

June 22, 2003 by Steve Brandon



The Greatest One

Matthew 11:7-15

John was...

1. A Prophet (verse 7-9)
2. The Forerunner (verse 10)
3. Greater than All (verse 11)
4. A Key Figure in History (verses 12-13)
5. Elijah (verse 14)

... and thus, identified Jesus more clearly than anyone else.

A few weeks ago, we were on vacation in the Boston area. On a certain day, we were planning on spending the day at Plimoth Plantation. At Plimoth Plantation, they have reenacted what it was like only a few years after the original pilgrims landed in Massachusetts. It is quite an interesting place. It is like a "living theatre." It is always 1627 at the plantation. Those who "live" there live in the same primitive conditions that were present in 1627. Buildings are rustic. The floors are dirt. Each house is warmed by an open fire which makes the houses quite smoky. The people there are actors who are "in character." They act out who the real people were who lived in those places. They speak with an accent. They have identities of those who came over on the Mayflower. You could ask someone his name and the reply might be "Stephen Hopkins," whom we talked with. The characters know nothing of the modern world. If you take out a camera to take a picture of them, they might say, "What is that little thing that you have?" You say, "It's for taking pictures?" They will look at you with a confused look on their face and say, "What is a picture? Do you mean a portrait?" Sometimes they will ask you where you are from. We would say, "Illinois." They would say, "Hmmm... Where is that? Is that an Indian village someplace?" Since they are living in the 1600's, Illinois has not yet been inhabited. They will often ask you, "Are you planning on staying with us?"

At school, my daughter, Carissa, had recently studied early colonial history and knew much about the pilgrims and their activities. She was so excited to visit this place that she was shaking with excitement. When we got there, we got out of the car and began walking to where the plantation was. On our way, we went under a large archway that led the way to get to the plantation. Now, suppose Carissa said, "Dad, stop, let me look at this." She spent some time soaking it in. She looked at the pictures of some of the characters on the arch. She looked at the sign that said, "Welcome to Plimoth Plantation." She began to start playing on some of the pillars to this arch. She noticed the flowers that were there. Then, she went back to study the pictures with a bit more detail. Suppose that after a few minutes we said, "Carissa, let's go and see Plimoth Plantation." But she refused to go, because she was quite interested in the big archway sign. After 15 minutes, we said the same thing, "Carissa, let's go and see the plantation." But, she was too interested in the sign to continue on to where the sign was meant to lead you. We would say that Carissa was being pretty foolish, would we not? She would be foolish to let the sign take priority over the substance. This is precisely the danger of our text this morning. Our text is like a sign that points to something. We can get so interested in the sign that we forget the substance. I trust that you will begin to see what I mean as we continue in our exposition.

We are returning to the gospel of Matthew this morning after a four week break. We find ourselves in the eleventh chapter. Our text begins with verse seven:

Matthew 11:7-15

And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces. But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen [anyone] greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The first part of verse seven clues us into the context of our text. It says,

"And as these were going away, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John." (Matt. 11:7)

Those who were "going away" were John's disciples, who had come on a mission from John. Their mission was described in verses two and three. John was in prison and had sent these disciples to ask Jesus if He was indeed the "Expected One." John had probably sent these disciples because he was wavering a bit in his faith that Jesus was indeed this Messiah. John had "heard of the works of the Messiah" (verse 2), but the ministry of Jesus did not quite match up with John's expectations. John had expected the Messiah to be somewhat like himself: a bold revolutionary, who preached judgment to come. He preached "axe at the root of the tree" sort of judgment. He preached "winnowing fork in His hand" sort of judgment. Furthermore, John expected the Messiah to do more than preach judgment. John expected the Messiah to

actually bring about the judgment and establish Israel's future kingdom by force, as prophesied of the Messiah. But Jesus was not doing these things. So, John sent these disciples to Jesus to find out whether Jesus was the Messiah, or whether someone else was. Jesus gave his reply in verses 4-6 and sent John's disciples on their way. Jesus told John to look to the Scriptures to see what they prophesied about the Messiah. The Messiah was to come and give sight to the blind, heal the lame, cleanse the lepers, open the ears of the deaf, raise the dead, and preach the gospel to the poor (verse 5). This was exactly what was happening. Jesus sent John's disciples back to him to tell him to look at these verses of Scripture.

