

Exalting Jesus, The Son of God

"John, A Man Sent From God"

INTRODUCTION:

I. Six-hundred years before Jesus Christ, the prophet Isaiah wrote many prophecies concerning the Messiah Jesus.

A. In fact, Isaiah was one of the most prolific Messianic prophets.

1. There are some 20 Messianic prophecies in the book of Isaiah alone – some of which cover several chapters.
2. But the prophecy we want to focus on this morning is found in Isaiah chapter 40 where the prophet foretold of the preparations that would be made for the coming of the Messiah.

a. **Isaiah 40:3-5** – *The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*

"Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; 5 the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

- B. The prophecy raises an interesting question: "Why was it necessary to prepare the way of the Lord in the manner described by Isaiah?"
1. The imagery was taken from the days when there were no paved roads – only well-worn, rock-hardened paths, which often contained all kinds of obstacles like rocks and ruts.
 - a. It was customary in those days, when a king would travel from one place to another, that the roads would be rebuilt and smoothed out so that the king's royal chariot would have a relatively smooth ride.
 - b. In the same manner, Isaiah prophesied that the way before the King of kings, and Lord of lords, would likewise be prepared.
 2. Isaiah wasn't talking about a literal highway, but rather the way, or the manner in which, the Messiah, Jesus Christ would go about accomplishing His work of redemption.
 - a. Isaiah said God intended to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah.
 - b. And when Jesus finally comes into the world as the Messiah, *"the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

- II. And then, approximately four-hundred years before Jesus Christ came into the world, another prophet prophesied of these events.
 - A. That prophet's name was Malachi. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets.
 - 1. Malachi foretold of a man who would be chosen by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. That prophecy is found in Malachi chapter 3.
 - a. **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.*
 - 2. This time it's the Lord Himself speaking through the prophet, saying that a special messenger would be sent in advance of the Messiah's arrival, to prepare His way.
 - a. This messenger will announce the coming of the Lord, whom the people of Israel had been seeking – the Messiah.
 - B. This prophecy also raises an interesting question: "Why would anyone be needed to announce the coming of the Lord?"
 - 1. Again, the imagery of this prophecy comes from ancient days when a herald – or a messenger – would stand in the city square and announce important events.

- a. He was sort of the "newsman" or "reporter" of his day, informing the public of important news events.
2. And so, Malachi said the Lord will send a messenger to the people of Israel to announce His coming, and to prepare the people for His coming.

III. But just who was this messenger?

- A. Are there any Old Testament prophecies that would help us identify this man sent to prepare the way of the Lord and to announce His coming?

1. The answer is "Yes." And the prophecy identifying this man is also found in Malachi.

- a. **Malachi 4:5-6** – *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."*

- B. But how can this be?

1. How can the Lord send Elijah the prophet before the coming of the Lord, *"to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers"?*

- a. Elijah had lived during the days of King Ahab and his evil queen Jezebel.

- b. When Malachi prophesied the coming of Elijah, the prophet Elijah had been dead 400 years. How could this be?
 2. Surprisingly, the Jewish people in the days of Jesus believed that God would actually resurrect Elijah the prophet just before the coming of the Messiah.
 3. They believed this would be one of the signs that the Messiah – the Savior and Redeemer of Israel – was about to come on the scene.
 4. Unfortunately, they completely misunderstood the prophecy of Malachi.
 5. The Lord didn't say He would resurrect Elijah before the coming of the Messiah. The Lord simply said He would send Elijah.
- C. So, was Elijah sent before the coming of the Messiah to prepare His way? Let's let Jesus answer that question for us.
 1. In the eleventh chapter of Matthew we have the story of Jesus meeting with the disciples of John the Immerser – John the Baptist.
 - a. John had been arrested by Herod and put in prison.

Therefore, he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask the Lord an important question: **Matthew 11:3** – *"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"*
 - b. **Matthew 11:4-5** – *Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 5 The blind see*

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.

2. Then Jesus began to address the multitude, telling them about John.

a. **Matthew 11:10-15** – *"For 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. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

b. Jesus made it perfectly clear. John the Baptist was the Elijah of whom Malachi had prophesied, and the one who had been sent to prepare the way of the Lord as Isaiah had prophesied.

