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Greatness!

Matthew 11:7-15

Matthew 11:7-15, *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'*

¹¹*"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹²And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. ¹⁴And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

The subject of greatness.

Who are really the great people in the world?

Some would say the geniuses of the world.

Others would say the educators, politicians, wealthy, the famous or the entertainers, the athletes, or kings, or the princes, or the heroes, or whatever.

But when it comes to greatness as God defines it, it's very different than it is for the world.

We are going to meet a man who is from a common humble family.

- No wealth,
- no worldly education,
- no success,
- no physical beauty,
- no earthly possession or
- No position.

Yet our Lord says he's the greatest human being who ever lived.

V 11, *“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

That is a statement of fact from the lips of our Lord Himself who is speaking.

“Among them that are born of women.”

Basically, a Jewish reference, or ancient reference to the human race.

Job 14:1, *“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.*

Job 15:14, *“What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous?”*

The Lord said when it comes to humanness there has never been a greater than John the Baptist. He is the greatest human being ever to live up until his time.

Now, that does not mean that he is necessarily being defined on supernatural terms or on spiritual terms even, but on strictly human terms, from the earthly human perspective.

- 1. Character,**
- 2. Calling,**
- 3. Impact.**

The word “risen” is interesting because it is commonly used to speak of the appearance of a prophet.

Matthew 24:11, *Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.*

Matthew 24:24, *For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*

The term “rise” then frequently is used in reference to a prophet.

There never was anybody like John.

He was the most powerful personality and voice that ever spoke. He had dynamic ability to communicate. There never was a prophet with more human talent to play in human history than John the Baptist. He was unparalleled.

- He was greater than Adam.
- He was greater than Abel.
- He was greater than Enoch.
- He was greater than Abraham.
- He was greater than Isaac, Jacob, Joseph.
- He was greater than Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel.

He was the greatest human being that ever lived, based upon his human abilities and his unique calling in human history.

Now our Lord reinforces the greatness in this passage repeatedly.

Jesus is confronting a multitude here.

He is going to make sure that they understand the greatness of John the Baptist.

But when it comes to the spiritual dimension, the least person in the spiritual dimension is greater than the greatest person in the human dimension.

1. Character.

He was great that are born of women, just because of his personal character. He had the marks that it takes to be great, to be a cut above, to be set apart, to be unique.

a) Overcome his weakness.

He could overcome his weakness.

It is always a mark of greatness that a man can overcome his weakness.

There are only two kinds of people.

Either they are victims or victors.

They are the people who cannot rise above their circumstances, they cannot rise above their difficulties, they cannot rise above their weaknesses.

Because everybody has weaknesses, failings, and problems. Whether or not you can overcome them and that is the mark of greatness.

The great ones fight through.

They can compete against their own ignorance.

They can compete against their own laziness.

They can compete against their own weaknesses, and they will overcome.

V 2, tells us that John was in prison.

John was questioning whether Jesus was really the Messiah or not. Because Jesus was not living up to the current expectations.

John is at a low in his life. He is at a weak place. Circumstances, outside influences, lack of information, unfulfilled anticipations have all brought doubt and confusion and perplexity into his mind.

How does he deal with it?

Does he start to tell all his problems to everybody else?

No. He goes immediately to the Lord.

V 2-3, *And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"*

They went and they asked, and Jesus demonstrated with miracles, and they went back, of course, and they told him. That settled the issue.

John was quite a long way away from where Jesus was. He was way down in the eastern part of the Dead Sea and the Lord was clear up in Galilee. He had absolutely no access because he couldn't leave the prison. He had to dispatch two of his disciples.

It was not an easy task but the man who is great is always the man who deals with his weakness and overcomes it.

John recognized that he had this weakness. He was also willing to admit it to subordinates, people beneath him. He wasn't trying to play the God game, to make everybody think that he was infallible, flawless and without any weakness.

He did not want to play to that illusion, because anybody who plays to that illusion remains in doubt and confusion.

Anybody who will not admit weakness is not going to get any help.

One of the great marks of this kind of man is humility. Nobody ever really becomes great, even on a human level, unless they do recognize they have weaknesses that must be overcome.

It is the person who lives under the illusion of perfection that is the true fool. Jesus said this in many different passages.

Matthew 20:26, *Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.*

John had at least enough humility to say I don't know. He said it to his subordinates and let them act in his behalf.

He showed his humility.

