

## **“HAVING GIFTS THAT DIFFER.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**July 20, 2025, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Romans 12:3-6a; John 1:19-27; 35-37; 3:26-30**

**Introduction: *Story of the rabbi walking home late.***

Rabbi Jozef was walking home from a long day at the synagogue. It was evening. In typical rabbinic fashion his head was down deep in meditation on that day's reading from the Torah. Oblivious to his surroundings he suddenly ran into a wall and from behind the wall the voice of a Roman centurion called out:

Centurion: **“Who are you and what are you doing here?”**

Narrator: In typical rabbinic fashion the Rabbi answered the question with a question:

Rabbi: **“How much do they pay you?”**

Centurion: **“One denarius a day.”**

Rabbi: **“If I pay you two denarii a day will you follow me and ask me those two questions every day?”**

“Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Why do you get up every morning? What are you living for? Who are you living for?

Is it possible there is more to you and your life than you think or imagine?

Do you know “Who you are and what on earth are you doing here?”

Our text says we are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. Does that have implications for why we get up and what we do all day? What does that mean?

Romans 1-11 makes it clear, we are not our own, we did not choose God, He chose us. Every time I say that out loud, you should have a moment's reaction of being stunned. It is staggering that we have received such undeserved mercy. You should shake your head in disbelief that God did that. As we sang earlier, “I know not why God's wondrous grace to me was made known.” So unworthy. We are not our own. If you are a Christian, you are called by God out of the world, and adopted into the family of God.

By His Holy Spirit you have the Spirit of adoption, making you are a son or a daughter in the family of God, and brothers and sisters to each other. By being born

again by the Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ you are a part of His body, the body of Christ.

You are a member of His body and you are members of each other. You have a God-ordained place and a part to play. We are not as independent and autonomous as we like to think. We need others and others need us. God wants us to humble ourselves to serve others and be served by others.

Never trivialize the church. It cost God the life of His Son to create this. You share something with those sitting around you so profound it surpasses the value of all our other human relationships (John Piper).

### **The context of spiritual gifts in a meaningful life.**

We are going to spend a few weeks talking about spiritual gifts. I want to begin by giving a context, the big picture. I want to set spiritual gifts in the context of a meaningful life created and designed by a sovereign and purposeful God. I want you to see your life is ordained by God and therefore is filled with meaning and purpose that isn't just about us, but has a larger purpose in the plan of God.

We think far too little of our lives and the spiritual gifts God has given *to each of us*. And by each one of us I am talking about each of you. To the student in ninth grade; the single seeking God's direction for their future; the mom at home with little ones; the man in the barn or shop; the person in the office or on the road; and the widow in the retirement center or care home.

### **The purpose and meaning of the life of John the Baptist:**

The life of John the Baptist illustrates the value and importance of knowing who you are and what you are and why you are here.

**John 1:6-8** There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

A man named John, *named* by God, and he was *sent* by God.

He was not the light, he was only a witness to the light.

He was not the one to be believed, but to be believed through.

John knew who Jesus was and he knew who he was and what he was given to do.

The same is true of us. We are named by God, called by God, sent by God. We are where we are and who we are by God's doing. We are salt and light, bearing witness to Jesus.

**John 1:19-27** The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” 22 So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

John was emphatically clear about who he was and who he was not, and what he was doing.

John answered from Scripture. He saw himself in biblical terms. He was grounded in the Word. If I ask you who you are, can you answer from Scripture? Created by God, saved for God, in the image of Christ, born again of the Spirit, a member of His body, with gifts for His purpose.

John saw himself connected with what God was doing. John saw himself connected with the mission and purpose of Jesus Christ. His life was lived for Christ. His life pointed to Christ.

John was not his own. He belonged body and soul to the eternal purposes and glory of God.

John’s testimony is a rebuke of our culture and the generation we live in. We live such selfish, self-centered, narcissistic lives. We live such earth-centered, trivial lives. We don’t think beyond ourselves, our families, our jobs, our day-to-day existence. We are too small-minded.

**John 1:35-37** The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. John loses two disciples to Jesus. Notice his response. No envy, no greed, no pride, no power plays. The question comes to mind, why didn't John follow Jesus and become an apostle? He wasn't called.