Body:

- I. This morning, as we continue with our series of lessons from the gospel of John, I want us to take a closer look at what the apostle John had to say about John the Baptist – "A man sent from God."
 - A. To understand the unique character of this man, John the Baptist, let's first go back and learn something about his heritage and upbringing.
 1. The Bible tells us that John's father was a Levite priest by the name of Zacharias, and his mother's name was Elizabeth. She just happened to be the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus
 - a. Luke tells us (**Luke 1:7**) both were older people, and neither expected a baby since Elizabeth was unable to have children and was well beyond child-bearing years.
 - b. An angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias while he was serving in the Temple, and told him the good news about the son he and Elizabeth would soon have.
 - c. The angel said that their son will go before the Lord ". . . *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.*" (**Luke 1:17**)
 - d. Nine months later, in what was clearly a miracle, Elizabeth gave birth to a son, whom his father named John.

2. Luke also informs us that from his boyhood until the day of his public ministry, John lived in the deserts (**Luke 1:80**).
 3. Mark tells us that John was clothed in camel's hair, wore a leather belt, and ate a steady diet of locusts and wild honey (**Mark 1:6**).
 4. And Matthew tells us that when John began to preach, he gave a true fire-and-brimstone call to repentance to the people of Israel in order to prepare the way for Jesus (**Matthew 3**).
 5. But when we turn to the gospel of John, written by the apostle John, we see just how important John the Baptist really was.
- II. There are five specific things the apostle John tells us about this uncommon man with a common name – five specific characteristics about this man sent from God.
- A. First, the apostle John tells us John the Baptist was just a man, but not an ordinary man. He was truly extraordinary.
 1. With no fanfare, the apostles introduces us to this extraordinary man with such simplicity: **John 1:6** – *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*
 2. There is nothing significant about his name – it was one of the most common names Jewish parents gave to a son.
 - a. The name means "Jehovah is gracious" or "Jehovah is full of grace."

3. He was neither a Pharisee nor Sadducee, neither a priest nor a scribe. He stood virtually alone, fitting into no preformed mold.
 4. However, what made John stand above the rest is that he was "a man sent from God" – a man with a special mission. He was sent to prepare the people of Israel for the arrival of Jesus Christ.
- B. The apostle John also tells us John the Baptist was a lamp, but not the Light.
1. **John 1:7-9** – *This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*
 2. We're told John "came for a witness" or "came as a witness."
 - a. The Greek noun for "witness" is "marturia" (mar-TUR-re-a).
The verb form "martureō" means "to testify, to affirm the truth about someone or something."
 - b. The context of this word is centered around John's teaching about Jesus Christ.
 - (1). In fact, of the thirty-seven instances of the NOUN found in the New Testament, thirty are found in John's writings.
 - (2). And of the seventy-six instances of the VERB, forty-seven (approximately two-thirds) are found in John's writings.

- c. As you can tell by just looking at the word "marturia" – this is the root from which we get our word "martyr" – meaning "a person who chooses to suffer or die rather than give up his faith in Jesus Christ."
 - d. Ironically, John the Baptist, a preacher of righteousness and the forerunner of Jesus Christ, would himself become a martyr at the hands of Herod the tetrarch.
3. John's mission was *"to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe"* (**John 1:7**).
- a. He came to light the way to Jesus Christ – to help the people of Israel escape from their spiritual darkness, and bring them into the light of Jesus Christ.
 - b. He was a lamp to lighten the way, but not the Light. The true light was Jesus Christ.
4. Therefore, John never thought of himself standing in the limelight, but rather in the shadow of Jesus, boldly testifying: **John 1:15** – *"This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"*
5. John's mission was to point the way to Christ – the same mission we should all be performing in this dark world.

C. The apostle John also tells us John the Baptist was a voice, but not the Word.

1. Like the relationship between a singer's voice and the lyrics of a song, John was simply *"a voice crying in the wilderness"* singing *"Make straight the way of the Lord"* (**John 1:23**).

2. However, while John was the voice, Jesus was the Word.

a. **John 1:19-23** – *Now this is the testimony of John, when 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 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said."*

3. There was never any doubt in the mind of John the Baptist – he was the man God had chosen to come like Elijah, as Malachi had prophesied, and prepare the way for Christ, as the prophet Isaiah had said.

4. All the synoptic writers persistently identified John the Baptist with Elijah, despite the fact that John denied that he was Elijah.
 - a. But John was simply saying he is not Elijah resurrected from the dead.
 - b. God had never intended to resurrect Elijah in the first place to be the forerunner of Christ. Rather, He planned to send someone LIKE Elijah to prepare the way for the Messiah.
5. Luke helps us understand the relationship between John the Baptist and Elijah when he records what the angel said to John's father before John was even born.
 - a. The angel said of John: **Luke 1:15-17** – *"He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He 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."*
 - b. John was coming *"in the SPIRIT AND POWER of Elijah"* – not that he would BE Elijah – but that he would come in the SAME MANNER as Elijah had come 800 years earlier, with the POWER of God.

