LESSON 2 | THURSDAY

John the Baptist, Preparing a People

QUESTION SCRIPTURE WORD STUDY KEY POINT

LESSON FOCUS: John prepared people for Christ by calling them to repentance and directing attention away from himself and toward the Savior.

I. Prophetic Preparation Across Scripture

- Abraham: God calls a flawed human being who goes when called to go.
- Elijah: the prophet must sometimes confront apostasy and call people back to God.
- Isaiah: the prophet's message ultimately points to the Messiah and salvation.
- Daniel: the prophecies point ultimately to God’s victorious kingdom.

II. John Prepared the Way for Christ

Mark 1:2-5, KJV

2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

III. John Fulfilled Isaiah's Prophecy

Isaiah 40:3, KJV

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

  - This shows the value of prophets:

- Because Isaiah could have just said everything John would say
- But Isaiah foretells that another messenger would come,
- and John then stood in his own time to apply God’s message to the people standing before him.
- God uses different prophets at different moments to prepare people for what He is doing next.

Q. So was John preparing actual roads?

John and Isaiah are using the ancient analogy of preparing a road for the arrival of a king.

The road imagery represents the preparation of the human heart - in this case, the heart of Israel.

IV. Preparing the Human Heart

- valleys are filled,
- mountains are lowered,
- crooked places are straightened,
- rough places are smoothed.

For Israel:

- Pride had to come DOWN.

- Spiritual emptiness had to be FILLED.
- Crooked living had to be STRAIGHTENED.
- Hard hearts had to be SOFTENED. (make way for the King!)

V. Surrender, Not Self-Salvation

- Israel was not being called to remove its own sin.
- They had no power to save themselves.
- They were being called to be willing to surrender whatever might keep them from recognizing and receiving the Messiah.
- A sinful mindset distorts our understanding of God's salvation.

Without a prepared heart, Israel would be looking for a different kind of Messiah than the One God sent.

VI. Repentance Changes Direction

Matthew 3:2

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Repent = metanoeō - to change one's mind, repent; to turn around - to change direction.

John is warning them: CHANGE DIRECTION. THE KING IS COMING - and He will save His people from their sins.

This is the work of a prophet.

KEY POINT: Prophetic ministry calls people away from self and toward the Savior.

  - they call for turning away from self and toward the Savior.

- And in his preaching: John points away from himself and TOWARD the Savior.

John 3:30, KJV

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

- "He must increase" - turn toward Christ, the Savior.
- "I must decrease" - John moves himself out of the center and points people away from himself and toward Christ.

VII. A True Prophet Points to Christ

VIII. Prophets Remain Human

Matthew 11:2-3, KJV

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

IX. Prophets May Seek Confirmation

A person may be used by God while still growing in understanding and trust.

Sometimes it is okay for the prophet to seek confirmation.

John's circumstances pressed him to seek confirmation of what he believed.

X. Jesus Confirmed John Through Scripture

Matthew 11:4-6, KJV

4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

5 The blind receive their 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.

6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

Jesus answered with biblical confirmation: His works fulfilled the prophetic Word.

Isaiah 35:5-6, KJV

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

6 Then shall the lame man leap as an hart (Heb. “ayyal” = deer), and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

KEY POINT: Christ confirmed John's prophetic ministry by fulfilling the Word.

Isn’t it wonderful that God is like that?

XI. John's Continuing Trust in God

The prophet, while being used of God, also had to continually trust.

- He remained fully human.
- But he trusted an ALL-POWERFUL GOD.