**John 3:26-30** [Some of John’s disciples] came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” 27 John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.”

This incident illustrates why it's important to know who you are and what you are doing here.

John's disciples get into an argument. They are feeling competition and jealousy; they are guarding turf and ego; they are seeking to exalt themselves and their status. "That man," (resentment) and "everyone is going to him" (exaggeration).

John was older, so he should receive precedence and honor over his younger upstart cousin who is also an itinerant preacher. Adding fuel to the fire, Jesus was more successful. We get caught up in that kind of thinking. We often compare ourselves with those like us: farmers to farmers, business owners with business owners, parents to parents.

Notice John's response, full of grace and truth.

**John 3:27** A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

This may be John's greatest statement. What a clear understanding that we live in a truly theistic universe, a God-centered, God-controlled universe.

Notice all John's statements are clear, firm, direct, bold, unambiguous. John has clarity and conviction about Jesus and about himself; he is not timid, hesitant; not conflicted by doubts and insecurities and who to please.

This comes from a life that is centered and grounded and focused. Stay focused, stay connected to who you are and what God has gifted you to do and given you to do.

All gifts, all calls, all purpose and meaning, all things are from God alone. He makes all this fit into the place He has for us in the stream of redemptive history.

Discontent over God's wise and sovereign purposes, discontent over what God has given us and where He has placed us is not only unbelief, it's arrogance that wants to tell God what's best for us. How often are we discontent, grasping for more, anxious? Or wishing we had someone else's gift or ability?

John meant what he said. Both John and Jesus were given their roles by heaven and John was content. John was content with his role as best man. He knew how to play second violin.

Ill: I have been a best man in a friend's wedding, and I had a best man at my wedding.

John's satisfaction was in knowing *his* God-given ministry had been successful. His joy is real and genuine, and it was complete.

“John finds his joy, not in grudgingly conceding victory to a superior opponent, but in wholeheartedly embracing God's will, and the supremacy it assigns to Jesus” (D.A. Carson, *John*, p. 212).

### **Summary/Conclusion of John the Baptist**

John the Baptist knew the meaning and purpose of his life and his spiritual gifts:

1. He understood his identity. He knew who he was and who he was not. Is that clear in your mind?

2. He understood his role.

He was not the groom. He was the best man. He knew his God-ordained station in life.

Do you know yours and are you able to embrace yours in the body of Christ?

3. He understood his direction, his objective.

“I am a voice.” “He must increase; I must decrease.”

4. He understood he was a steward of a gift, he was sent, he was not his own. He wasn't panicked or fearful, anxious or discontent.

5. He understood his limits.

His energies weren't sapped trying to be or do something else or everything else. His weaknesses didn't wipe him out.

He knew he was equipped to do just what God wanted.

He was not tempted to please everyone else or seek applause. He was not a people pleaser.

### **Implications and application.**

The knowledge that God has called, chosen, appointed and gifted us, that He has made us what we are and placed us where we are is the cure for many troubled or anxious hearts.

A life that is focused and centered and clear is a life that can rise above the storms and winds, the changes and stresses and tensions, will rise above things like a mid-life crisis.

Mid-life crisis happens when you wake up to the fact that the goals, dreams, visions, desires you have are either met and were too small, too short-sighted or

small-minded, leaving you dissatisfied; or they are met and now you realize they don't matter or were the wrong ones.

Thinking about who we are and what we are doing here and what God has given us sets us free from fear and stress and worry and doubt; from comparing ourselves to others; from jealousy and envy over what others have or can do; and from thinking we have messed everything up so much that we are hopeless. It helps us see how great God's grace is and how generous His gifts are and how meaningful His purposes are.

“Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Fame, pleasure and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of His eternal plans” (J. Campbell White).

As we think about spiritual gifts these next week's let's see them in the context of God's purposes for our lives in the midst of His great redemptive plans. We are a part of something bigger and more important than just ourselves and more satisfying and fulfilling.

Hear the joy and triumph of Ephesians 1:3-6:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

**Prayer:** Holy Father, give us all ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to your church. Cause your truth to take root and bear fruit for your glory and for our good and for the blessing of those around us, for Jesus' sake, Amen.