Perhaps at this point in time when John's disciples were returning to report Jesus' words to John, there may have been a tendency on the part of the crowds who had witnessed John's questions to think less of John. Have you had the experience of being fearful of asking a question in a large group of people out of fear that you will look stupid? I have had this feeling. It's always comforting when the teacher responds positively by saying something like, "Now, that's a good question. Let me try to answer that for you." When a teacher responds that way, you are comforted because you see that your question was not really a dumb question. Such a response helps your reputation in the class. People respect your question precisely because the teacher expressed that it was a good question. As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus used this moment as an opportunity to affirm John's role in the life of Jesus' ministry. The people were not supposed to look down upon John as a wavering, doubting preacher. Rather, they were to look at him as the forerunner to Jesus. John was ...

1. A Prophet (verse 7-9)

John had some questions for Jesus. Now, Jesus has some questions for the multitudes. He asked, "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?" (verse 7). This is a rhetorical question that demands the answer, "no." The multitudes weren't attracted to John because he was a doubting, waffling teacher without a backbone. They weren't attracted to John because he was blown here and there by every wind of public opinion? On the contrary, he was not one who wavered. He was strong and bold. His message is summed up with these words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). The kingdom of heaven is near. When the king comes, he will bring judgment. Repentance is the only acceptable way to avoid your own doom. John stood firm against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees by calling them a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 3:7). He explained repentance to the tax gatherers by telling them to "collect no more than you have been ordered to do" (Luke 3:13). To the Roman soldiers, he said, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14). It was, in fact, John's boldness that landed him in prison. He was strongly preaching against the immorality of Herod, the King, who seduced and married his brother's wife. John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have her" (Matt. 14:4). Of course, the multitudes did not go out to see a reed shaken in the wind. The multitudes went out to see prophet boldly proclaim the ways of God without compromise.

Jesus continued the questions in verse 8, "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?" Again, the obvious answer is, "No!" Those who saw John in the wilderness knew that his life was far from comfortable. He was not some tenured teacher sitting in his ivory tower of comfort. Rather, he was living in the wilderness. They saw him wearing a garment of camel's hair. They knew he ate locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4). Camel's hair was the uniform of a prophet. In Zechariah 13:4 we are told of the day when the false prophets come, they "will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive." Elijah dressed this way (2 Kings 1:8). This was not the uniform of a king. Jesus said, "Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces" (verse 8), perhaps alluding to King Herod.

The multitudes went out to the wilderness to see a prophet! This is what verse 9 says, "But why did you go out? To see a prophet?" The answer is, "Yes!" The public opinion polls esteemed John as a prophet. Herod, being a good politician, was aware of the positive opinion ratings that John was receiving. Thus, he feared executing him even though he wanted to. Matthew 14:5, "Although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they regarded him as a prophet." Even after his death, John was regarded as a prophet. In Matthew 21:26 we find that the multitudes "all held John to be a prophet."

Jesus affirmed that John was a prophet. In so doing, Jesus was again subtly building the case that He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. Prophets speak the truth. **John spoke the truth about Jesus.** We are told in John 10:41, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." John bore witness of Jesus saying,

"I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:32-34)

But Jesus said that John was, "more than a prophet" (verse 9). John was "more than a prophet" because he was...

2. The Forerunner (verse 10)

The last prophet that the Jews had was a prophet named Malachi, who had prophesied to the Jewish nation about 400 years before. Jesus quoted from the writings of Malachi (Mal. 3:10) when He said in verse 10, "This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.'" Malachi prophesied that a messenger would come before the Lord returned to "clear the way" before the Messiah would come. Thus, Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the one of whom Malachi spoke. In this we get a sense of why John was "more than a prophet."

A prophet was a mouth for God. A prophet was to preach to the people and call them to repentance. A prophet was to warn the people of the coming judgment. A prophet was to lead the people to trust in the Lord. A prophet was to tell people of the coming Messiah. John the Baptist did every one of these. But, John was greater than all of the other prophets, because **John was called upon to identify Jesus face to face.** Whereas the other prophets may have told of the coming of the Messiah in somewhat vague terms and in veiled ways (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12), John's mission was to say of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John proclaims, "I have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). Other prophets may have pointed to the God in the heavens, but John pointed to the

God on the earth! The prophets may have prophesied about Christ's coming in the future, but John prophesied of Christ's arrival. The prophets may have anticipated the forerunner, but John, himself, was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah's forerunner. As such, he was given a special honor as being "more than a prophet."

