

John the Forerunner of Light

by Conrad Murrell

Conrad Murrell's sermon emphasizes John the Baptist's role as the forerunner of Christ and the importance of believers as witnesses of the light in a dark world.

Duration: 21:34

Scripture: Malachi 4:1-2, Malachi 4:5-6, John 1:1-13

Topics: "John The Baptist"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by quoting Malachi chapter 4, which speaks about the coming day of judgment for the wicked. He emphasizes that those who do wickedly will be burned up and left with neither root nor branch. However, for those who fear the name of the Lord, the Son of righteousness will arise with healing in his wings. The preacher then connects this passage to John chapter 1, where John the Baptist is described as a witness to the light, preparing the way for Jesus Christ. The preacher highlights the humility and ordinary appearance of Jesus, as described in Isaiah 53, and emphasizes the importance of being witnesses for Christ in a world filled with darkness and apostasy.

Transcript

Would you find in your Bible Malachi chapter 4 and John chapter 1? Malachi chapter 4 and John chapter 1. Greetings from Malachi chapter 4, verse 6 verses. For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubborn, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness rise with healing in his wings, and you shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall, and you shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes unto the soles of your feet.

And the day that I do this, saith the Lord of hosts, remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming and great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers of the children to the heart of the children of their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a corpse. From the Gospel of John, chapter 1, the first six verses.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of man. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light that all men through him might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light, that was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

He came to his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him gave him power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of the blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God. There is always a necessity, there is a necessity of the witness of the light.

There was a deep darkness in the day of Christ, and the light appeared, we are told in Isaiah 59. The darkness of deep apostasy in both Israel and Judah, followed by 400 years of prophetic silence, Malachi 4, 1 through 6. Christ, who is the light, did not appear as a light, as deity, but as an ordinary man. And there was nothing about him to indicate his ineffable glory in life.

Isaiah 53 tells us that, Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He hath no form, nor gumpbleness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And we hid, as it were, our face from him. He was despised, and we received him not. The peculiarities of John the Baptist which sets him apart from all other men in human history.

His birth, Luke 1 through 5. Luke 1 through 5. Chapter 1, verse 5. There was in the days of Herod the king of Judah a certain priest named Zechariah, of the course of Abiah. And his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. He was chosen and ordained before conception, before he was.

That is, before he was even born in the womb, he was chosen before then. Everything about him is supernatural. Here's an old man, barren wife, and the sudden appearance of the angel Gabriel.

This marvelous event happened utterly unexpected, and everything was going on as usual. Absolutely nothing to indicate anything unusual was about to happen. Zechariah's unbelief and his muteness, his silence, signaled to the people that he had met with God, and that God was about to do something significant.

Now that's a thought there. He's not babbling, so he must have met with God. His name means Jehovah is gracious or merciful.

The end and outcome of John's testimony was Jesus Christ, the grace of God. He was born again before he was born. Luke 115.

This is the only person of the descendants of Adam to escape human depravity. His entire life was free from the tyranny of fallen flesh. You can imagine such a man.

Although he had normal fleshy desires, as do all Christians, the lying pleasantries of this world were unable to deter him from his mission. He lived in the wilderness, wore a rough garment of camel hide, and subsisted on locusts and wild honey, grasshopper salad. A stranger to fleshy comfort, the world was

impotent to weaken his singular mission, irrespective of how unpopular it was.

He was full of God, great in the sight of God, contemptible in the sight of man, nothing in his person, his personality, his style, his natural gifts to commend him before God. See, we come here all stretched up in a suit and coat and tie and something like that, and he's out there in an old camel hide draped around him, probably stank. His divinely appointed name, his fame, his renown was this.

This is what Jehovah means, John. Jehovah is gracious. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

His power and greatness. Jesus said, Of those born of woman, John was the greatest. He comes in the spirit and power of Elijah, the powerhouse of the old covenant Israel.

But John did it the hard way. Elijah did miracles, and he was feared and heard because of them. John did none.

His sole power was the anointing of God upon his person and his preaching. His preaching defied the time-proven worldly wisdom of apostate religion. Don't say anything that'll make the people feel badly or guilty, even if it means hiding the word of God.

The gospel and the doctrine of repentance and judgment. This was precisely his singular message. It was the one that nobody wanted to hear.

That's exactly what he wanted to preach. Far from driving people away, however, they poured out of the cities and flocked to him. This anointed preaching, as well as his person, caused men to think him to be Elijah, that prophesied prophet or the Messiah.

His limitation. He knew and preached nothing but repentance in the view of the imminent judgment of God. The only sermon he had.

This was Israel's last warning before God reprobated the whole nation to judgment. His message of repentance was to turn the children of Israel back to the faith of the fathers. Multitudes understood that and were baptized, and in doing so, confessed their sins.

Doubtlessly, many of these were among the 3,000 souls converted at Pentecost. But John knew nothing of the new birth or of the gospel. He was only its forerunner, its witness, not its preacher.