D. And then, the apostle John says John the Baptist was useful, but not indispensable.

1. As the Pharisees continued to probe John:

a. **John 1:25-28** – *And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. 27 It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose." 28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

2. John's humility can clearly be seen in verse 27: *"It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."*

3. When we understand the significance of this statement, it's even more powerful.

a. This comes from an old rabbinic saying: "Every service which a slave performs for his master, shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandalthong."

b. A disciples would never untie the shoes of their masters. That was the duty of slaves.

- c. The relationship between a disciple and his master was much higher than the relationship between a slave and his master.
 - d. Therefore disciples never untied shoes – only slaves were required to stoop that low.
4. Do you see where John puts himself in relationship to Jesus Christ?
- a. Here stands a man chosen by God to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and to prepare the way for the Messiah – the very Son of God.
 - b. And yet John doesn't consider himself worthy to even be a slave in relationship to Jesus – let alone a disciple.
 - c. John didn't even consider himself worthy to be a lowly slave to untie the Lord's sandals. He thought of himself lower than even a lowly servant.
5. His ministry in preparing the way for the Lord was useful – he had a purpose to serve.
6. But at the same time, John never once considered himself indispensable.
- a. The day would come when John would gladly step off the stage and give all the glory to Jesus Christ.

- b. That's the attitude we should all have. None of us – no matter how much fame we have, nor how much praise we may receive – none of us are worthy to untie the Lord's sandals.
 - c. We are all useful, but not indispensable.
- E. Finally, the apostle John says John the Baptist was a witness, but not the object of worship.
- 1. A witness does not tell his own story, but merely testifies to what he has seen and heard.
 - 2. Here's John's testimony: **John 1:29-34** – *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' 31 I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."*
32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. 33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" 34 And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."
 - 3. Throngs of people came from all over the region to hear John preach.

- a. **Matthew 3:5-6** – *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*
 - b. John baptized thousands, but he never held himself up as being someone great or worthy of praise and adoration.
 - c. His message was simple: **Matthew 3:2** – *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*
 - d. But his message also contained a warning: **Mathew 3:11-12** – *"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. 12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*
4. And yet, despite John's popularity among the people, he never elevated himself.
- a. Later, John's disciples were upset when they heard Jesus was baptizing and that all the crowds were now flocking to Him.
 - b. John simply replied: **John 3:30** – *"He must increase, but I must decrease."*

5. There was no room for pride, egotism, envy, jealousy, or delusions of indispensability in the heart of John.
6. John came with one mission – and one mission only – to exalt Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION:

- I. Does your life exalt Jesus Christ?
 - A. If you're like John the Baptist, then there's no question about.
 1. Your whole life – everything you do in life, every day of your life – exalts Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 2. And people will see that reflected in every aspect of your life.
 3. You will be as much a light for Jesus Christ as was John the Baptist.
 - B. Let me bring this lesson to a close by making a point here about being a lamp for Jesus Christ.
 1. We all have a variety of lamps in our homes.
 - a. Some might be fancy, fashioned in brass or silver, or made of stained glass or crystal.
 - b. Others might be a plain, simple, unadorned porcelain fixture.
 2. However, lamps would be nothing without the light radiating from them.

a. Without a bulb, those beautiful ornate lamps would be nothing but elaborately decorated dust collectors.

3. It's not the shine of the brass, or the glimmer of the silver, but rather the radiance of the light that makes a lamp useful.

III. Are you exhibiting the light of Christ in your life?

A. Are you letting your light so shine before men that they will ultimately glorify the Father in heaven?

1. Is the light of Christ radiating through your life, or is it being obstructed by some dark, cumbersome lampshade of sin?

B. If your light is obscured by sin, there is a very simple solution – get rid of the sin.

1. You can do this by coming to Christ in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him before others, and by being baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins.

a. There is no sin so big, or so dark, or so horrible but that the blood of Jesus Christ can wipe it all away.

2. And if you're a disciple of Christ, but your light had been dimmed by sin, or by simply drifting away from the love of Christ, you can restore the brilliance of Christ in you by humbly repenting and confessing your sins to God.

C. John the Baptist devoted his whole life to lighting the way to Jesus Christ.

1. You can do the same.
2. You can continue the work he began by lighting the way to Jesus Christ for others.
3. Whatever you need to do to prepare yourself for that task, I pray you begin now.