When I was a junior in college, I was selected as the student grand marshal for the graduation ceremonies. The grand marshal was a faculty member who led the faculty in the graduation ceremonies. The student grand marshal led in all of the graduating seniors. I had the opportunity to sit in the front row during the ceremonies. At the proper time, I was to stand and usher the students up to the podium to receive their diplomas. I also led the students out of the ceremonies. Let me ask you this: who is more important in the graduation ceremony, the grand marshal or the graduating students? Not the grand marshal, but the students. In the same way, John was the grand marshal for Jesus. He was preparing the way for Jesus' ministry. Though John was the forerunner, it was Jesus who was most important. This is why John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:29).

We are told of John that "he came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light" (John 1:7, 8). When you go to a museum, you go to see the great works of art. The light bulb that illuminates the art is very important. But you do not come to see the light bulb. You do not come to give honor to the light bulb. You give honor to the art. John is the grand marshal leading all to honor Jesus. John is the light that shines on Jesus. As Jesus speaks these things of John, He is establishing His own identity.

Not only was John a prophet and forerunner, he was also...

3. Greater than All (verse 11)

Look at verse 11, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). This must have jolted those in the crowds. They had some mighty heroes of the faith.

Abraham was a hero. God gave His covenant to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. ... In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2, 3). He is known today as the "father of faith." To Jesus, the Jews said, "You are not greater than our father Abraham." (John 8:53). But John was greater than Abraham.

Moses was a hero. The Sadducees followed the writings of Moses and in him they had placed their hope (John 5:45). After all, Moses was the beneficiary of God's promise to Abraham to have a great nation. Moses was the one chosen to lead the people to the land. It was through the hand of Moses that the law was given to Israel. But John was greater than Moses.

David was a hero. David was "a man after [the LORD's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). God covenanted with David that his descendant would sit on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13). God spared many kings down through the history of Judah on account of His covenant with David. But John was greater than David.

John was greater than Elijah. John was greater than Elisha. John was greater than Isaiah. John was greater than Jeremiah. No matter what Old Testament saint you name, John was greater than him. Select a prophet: Joel, Amos, Hosea, Daniel, or Ezekiel. John was greater than all the prophets. Take a king: Hezekiah, Josiah, or Jehosaphat. John was greater than all of the kings. Think of the better judges: Samson or Samuel. John was better than all the judges. Select one of the patriarchs: Isaac, Jacob or Joseph. John was greater than all of the patriarchs.

It wasn't miracles that made John great. In fact, he did not do any miracles (John 10:41). It wasn't his writings of his prophecies that made John great. In fact, we do not have any writings from John. It wasn't his faith that made John great. Indeed, we find John doubting who Jesus was. Neither was it a highly honored status among noblemen that made John great. In fact he was not honored; he was in prison.

What was it, then, that made John great? He was great because he identified Jesus with more clarity than any of the other prophets before him had done. Peter tells us that "the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come ... made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:10-11). The prophets were inspired by God to write of the coming of the Messiah, but they never knew fully of the fulfillment of their prophecy. John was the culmination of all of the prophets. He was the one to identify the Messiah in the flesh. In John 10:41, many were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." This is why John was great -- he was testifying accurately of Jesus. This is the point of verse 10. John has fulfilled the Malachi prophecy.

Suppose that I was introduced this morning by Gordy Bell before I started preaching. Whenever someone introduces a speaker, his goal is to persuade the audience that the one getting up is worthy of their attention. So, Gordy gets up and speaks about my qualifications to speak before you this morning. Then, suppose, that I stand to speak and make some comments about Gordy. He gave testimony to me. I wanted to return the favor. I said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I want you to know that among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than Gordy Bell, *because he has introduced me.*" What would you think about me if I said those things? You would think that I am pretty arrogant. As great as Gordy Bell may be, I put myself up as much higher than he is. When Jesus said these things of John, it was an incredible admission of His own greatness! This is the point of the passage!

Certainly, the multitudes would have been shocked by Jesus giving such a high place to John. Jesus had told them, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11) You can imagine the crowd at this point is very confused and wondering, "John is greater than Abraham? Moses? David? Elijah? Elisha? Isaiah? Jeremiah?" But Jesus' next statement was certainly more of a shock! Jesus said, "...yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than [John]" (Matt. 11:11b).

Do you realize what this means? It means that you are greater than John the Baptist! At first, you might balk at such a statement. After all, you might think, "How can I even begin to be compared with John the Baptist? He was a great preacher. He saw great revival in Israel. He was the object of prophecy. He gave himself completely to the work of God. He was martyred for his faith. How can I be greater than John

the Baptist?"

