

**THE BIG IDEA:** There's a price to pay when you make the way.

### The Take-Off

Let me read a few names for you and see if anyone recognizes them. My guess is that you won't.

Roland Harper. Jim Braxton. Tommy Vardell.

Maybe these will be more familiar: Daryl Johnston. Brad Hoover.

But if you're even a casual football fan, you'll recognize these 5 names: Walter Payton, O.J. Simpson, Barry Sanders, Emmitt Smith, and Stephen Davis (for all you Panther fans!).

The first 5 lesser-known men are the fullbacks who opened holes for the more famous men who ran through them, and they provide the perfect illustration for understanding the mission of John the Baptist.

John had a mission, and there were 3 important steps he had to take in order to fulfill it, but before we see them, let's make sure we're clear on what his mission was.

It's found in Matthew 3:3 and it's very clear: John was to prepare the way for Jesus and make straight paths for Jesus.

Bottom line? John the Baptist was Jesus' fullback.

That was his mission: make the way for Jesus. And as we'll see, fulfilling that mission required 3 sobering steps:

#### 1. John had to go first

- a. I'm not going to try to make this hard or confusing or unclear: if a running back is going to score, someone has to go into the hole first, and that person is usually in for a major collision
- b. That was John's role. He went first.
- c. I know we have some outdoor people here, and so let's just talk about blazing a trail, okay?
- d. Doesn't it sound awesome? Everybody wants to go down in history as the guy who blazed a trail, the guy who went boldly where no one else has gone.
- e. But then we realize that it's a lot of work. That there's a lot of danger and risk.
- f. Suddenly, we're re-thinking that trail blazing thing, aren't we?
- g. This week-end is all about honoring our veterans, and I got to thinking about how much we owe them, because they are literally the ones who are going first, aren't they?
- h. They take the bullet so we don't have to.
- i. I've always been amazed with the stories of D-Day and the beach landings of the Normandy Invasion, and I was reading some more about that last night.
- j. I found out that on the Omaha Beach alone, the first wave of soldiers saw 3x the casualties as the second wave.
- k. They went first, and they went first knowing what that meant. But someone had to go first, and we're indebted to the ones who did.
- l. They jumped off the boats knowing they could - and probably would - die.
- m. Going first is so often a call to die so that others can live, and Jesus calls us to that, too.
- n. Matthew 16:24-25
- o. Like John, we're called to make a way for Jesus, and if we're going to do that well, we're going to have to be willing to go first.

#### 2. John had to go hard

- a. I know we're close to running the fullback and football analogy into the ground, but fullbacks don't just go first into the line. They go hard, too.
- b. Making a way for Jesus isn't for wimps. No tip toe-ing into the battle.
- c. Jesus said in Matthew 11:12 that John was a man of force, and that the kingdom was advanced by force.
- d. Buckle up, because this could be a bumpy ride.
- e. This is why Paul wrote in Ephesians 6 that we need the armor.
- f. This is why Paul wrote in Colossians 4:12 that his colleague "wrestled" in prayer.
- g. This is why we read about David - when he saw the giant, Goliath - running to the battle
- h. Go big or go home, right?
- i. John was a man who went big. He didn't back down from a challenge.
- j. He spoke truth to anyone and everyone, no matter what it could cost him.

- k. Matthew 3:7 - he sees the religious leaders coming to be baptized and calls them out on their hypocrisy (calls them a bunch of snakes!)
- l. Mark 6:14-29 - John calls out the sin of a king and pays for it with his life
- m. In fact, that's the story that is referred to in our text, and let's start on the third point by talking about what happened to John in prison

3. John had to go away

- a. Any good fullback knows that it isn't enough to go first and strong into the hole to block.
- b. In order to complete the mission, he's also got to go away.
- c. Once you've made the way for Jesus, you've got to get out of the way of Jesus so that he can move.
- d. John knew that. In fact, John 1:29 was the confession that marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the beginning of the end of John's.
- e. John watched his disciples become disciples of Jesus. When asked about Jesus' growing popularity (John 3:26 - "everyone is going to him"), John replied that "he must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:30)
- f. John knew that eventually he had to go away - he had to get out of the way
- g. I think that the longer John lived his life and the more he fulfilled his mission, the more he knew how his life was going to end
- h. I've mentioned to you before about Koshy - the man we help in India - and how he has said many times that he doesn't expect to die a natural death
- i. I think John knew that, too, and had counted the cost long before he stormed the beaches on D-Day for the kingdom of Jesus
- j. And yet, even after going first and going hard - even after saying in John 3:30 that he knew he had to go away - in prison, John ran head first into his toughest opponent yet: doubt.
- k. Matthew 11:2-3 - John sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the One
- l. After a career of blocking, hitting the hole and playing second fiddle, in prison John starts to wonder if he had blocked for the right person
- m. I love Jesus' response: go back and tell John about the wins - the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the good news is being preached to the poor!
- n. Bottom line? I'm running through the hole you made.
- o. Mission accomplished.

The Landing

But I know what you're thinking, and it was the same thing John was thinking: why was he still in prison?

If Jesus was the One, why not set John free, too?

"He must increase, and I must decrease."

We're crazy to think that promise can become reality without pain. Our mission is the same as John's: make a way for Jesus to redeem others.

- Acts 1:8 - we'll be his witnesses

- 2 Corinthians 5:20 - we're his ambassadors

Accomplishing that mission means we also have to go first, go hard and go away and that will cost us.

Today's Big Idea sums it up: **There's a price to pay when you make the way.**

Isn't it funny how everyone wants the fairy tale ending when they follow Jesus, and yet those closest to Jesus in the Bible had violent endings?

John 16:33 - in this world you will trouble, but I have overcome the world!

Why would anyone - John the Baptist, men on D-Day, you or I - willingly suffer loss so that others could win?

Because we know that we are making the way for something - or in our case, Someone - greater than us.

There is a price to pay when you make the way, but when the kingdom is advanced, and we look up from the ground with grass stuck in our face masks and blood on our arms to see Jesus crossing the goal line, there's a reward, too.

Jesus wins, and making the way for a winner - even at personal loss - is worth it.

The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear. You've played your part well, John, and even in your doubt, I can say that no one born has been greater than you (Matthew 11:12).

Well done, good and faithful servant. You made a way for me, and I have made a place for you. Enter into your rest.