Matthew 3:11, *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

Matthew 3:14, *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"*

John 3:30, *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

John was a man of humility.

He was a man who would recognize weakness.

Pride curses greatness.

The great are the ones who see their weakness and work to overcome, not the ones who fancy themselves to be without weakness.

Neither the Romans nor the Greeks had a word in their vocabulary for humility, because man does not want to admit his weakness.

b) Conviction

V 7, *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"*

The multitude remaining, but the two disciples left.

The multitude had heard this whole conversation, and they were now aware of John's doubt.

They already perceived that he was a prophet.

Matthew 21:26, *But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."*

John the Baptist is a great prophet, and he has got doubts.

Maybe he is a weaker man than we think he is.

Maybe he is a more wavering person than we have imagined.

Maybe he isn't as great as we think.

Our Lord begins to reaffirm in their minds his true greatness, because people are so often prone to assume that to admit weakness is not to be great when just the opposite is true.

Jesus asks them a very simple question.

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”

You went out to see John they might be thinking that can we believe him?

Because John is the one who said, *Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.*

John is the one who announced the Messiah but now he’s doubting.

Can we believe John?

Lord asks them when you went out into the wilderness, did you go out there to see a reed shaken with the wind?

What does He mean by this?

Jesus wants to remind them of the greatness of John, and He does it by pointing to their own attitude and experience with John.

Jesus doesn’t want them to think of John as a wavering kind of weak person with no ability to make up his mind.

Why did you leave Galilee and go all the way out to the desert around the Dead Sea?

What was it that attracted you to that man?

“Was it because he was a reed shaken in the wind?”

Was it simply because he was a weak character, blowing back and forth with every new wave that came along?

Because if they wanted people like that they could have found them in the temple.

If they wanted weak, indecisive, ordinary reeds that blew around with every wind, they could have found them all over their religious system.

They certainly didn't need to go all the way out to the desert to find one.

Those reeds that are spoken of here were very common reeds. They would grow along the bank of the Jordan River and they were frequently growing in other places around water. They were by the thousands everywhere along the Jordan.

The Lord is saying did you go out there because he was just a common ordinary garden variety person, blown around like everybody else with no strength and no conviction?

The reed blowing back and forth symbolizes a man who yields to popular opinion, a man who is blown about by ideas and pressures, a man who can be bought.

A man who does not have the courage or the boldness to be a man of conviction.

It refers to the spineless.

What Jesus was saying is this, if you wanted to find some spineless people there are plenty of them right where you were. You didn't come out here because he was spineless. The whole land was filled with people like that.

John was not common.

John was not compromising.

They knew that.

John did not hold back his message for anybody.

When all the religious leaders came out, if he wanted to play to the crowd that was his moment.

Matthew 3:7-10, *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. ¹⁰And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

Then he goes on to talk about judgment of fire and purging and burning them with unquenchable fire. A devastating attack against the religious leaders.

The whole leadership of Israel had let Herod's sin pass, Herod's horrible adultery and Herod's illicit marriage. But John faced him nose to nose and told him it was a sin. That is why John was in prison and soon to have his head chopped off and brought in on a plate.

No, it wasn't because he was a reed shaking in the wind that they went to see him.

If they wanted to see that they could see that everywhere. It was because he was a man of great conviction.

“Right is right even if everyone is against it and Wrong is wrong even if everyone is for it.”

He was a man of great conviction.

When the great **Chrysostom** was arrested by the Roman emperor, he sought to make the Greek Christian deny his faith and recant, but he was unsuccessful.

So, the emperor discussed with his advisers what they could do to this prisoner.

“Shall I put him in a dungeon?” the emperor asked.

“No,” one of his counsellors replied, “for he will be glad to go. He longs for the quietness where he can delight in the mercies of his God.”

“Then he shall be executed,” said the emperor.

“No,” came the answer, “for he will be glad to die. He declares that in the event of death he will be in the presence of the Lord.

“Well, what shall we do then?” the ruler asked.

“There’s only one thing that will cause him pain. Make him sin. He is afraid of nothing but sin.”

Scripture confirms the value of a person with conviction.

James says, “Don’t be a double minded person, going whatever way is easy.”

Ephesians 4:14, *“Don’t be blown about by every wind of doctrine.”*

Be a person of conviction.

The great people of human history and you will find they were people who had convictions about something. They pursued those convictions to the end.

c) Self-denial.

The truly great people are the people who can deny themselves.

