour precedes the dawn, and Old Testament predictions must have been eagerly scanned by those that watched and waited. They could not doubt that the Messiah was near. The term of years foretold by Daniel had nearly expired. (See Daniel 10–12.) The Scepter had departed from Judah, and even Magi

studying the dazzling glories of the eastern heavens had come to the conclusion that He was at hand who would bring again the Golden Age.

And so those loyal and loving souls who often spoke together must have felt that if the advent of the Lord whom they sought was near, then that of His messenger must be even nearer. They started at every footstep and listened for every voice. At any moment, a voice might be heard crying, *“Cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.... Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh”* (Isaiah 62:10–11). Those anticipations were realized in the birth of John the Baptist.