Before we answer that question, let's first consider the related question: How is John greater than those who came before him? Was he a greater leader than Moses? No. Was he a greater military man than David? No. Was he a greater preacher than Isaiah? No. Was he the only one martyred for his faith? Again, the answer is "no." **John is the greatest, because he identified Jesus as the Messiah with more clarity than all others who preceded him.**

So I ask you again, why are you greater than John the Baptist? The answer is tied to the same reason why John the Baptist is greater than all others up until his day. It is because you can identify Jesus as the Messiah with far greater clarity than John ever did. John did not quite understand Jesus' role as the Messiah; he was doubting. Jesus' disciples did not even fully understand God's plan to redeem His people through the suffering and death of Messiah. In order for them to understand, Jesus had to explain it to His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). Jesus explained God's entire plan of redemption during a forty day period after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). It was after this that His disciples finally preached boldly that Jesus was the Messiah. His crucifixion was all a part of the plan. He had to be crucified to bear in His body our sins. He rose to demonstrate His power over death. His kingdom reign has begun. Oh, it is not yet fully established, but it is progressing to that final end one day when Jesus will return to consummate it.

John identified Jesus more clearly than anyone else before Him. Yet, even the one who came to faith in Christ yesterday can identify Jesus' work with greater clarity than John ever did by saying, "Jesus Christ is the one who died for me. He took my sins on His cross. I'm forgiven through His blood." The least in the kingdom has been transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13) and can tell others of how Jesus has delivered him. In a sense, your greatness in the kingdom is not related to your own abilities or great deeds for God. Rather, it is related to your giving testimony to others of the saving grace of Jesus in your life.

This will come about when you speak to others about Jesus. This will come about when your love for others demonstrates that you are one of Jesus' disciples. This will come about when you act with genuine humility toward others, because you know that your greatness is found in Jesus and not in your own life. This will come about when you "regard one another as more important than yourself" (Phil. 2:3) and delight in serving each other. John was great, because he exalted Jesus. You will be great, when you exalt Jesus. You have the advantage, because you live on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. You can exalt Jesus better than John could. You can honor Jesus in far greater ways than John ever could.

John was also...

4. A Key Figure in History (verses 12-13)

In verse 12, Jesus said, "from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force" (Matt. 11:12). The key to understanding this verse is to understand that Jesus is talking about the progress of the kingdom of heaven. Admittedly, this is a very difficult verse to interpret. Its interpretation centers around the two different words translated, "violence" or "forceful." They can be taken in a good way or in a bad way. The kingdom can either be advancing forcefully (in a good way) or it can be experiencing forcefully violent opposition (in a bad way). Those who encounter it may be either forcefully opposing it (in a bad way) or they may be forcefully pressing their way in (in a good way). The NASB translates both of these words with a bad connotation: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force." On the other hand, the NIV uses both words with a good connotation: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." Or, you may combine these types. D. A. Carson believes that the kingdom is advancing (in a good sense), but there is opposition to it (in the bad sense).

Regardless of how you interpret this verse, it still is speaking about the coming kingdom and man's response to it. The kingdom is progressing (regardless of the opposition it faces). People are either resisting it or entering into it. This is the point: **The kingdom is progressing. And it started progressing with John.** When John came on the scene into the wilderness of Judea preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2), the kingdom began its rise. It all started progressing "From the days of John the Baptist until now" (according to verse 12). John may not have quite understood how the kingdom was progressing, but it was set in motion with his ministry. John was a key figure in history to see the dawning of the kingdom. He was great.

Throughout Matthew, we have seen the kingdom advancing. John comes in chapter 3 to announce it. In chapter 4, Jesus comes and begins His ministry. In chapters 5-7, Jesus begins to proclaim the truths of the kingdom. In chapters 8-9, the miraculous power of the kingdom is on display, as Jesus demonstrates his authority by healing all sorts of diseases. In chapter 10, Jesus instructs His disciples to go out and proclaim the kingdom. In chapter 11, Jesus is clearly describing the kingdom.

John was in the balance between the prophets of the old covenant and the beginning of the new kingdom (i.e. "from the days of John the Baptist"). Verse 13 also shows how crucial a role John played in history: "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John" (Matt. 10:13). The Scriptures had anticipated this coming kingdom. The Scriptures had prophesied that it would come. John was the one in history, who began its culmination.