- Read about great **generals** who put their life on the line, who went through incredible hardship to win a victory.
- Read about **scientists** who were locked up in a situation for days and weeks and months and years trying to discover something which we now take for granted.
- Read about some person who stayed with a problem, hour upon hour upon hour until, ultimately, it was solved.

V 8-9, But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

Did you go out there just to see another typical guy who is a courtier, who operates in the palace, who favours the king, who does whatever you need to do to get the royal favours, a man who lives a life of luxurious self-indulgence?

Did you go out there to see a guy who plays to the court, who seeks the favours because he wants to pad his seat?

In the early days of Herod, the Great, many of the scribes who were attracted to Herod. They were seeking favour from Herod took off their usual plain dress, which was the mark of a scribe, and they donned the ornate, luxurious robes of Herod's court. They sold out.

But John the Baptist was no self-seeker. He was no part of the system at all. He lived in the wilderness. His cause was not comfort.

His cause was not self-indulgence.

His cause was not to see how easy it could be on him.

He was not interested in gaining favour from people above him who could pad his seat. He stood apart, unstained by the system.

He was a man so consumed by a greater cause in his own mind that he couldn't be attracted to the system.

John led a very simple lifestyle.

He had a raiment of camel's hair, a rough garment of camel's hair, a leather belt.

Matthew 3:4, *Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey*

Can't imagine the wild honey could do much for the locusts.

But in those days, they use to de-wing, bake, and salt those things and eat them like peanuts, with a little honey.

He lived in the wilderness.

His lifestyle was a living visual protest self-indulgence.

His lifestyle was a statement against self-centeredness.

He was so utterly abandoned to the cause and that is the mark of greatness.

The great people are concerned with a goal. They are concerned with a mission that supersedes any personal comfort or self-indulgence.

John's commitment was a consuming commitment.

Luke 1:15, *For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.*

The Nazarite vow meant you would drink neither wine nor strong drink. Which immediately eliminates you from all the fancy banquets and all the nice little things that you might attend.

Part of the Nazarite vow to allow your hair to grow without cutting your hair, never putting a razor to your head which didn't exactly keep you up with the current society trend and hairdos.

I do not care about what I look like. I do not care about indulging myself in those delicacies of life. I am given to a cause.

There were many people who took a Nazarite vow for a few weeks or a few months.

There were only less than a handful who took that vow for life. Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist. He restricted himself even above the priests. The priests could only have to restrict himself from wine and strong drink while he was functioning as a priest, according to Leviticus chapter 10.

But John did it for life.

He took the highest level.

He was committed to self-denial.

John was great. He was great because of his personal character. He was remarkable.

John the Baptist was so remarkable that people thought he was the Messiah.

Luke 3:15, *Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not,*

His greatness was built in his personal character.

2. Calling

Privileged calling.

His greatness was also marked by his privileged calling.

When it comes to tasks on earth, he was given the greatest task that any human being ever had.

What could be a greater task than announcing the arrival of God in human flesh?

The only person in the human race that even comes close to John in that regard is Mary, mother of Jesus.

Mary was chosen to bear the Messiah. But in many ways John was greater than Mary.

- Mary gave birth to a baby.
- John heralded a King.

- Mary brought Jesus into 30 years of obscurity.
- John ushered Him into three years of effective ministry.

The Lord's third question.

V 9, *But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.*

They didn't go out to see a reed shaken with the wind.

They didn't go out to see a man dressed in soft clothing like people in a king's court.

What did you go out to see?

"A prophet?"

Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

How could John be more than a prophet?

V 10, *For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'*

They went out to see a prophet. But far more than a prophet, the very herald of the Messiah. He was a prophet and they saw him that way.

Matthew 21:26, *But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."*

When it came to John's ability to speak, he was without equal. There were some great prophets. Starting with Moses who was the first prophet, all the way to John who was the last prophet.

He was the valedictorian of the prophets.

John was the most dynamic, articulate, confrontive, powerful spokesman God ever had to do the supreme prophetic task, the last prophet who would announce that the Messiah was not coming, but was here.

So, the greatness comes not only from character but from calling. John's greatest personal character matched with the role that he had in history, summed up to make him the greatest man that ever lived.

True greatness always matches the right man with the right position.

A man could have potential greatness but if he never got into the right field, he would never know that.

When a person is a Christian because God knows what your strengths are and God, through His expressed will and the Spirit of God, can lead you into that which is the greatest fulfilment of that ability. People in the world just sort of grab and if they are lucky enough their talent will intersect with

their calling. But as Christians, we have God to give us that direction.

