

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Go away from my window
Leave at your own chosen speed
I'm not the one you want, babe
I'm not the one you need
You say you're lookin' for someone
Who's never weak but always strong
To protect you and defend you
Whether you are right or wrong
Someone to open each and every door.

But it ain't me, babe
No, no, no, it ain't me, babe
It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe.

Go lightly from the ledge, babe
Go lightly on the ground
I'm not the one you want, babe
I'll only let you down
You say you're lookin' for someone
Who'll promise never to part
Someone to close his eyes to you
Someone to close his heart
Someone to die for you and more.

But it ain't me, babe
No, no, no, it ain't me, babe
It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe.

You say you're lookin' for someone
To pick you up each time you fall
To gather flowers constantly
And to come each time you call
And will love you for your life
And nothin' more.

But it ain't me, babe
No, no, no, it ain't me, babe
It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe.

We could argue about who had the best version of this song since Bob Dylan wrote it in the 60's but that's not what we are here for. Let's keep this song in mind while we hear our text again

⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Pray

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for sending John the Baptist to announce your coming to save people. Help us to repent and believe in you. **Amen.**

Pastors, especially new or young pastors sometimes have a crisis of conscience. They wonder if they do their work for their own benefit or the benefit of the hearers. It's terrific to get encouraging comments, like 'thanks for the sermon', or 'well-done pastor', or 'that was a well-planned service', or 'thanks for the study', but sometimes all these go to their head, and they start to think 'it is me, I'm the one they are here to see'. They know that this is not true, and hopefully, parishioners do also, but it doesn't mean the thought doesn't enter the pastor's mind. You better not believe that the pastor is the messiah because then we would all be in big trouble. Incidentally, this is the cause of much conflict between pastors and congregations because our behaviour sometimes denies our belief that the pastor is just a vessel.

We started with the Song 'It Ain't Me Babe', Bob Dylan wrote, Johnny Cash and an endless list of others recorded it, and it fits well with the message that John preaches today.

John the Baptist appears to be an influencer by Mark's description, yet everything is against him to be popular. He is in a strange and remote location, his diet is weird, his clothing unusual, his preaching confronting, and his baptising challenging, yet he must have 'Rizz' because everyone is going out to see him. The biggest thing John doesn't do that our modern influencers do is that he doesn't promote himself, his message is the opposite of self-advertisement. He says; ⁷And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark 1:7-8 (ESV) That is, 'It ain't me you're looking for.'

So lowly is John that he doesn't even see himself as acceptable to remove Jesus' shoes. The mental picture that we might have is that of a shoe shine boy. The Shoeshine Boy is one of the lowest jobs you can have, so low that we've all but abolished the position. The shoeshine boy would sit out in the street, down at your feet, in streets full of dirt, mud, rain, vermin, spit, rubbish, and before the advent of the car manure and clean the boots of passers-by. It is generally a denigrated position; you would do any other job to avoid it. John the Baptist says he is not even worthy to do this job for the one who is to come. This is how lowly John sees himself and how highly he rates the one to come.

We best be talking about the one to come. He is the one who is going to bring comfort to people who are destroyed by war and punished for their sins. He is the word of the Lord that will stand forever. He is the favour of God on humankind, the forgiveness that we so desperately need. He is the salvation and glory of God. He is faithfulness and righteousness come together and personified, he is God's faithfulness and righteousness flowing up from the ground and raining down from the heavens. He is the increase and abundance that is so desperately needed for ailing people. He is the eternal God, the one who transcends time and space and because he is the first to rise from the dead brings that resurrection to all who are in him. He is the one who is without spot or blemish, the true Passover lamb who applies that pure sinlessness to us.

Joh says; After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

He effectively said, 'it ain't me you're looking for', there is another one coming who is more powerful, or stronger, so powerful that I'm not even worthy to help him take off his shoe. Now this was not some false humility this is not a humble brag, John knew how powerful this one to come is.

The world is still looking for someone. Someone to cling to who is, never weak, always strong, protects and defends, picks you up each time you fall, someone to die for you and more...We, sinful humans, are adept at finding false heroes to worship and villains to hate. All in place of the one true God who can provide exactly what we need, want and desire and more. Just look at how we cling to our Pastors and then let them fall when we see that it's not them. This is a classic problem in the church, the congregation loves the pastor for all the things he does for them and so elevates him onto unimaginable pedestals only to desert him when he doesn't do it the way they want. Forgetting all the time that the purpose of the pastor is not to be the hero himself but simply to point the people to Christ Jesus, who is the one you are looking for.

John the Baptist is a good example. All the region had headed out into the desert to hear him speak, they saw that this was the new thing, to hear his message of turning around, getting dunked in the river and they were all there looking for the Christ, the chosen one. Even Herod knew he was important, but it didn't stop him from putting him in prison and eventually beheading him.

Peter, Paul and the other disciples found the same problem, when they preached people wanted them to be the messiah, they were the ones with power. But Paul gives the same message in 1 Corinthians 3

For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

They were hearing the same things as John heard, this man must be special because of what he does or how he speaks, but Paul isn't willing to have any of that, he tells us it ain't me babe, it ain't me you're looking for.

Over history, we've done the same thing over and over in the church. Just look at us, we've even taken the name of our reformer as our own. But you know even when we idolise Luther, his message is still the same, it ain't me babe, it ain't me you're looking for!

We are constantly on the lookout for someone to save us, someone who is never weak, always strong, protects and defends, picks you up each time you fall, someone to die for you and more...

We are looking for someone to save us from this life of death, to take away the grief that we feel when someone dies, and we realise again that life doesn't go on forever and that we are just like grass or flowers that wither and die. We are looking for someone who transcends time and space, someone who is eternal. We are looking for some hope, someone new who we can cling to. But it ain't me babe...

The one you are looking for has already come. He followed John and came with all the power John indicated, so much power that he died in place of all humanity, in place of you. He brings you into his death through baptism with his Holy Spirit so that when you are looking for him you don't need to be confused by all those who it ain't, you find him. So that he can show you that he is never weak, always strong, protects and defends, picks you up each time you fall, someone to die for you and more..., you find him in his word; preached by those who point you to him and tell you it ain't me, it's him, you find him in the waters engulfing you in your baptism proclaiming you to belong to him

because you are now covered with him, and you find him in his body and blood when you are kneeling at his altar and he is serving you by his servants and giving you eternal life.

It isn't me babe, it's Him.

Amen

Dear Heavenly Father continue to send your messengers to point us to Christ

Amen

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.