

# The Gospel of John

## The Forerunner of Christ

John 1:6-8,15,19-34

### INTRODUCTION

As we face the beginning of a New Year, we are also reminded that when Christ was born mankind was facing a new era. This was a time when the Mosaic Law was going to be fulfilled and replaced with a new covenant. God's plan of redemption was finally ready to take place. We would no longer be under the Law but under grace.

God chose a man to be a forerunner for Christ named John the Baptist. He prepared the way for Jesus by testifying that the prophesied Messiah had just arrived. In our scripture reading this morning, we are given a glance at the life of John the Baptist who was assigned the task of a messenger to prepare the way of Christ.

### All Stand and Read Scripture

**John 1:6-8,15,19-34 (NASB)**

#### **The Witness John**

6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

...15 John \*testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

...19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he \*said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. 27 *It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29 The next day he \*saw Jesus coming to him and \*said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 John testified

saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. <sup>33</sup>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.' <sup>34</sup>I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

## Prayer

### **I. THE PROPHESED FORERUNNER.**

Just as the Messiah was prophesied throughout the Old Testament and Christ's life was accompanied with many signs and miracles, the same was true of John the Baptist.

Most everyone, believer and non-believer alike, has heard of John the Baptist. He is one of the most significant and well-known figures in the Bible. John's coming was foretold over 700 years previously by Isaiah:

#### **Isaiah 40:3 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup>A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

This passage illustrates God's master plan in action as God selected John to be His special ambassador to proclaim His own coming.

The angel Gabriel foretold the miraculous birth and prophetic ministry of John the Baptist to his father Zechariah. The news was a joyous answer to prayer for the previously barren Elizabeth and news that Zechariah found very hard to believe. Gabriel also foretold them who John was going to be:

#### **Luke 1:15-17 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup>For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup>And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

John was to become the God-ordained messenger proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. True to the word of the Lord, Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, gave birth to John. At the circumcision ceremony, Zechariah said about his son,

#### **Luke 1:76 (NASB)**

<sup>76</sup>"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways;

John's mother, Elizabeth, was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The two women were pregnant at the same time. Then another **sign** occurred when the two women met.

#### **Luke 1:41 (NASB)**

<sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

There must have been no doubt in either of their hearts that John was going to be a

special person!

## II. WHO WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST?

John the Baptist is one of the most distinctive characters in the New Testament. As an adult John lived a rugged life in the mountainous area of Judea, between the city of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. He wore clothes made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, the typical garb of a prophet and he preached a strange message. He had a simple diet of locusts and wild honey. John lived a simple life and, unlike so many people, John the Baptist knew his mission in life. He clearly understood that he had been set apart by God for a purpose.

The remarkable ministry of John the Baptist included the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. John did not lack boldness as he challenged even Herod to repent of his sins. In approximately 29 AD, Herod Antipas had John the Baptist arrested and put in prison. Later John was beheaded through a plot devised by Herodias, the illegal wife of Herod and ex-wife of his brother, Philip.

Although his name implies that he baptized people (which he did), John's life on earth was more than just baptizing. John's adult life was characterized by devotion and surrender to Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

### **John 1:23 (NASB)**

<sup>23</sup> He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

John's voice was a "**lone voice in the wilderness**". He proclaimed the coming of the Messiah to a people who desperately needed a Savior. He was the forerunner for the modern-day evangelist as he unashamedly shared the good news of Jesus Christ. He was a man filled with faith and a role model to those of us who wish to share our faith with others.

Later, King Herod put John the Baptist in prison. Herod had married the former wife of his brother, Philip. John boldly spoke out against this marriage, much to the dislike of Herod's new wife, **Herodias**. While John was in prison it seems that he may have had a moment of doubt. It is recorded in the scripture how Jesus reassured John.

### **Matthew 11:2-6 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup> Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent *word* by his disciples <sup>3</sup> and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> *the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* <sup>6</sup> And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

Jesus never rebuked John; rather, He gave evidence that He was the promised Savior. Jesus then spoke to the crowd about John...

### **Matthew 11:10-11 (NASB)**

<sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

<sup>11</sup> Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

While it is hard to know for sure what John was feeling as he sat in prison, he did certainly seem to have doubts. But John sent a message out to Jesus in an effort to find the truth. As Christians we all will have our faith put to the test, and we will either falter in our faith or, like John, cling to Christ, seek truth, and stand firm in our faith to the end.

John the Baptist's ministry, as well as his life, came to an abrupt end at the hand of King Herod. In an act of vengeance, Herodias plotted with her daughter to have John killed. Herodias's daughter danced for Herod and his dinner guests one night, and Herod was so pleased that he said to her, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you". The girl consulted with her mother before she answered that she wanted the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod had been afraid of John, "**knowing him to be a righteous and holy man**", and so was afraid to kill the prophet, but he had promised to give the dancing girl whatever she asked. Since John was already in prison, it was a simple thing to send the executioner to behead John, which is exactly what happened. It was a sad and ignoble end to the life of such a faithful man.