Amos 3:7, *Surely the Lord God does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.*

John was one of those, the man with the message from God. It had been silent for 400 years since there had been a prophet.

When John came, they knew he was a prophet. He spoke with power and conviction and people were changed.

They didn't all believe his message, but they all saw he was a prophet.

Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

How could you be more than a prophet?

John not only prophesied but he himself was the fulfilment of prophecy.

V 10, *For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'*

He is the fulfilment of **Malachi 3:1**, *"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the*

Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.

He is not only one who prophesied but also, he is the fulfillment of prophecy.

So, he is more than a prophet.

He not only predicted the Messiah, but he also actually baptized the Messiah. So, he is not just one who tells, he is one who does. He touched the living Christ.

He not only said, “He will come, He will come, He will come,” but one day he said, “Here He is.”

He is more than a prophet, because he was not only the last prophet, but the forerunner of Christ, the baptizer of Christ, the fulfillment of prophecy.

V 10, is a quote of **Malachi 3:1**. It’s an interpretive quote and the Lord by the way He quotes, interprets the verse to refer to John the Baptist, of course.

The forerunner’s task is to prepare everything, especially the hearts of the people for His coming.

God says, I send him, My messenger, before You the Messiah and he will prepare the hearts of the people for you.

So, you have a marvellous conversation between the Father and the Son, from **Malachi 3:1**, here given in reference to John the Baptist. *“He will come before Your face.”*

He is the personal messenger of the Messiah. He is calling apostate Israel to repent.

It’s a great thing to be the pastor of our Church. It is something more than I could ever dream.

If I were in John’s position, it would be so hard pressed to perceive that after hundreds, thousands of years of preparation for the Messiah, I should be the one to be His personal herald.

Incredible calling.

No greater privilege is ever given to any human being in history than to John the Baptist, not even Mary.

He was great because of his personal character.

3. Impact.

John was great because of his powerful culmination.

You have got to have the right man and the mission.
You have got to have the right impact.

Right place and right time and right opportunity and right exposure.

There was 400 years without a prophet, tremendous anticipation had built. It was the right moment. There was electricity in the air when John came on the scene.

Every single thing going on started revolving around him and he became the issue.

He became pivotal at that juncture of redemptive history. He became the issue. The action took place all around him. He was the culmination of all Old Testament history.

He made waves.

He upset the status-quo.

He had high impact.

He created conflict.

V 12, *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Ever since John has been around, we have had problems. It has been two and a-half years of his ministry. Nearly the last year has been in prison but still the violence goes on.

Eighteen months of wilderness preaching. This man creates all kinds of activity.

The great ones are always at the middle of the action.

His life had become the issue.

His ministry had become the focus.

The Kingdom of heaven refers to God's rule.

God's rule simply referring to God's will, God's message, God's principles, God's dimension, God's Kingdom, God's purposes.

They have been violently dealt with since John came along.

What is the nature of this violence?

There are two main ways to interpret this verse.

Depends on how you look at the Greek verb that is here translated "suffers violence" (*biazeō*).

Some translators have understood this verb to be translated in what would be called the "passive voice"; that is, that it's describing something that is being done to the kingdom of heaven. That's the way it is being translated, for example, in the New King James Version; that "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence".

If this is the correct way to interpret these words, then this might mean that the kingdom of heaven is being violently attacked to keep it from spreading. Of course, that is true.

The Lord Jesus used this very same word to say that, whenever the "seed" of the gospel is sown in someone's heart, the devil often comes and *"snatches away what was sown (Matthew 13:19)*.

Jesus once rebuked the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 23:13, *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.*

Herod has done his part by taking the chief preacher of the Kingdom and throwing him into prison. The Kingdom was being violently denied. Its spiritual reality was being rejected.

Even Paul, on one of his missionary trips, was violently attacked and nearly stoned to death. Afterwards, he would appear in churches on his way home from this journey all bandaged and broken and limping.

Acts 14:22, *strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith,*

and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

When Jesus says, then, that "the violent take" this kingdom "by force", it could be a way of expressing how it suffers attack from its enemies.

A second way of interpreting this verse, though, interprets that verb in 'the middle voice'; that is, that it is describing an action that the subject of the verb performs on itself.

This is the interpretation taken by the New International Version. Which reads, *"the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it."*

That would make this a call for us to be aggressive in seizing hold of the kingdom with all our energies to be forceful in laying hold of it.