We can easily understand how the prophets were anticipating it. The prophets are constantly speaking of God's coming to the earth. The prophets are constantly anticipating the reign of the Messiah. The prophets are constantly exhorting the people to be ready for these realities. The law also was anticipating the coming of the kingdom as well. The sacrifices prophesied of a coming sacrifice. The legal requirements of the law prophesied of a time when they would be fully satisfied and lived out. Remember when Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). Jesus came to fulfill the law in the sense that He was the one to whom the entire law anticipated. He was the perfect God-man. He initiated the rule of Messiah. Jesus was also bringing in a new age, in which those in the kingdom would perfectly live as God commanded us to do. This will be fully realized at the end of the age in heaven. Verses 12 and 13 anticipate the inauguration of the kingdom, which John began and Jesus accomplished: "The prophets and the law prophesied until John [came]." And "from the days of John the Baptist" the kingdom was advancing.

John was a key figure in history, not because he was a hero, but because the issue that his life advanced. He was sovereignly the right person in the right place at the right time. Down through history, there have always been great people who have become key figures in history because of what they have represented. When you think of these people, you think of the issues that surrounded their life. When you think of Martin Luther, you think of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. When you think of George Washington, you think about the creation of the United States of America. When you think of William Wilberforce, you think the abolition of the slave trade. When you think of Lewis and Clark, you think of the exploration of North America. When you think of Martin Luther King, Jr., you think of the civil rights movement. And when you think of John the Baptist, you think of the dawning of the Messianic Age. This is the point: John was an important part in history. He directed people to look to Jesus. When you think of John the Baptist, you are to think of Messiah. This is why John is great, because in thinking of him, you think of Messiah. John was also...

5. Elijah (verse 14)

Verse 14 says, "If you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come" (Matt. 11:14). Jesus is alluding again to a prophecy found in the book of Malachi. This time it is not Malachi 3, it is Malachi 4. In Malachi 4:5 we read, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD." It was prophesied that Elijah would come again before the LORD comes. The Jews believe this today. At the Seder meal for the Passover, they always set an empty place for Elijah to sit. At one point in the Seder, a child is to go to the door of the home and open it up and see if Elijah would come back. Jesus says that John is Elijah.

Some time later after John's death, Jesus' disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" (Matthew 17:10). Jesus said that "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished" (Matthew 17:11, 12). (i.e. Herod had him killed). On the one hand, John the Baptist was Elijah. On the other hand, Elijah will come in the future. This is the tension that we face in the Bible when we attempt to understand the kingdom of God. Theologians call it the "already/not yet" tension. On the one hand, the kingdom has come. John the Baptist was Elijah. Jesus and John preached how the kingdom was near. The kingdom age has begun. But on the other hand, the kingdom awaits. Elijah will come again in the future. Jesus is waiting to fully establish His kingdom. I believe that this tension explains why John the Baptist denied being Elijah to the religious leaders of the day (see John 1:21). I believe that he was denying being the final Elijah who will come before the end of time.

So, what does it mean that John the Baptist is Elijah? It means that **John came to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord!** Again, John was great, because he cleared the way for Jesus to come!

These are difficult things. This is why Jesus said in verse 15, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus tells us to listen and digest these things into our hearts. I trust that as I have spoken of John, you realize how his life is essentially a giant arrow directing attention to Jesus. Though this passage speaks about John, everything in this passage is pointing to Jesus. This text is like the giant Plimoth Plantation archway. It is meant to lead us somewhere. We are not supposed to spend our time looking at the sign. We are supposed to get past the sign and get to the substance. Our text this morning was a sign, I trust that you see the substance.

In preparation for this message, I was reading one commentary, who focussed all of his attention upon the greatness of John. The argument went, "He was a great man, so we ought to seek to emulate him in his greatness." While this is true (and certainly beneficial to some point), this isn't the point of Matthew 11. While Jesus made comments about the life of John, in every way, these comments pointed back to the identity of Jesus. John was a prophet, so that everything that John said about Jesus was true (verses 7-9). John was the forerunner, who would prepare the way for Jesus (verse 10). John was greater than all, because he identified Jesus more clearly than anybody ever had done before (verse 11). John was the key figure in the turning point in history (i.e. at the dawning of the Messianic age) (verses 12-13). John was Elijah, who would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord (verse 14).

May our lives point others to Jesus.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 22, 2003 by Steve Brandon ¹.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

¹ I must admit my indebtedness to D. A. Carson for guiding my understanding of this portion of Scripture. On several occasions I have had the opportunity of hearing him explain this passage along these lines. His excellent commentary on Matthew alludes to some of these things in detail. (I was encouraged to find Dr. James Montgomery Boice following Carson's interpretation in his own commentary on Matthew).