### **III. WHAT WAS THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST?**

Through God's direction, John the Baptist challenged the people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah by turning away from sin and being baptized as a symbol of repentance. Although he held no power or influence in the Jewish political system, he delivered his message with the force of authority. People could not resist the overpowering truth of his words, as they flocked by the hundreds to hear him and be baptized. And even as he attracted the attention of the crowds, he never lost sight of his mission—to point people to Christ.

John the Baptist's ministry grew in popularity.

#### **Matthew 3:5-6 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; <sup>6</sup> and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

To be baptized by John was to admit your sin and repent of it. Which was, of course, a great way to be prepared for the Savior's coming. The repentance associated with John's baptism also kept the self-righteous **out** of the water, as they did not see themselves as sinners. For the self-righteous, John had stern words, calling them a "brood of vipers" and warning them not to rely on their Jewish lineage for salvation. John's faith made him fearless in the face of opposition.

His message was simple and direct:

#### **Matthew 3:2 (NASB)**

<sup>2</sup> "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

He knew that, once Jesus appeared on the scene, his work would be all but finished. He willingly gave up the spotlight to Jesus, saying...

### **John 3:30 (NASB)**

<sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease.

Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John in the River Jordan. John rightly recognized that the sinless Son of God needed no baptism of repentance and that he was certainly not worthy to baptize his own Savior. But Jesus answered John's concern.

### **Matthew 3:15 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he \*permitted Him.

Jesus was identifying Himself with sinners for whom He would ultimately sacrifice Himself, thereby securing all righteousness for them. In humility, John obeyed and consented to baptize Jesus.

### **Matthew 3:16-17 (NASB)**

<sup>16</sup> After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him, <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

This was another sign that both John the Baptist and Christ were truly who they claimed to be. People who witnessed this event were certainly not going to forget hearing the voice of God and watching a dove land on Jesus.

## **IV. WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST?**

There are several lessons we can learn from the life of John the Baptist. One lesson is that whole-heartedly believing in Jesus Christ is possible. John knew that the Messiah was coming. He believed this with his whole heart and spent his days "**preparing the way**" for the Lord's coming. But the road was not an easy one to prepare. Daily he faced doubters who did not share his enthusiasm for the coming Messiah. Under hard questioning from the Pharisees, John shared his belief:

### **John 1:26-27 (NASB)**

<sup>26</sup> John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. <sup>27</sup> *It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

John believed in the Christ, and his great faith kept him steadfast on his course until the time when he could say as he saw Jesus approach.

### **John 1:29b (NASB)**

<sup>29</sup> ...**"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**

John the Baptist did not set out with the goal of being different from everyone else. Although he was remarkably strange, he wasn't merely aiming at uniqueness. Rather, he targeted all of his efforts toward obedience. Obviously, John hit the mark, as Jesus called him the **greatest of men**.

John's greatest strength was his focused and faithful commitment to the call of God on

his life. Taking the Nazirite vow for life, he exemplified the term "set apart for God." John knew he had been given a specific job to do and he set out with singular obedience to fulfill that mission. He didn't just talk about repentance from sin. He lived with a boldness of purpose throughout his uncompromising mission, willing to die a martyr for his stand against sin.

## **CONCLUSION:**

John's life is an example to us of the seriousness with which we are to approach the Christian life and our call to ministry, whatever that may be. John lived his life to introduce others to Jesus Christ; he was focused on the mission God had given him. John also knew the importance of repenting of one's sins in order to live a holy and righteous life. And as a servant of God, he also was unafraid of speaking truth, even when it meant calling out people such as Herod and the Pharisees for their sinful behavior.

John was entrusted with a unique ministry, yet we, too, are called upon to share the truth of Jesus with others. We can follow John's example of faithful and obedient trust in God as we live and proclaim His truth in whatever life circumstances God has given us.

As believers, we can all have this steadfast faith.

When we come to realize that God has given us a specific purpose for our lives, we can move forward with confidence, fully trusting the One who called us.

We have all been created to fulfill God's will in our lives. We will not all be called to preach or teach, or lead songs, or play a piano, or lead youth, or serve as an elder or deacon, but we will all have a mission assigned to us by God. Whatever the call may be, do it with obedience and faithfulness. Be confident that if God has called you for a task that you CAN do it because it is God's will that **you** do it. You may not know the fruit that it may generate, but you can trust that God will use you to accomplish His will whatever it may be.

As John 10:27-28 tells us, we are to listen for God's voice to give direction in our lives and follow Him. Jesus tells us that if we are truly one of His sheep we WILL HEAR HIS VOICE AND FOLLOW HIM. He also promises us that when we follow Him, He will know that we are doing His will and will give us eternal life with Him in heaven.

### **John 10:27-28 (NASB)**

***27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.***

**This is the Day!**