It would be very much like what Jesus said, in a different context.

Luke 16:16, *"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it."*

Great Puritan preacher **Thomas Watson** wrote an entire book on this one verse. In it, he wrote, "Our work is great, our time short, our Master urgent. We have need therefore to summon together all the powers of our souls and strive as a matter of life and death, that we may arrive at the kingdom above. We must not only put forth diligence, but violence."

He meant an earnest eagerness for the truth, and a passionate pursuit of our own salvation.

This is how Paul spoke of his own passionate pursuit of the kingdom of heaven. He said,

Philippians 3:12-14, *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. ²⁶Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷But I*

discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

The kingdom has been offered to the Jewish people and their King has presented Himself to them. Yet, they are not responding to the offer.

The prophets and the law had preached until John and during that time, the time of urgency had not arrived.

But now, the "end of the ages" has arrived. The kingdom must be eagerly sought and eagerly seized upon. A man or woman of God must be earnest and zealous and eager. He or she must deny themselves, set all worldly pursuits into second place, and aggressively "seize the kingdom".

What impact John the Baptist had?

People were turning to God, they were repenting of their sins, he was leading many to Christ.

Luke 1:16, *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.*

John is going to go with a great effect and turn many hearts to God.

The kingdom is moving ahead vigorously. Our Lord was continuing then, to mark out the greatness of John. Through

him, the kingdom was vigorously moving ahead. He was God's tool to purify the people. He was God's tool to get them ready.

The kingdom is not for weaklings and for waverers or compromisers.

The kingdom is for hard, sturdy-hearted folks like Joseph, Nathan, Elijah, Daniel, and his three friends, and Mordecai, Stephen, Deborah, Esther, Lydia, Ruth, and Paul.

It's for men and women who are willing to enter it and affirm the Lordship of Christ.

V13, *"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."*

He is the climax.

Everything from Genesis to John is moving along to the moment that he pointed to Christ.

It was all one message. From Genesis to John was one message. The Messiah's coming!

John was the culmination.

What a commendation. He is the focus. Everything is swirling around him. The kingdom is moving violently through the godless, human system. Eager and vigorous people are pressing into it.

Why?

Because this is the climax, everything has built up to John.

V 14, *And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.*

In **Malachi 4:5** it said that before the Messiah came to set up His kingdom on earth, Elijah would come as a forerunner.

Would this be a real Elijah?

No.

Elijah's not going to be reincarnated. But one like Elijah.

Luke 1:16-17, *And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

John 1:21, *And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."*

If he says I am not Elijah. Jesus here says, "If you receive, he is Elijah," then we know what we mean by Elijah will come.

One in his power and in his person and with his kind of character.

A powerful, rugged individual who will come and announce the Kingdom.

V14, If you receive the Kingdom, and open your hearts to the Messiah, then God will establish the earthly kingdom. John will have fulfilled that prophecy. He will have been that Elijah.

But if you refuse the kingdom, then John is not going to fulfil that Elijah prophecy. There will yet be an Elijah-type person to come in the future.

They didn't receive the kingdom.
So, John was not that Elijah.

Before the kingdom comes there are going to come two witnesses.

Revelation 11:3, *And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."*

They will be that Elijah who comes to announce the Kingdom. John could have been if they had believed, and then the Kingdom would have been established right then. But they didn't believe, and so he was not that Elijah.

Not everybody understood the significance of this man, so the Lord adds a warning.

V 15, “He that ears to hear, let him hear.”

Jesus is saying, if John is the forerunner, then I am the King.

If I am the King, the Kingdom is being offered. That puts you in the place of making a choice.

Don't refuse it.

There is a two-fold offer of the Kingdom.

Receive the Messiah into your heart, and if you as a nation receive Me, I will bring the Kingdom to earth, the millennial kingdom.

They were offered both.

The nation did not receive the Messiah.

A few received into their hearts the King, and so there was a kingdom in the heart. There yet waits to be a Kingdom in the earth. The greatest man that ever lived.

Conclusion:

V 11, *but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

In all the human greatness of John, personal character, privileged calling, powerful culmination in human history, and all that he is born of women, and he doesn't come up to the least person who is in God's spiritual Kingdom.

Great truth.

You know what true greatness is?

True greatness isn't being like John the Baptist, that's beneath true greatness. That's earthly greatness.

True greatness is being in God's Kingdom.