There was a defect. This was a defect in the preaching of Apollos and his disciples as spoken of in Acts 18 and 19. Concerning his high privilege, he was a prophet of the Most High, Jesus.

Luke 1, chapter 1, verse 76, And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the highest, and thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, and to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, and by their remission of sins through the tender mercies of our God, whereby they spring from on high, visit us to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. Salvation through the tender mercy of our God. He himself was the witness.

He did not merely do witnesses. He was a witness, the man himself. In his person, the fullness of the Spirit, in his boldness, the fullness and unworldliness, in his preaching, his uncompromising word, his faithfulness to declare the truth of men about themselves, and the imminent coming judgment of God.

Through him it was evident that God was on the scene and that light was about to break through this thick darkness. He bore witness, testimony of the light. He refused to allow man to focus their attention upon himself, although they were more than willing to do that.

John 1, 19 through 23. Indeed, they attempted to do that, but he steadfastly pointed out Jesus to be the Lamb of God, the light of the world, the Savior of sinners, the coming King. John 1, 25 through 34.

John 1, 25. They asked him and said, Why baptize thou, if thou art not Christ, nor Elias, nor that prophet? And Jesus answered them, saying, I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is whose coming is preferred before me, and whose shoe-latches I am not worthy to unloose.

These things were done in Bethlehem beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. And the next day John seeth him coming, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After a man cometh before me was preferred before me, for he was before me.

And I knew him not, but that he should be manifest to Israel. Therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John by record saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

And I knew him not, but he that sent me to baptize with water the same said unto me, Upon thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him the same as he which baptizes with the Holy Ghost. And I saw in bare record that this is the Son of God. He's a friend of the bridegroom.

He does not have the bride. The bridegroom does, but he rejoices however in the high privilege of the bridegroom. The significance of John the Baptist to us, a practical application of this, is greatness.

The greatest of all covenant prophets and of those born of woman under the old covenant. The least of those in the kingdom of God do know the new covenant is greater than John. Luke 27, 28.

How can this be? We who are Christians live under the new covenant of which John knew nothing. He was an old covenant prophet, the greatest of them, but he knew nothing of new covenant glories. As a witness of the light, we are John's spiritual successors.

But the light must have a witness. How shall they believe upon Him upon whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach except they be sent? We have been sent as John was sent. John 20, 21 through 22.

Like John, we have been baptized, hopefully. We have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. We have been filled with the Holy Spirit from our spiritual birth.

There is no reason that we should not disdain, sustain from, and avoid fleshy lusts and worldly vanities any less than John. We do not have to sleep in the desert, live on grasshopper salad, and wear rawhide garments, but neither should we let our wardrobes be dictated by the garment designers and peddlers of every carnal fad under the sun to dictate our appearances. We should be content with modest dwellings.

We can flee freely, abstain from this world's frivolous parties and pastimes, epicurean reveling and insane sports mania. This spiritual baptism is filling, fitting, and necessary to make us witnesses and enable us to bear witness that Jesus Christ is the light of the world and that the whole world lies in darkness and that everyone walks in darkness until Christ comes and saves them by His saving power. We are greater than John in that we know the full gospel, which he did not know.

John knew nothing of the regeneration and the new birth. He knew nothing of justification by faith. He had no idea of the blessedness of being a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, of being a functioning member of a local church.

Although he had disciples, men who followed and helped him, he did not know them as brothers. And although he recognized Jesus as God's Lamb and that He would take away the sin of His people, he did not know of His obedience, His triumph over the devil, and that He was the head of a new race of people. He did not know His intercessor, His priesthood, His suffering, and His effectual, satisfying, sacrificial death.

This greatness, however, is not a personal or an official greatness. He who would be great in the kingdom of heaven must become a little child, a servant of all. It is a greatness of privilege, of light, of knowledge, of understanding, of joy unspeakable and full of glory.

John had no song to sing, only a warning of judgment to sound and the herald of the advent of Israel's Messiah. We have a new song to sing of which John knew nothing. With the endowment of the superior light and understanding this fullness of light from He who is the light, we have a heavier responsibility than John.

None of this world shall ever know or believe on Jesus Christ except through our witness. That's a sober truth. If our mouths are closed, our life and light will not shine.

All men shall be forever doomed to darkness. As we preach and witness, we must continually, vehemently disclaim anything of ourselves other than simply witnesses. We are no more than voices, forerunners of Jesus Christ.

The same anointing that was upon John is upon each of us. If not, we are none of his. Think about that.

There is a power of bearing a witness in the light. There is light in that witness, and there will be a people who will mistake us for the light and their Savior and their hope. We must be confessing ourselves to be nothing but witnesses.

What are Baptists? He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit is now on his threshing floor, his winnowing fan in his hand, and he's burning up the chaff and gathering the wheat into his garner. For in heaven, we don't understand why we are privileged to have this gospel and to have the reality of the joy of knowing You and the sweetness of the fellowship of this congregation and these others who we live with. We pray that You would bless them.

Bless us and make us to know You and walk with You, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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