

The Friend of the Bridegroom

by Stephen Kaung

Jesus came into the world as the Lamb of God, the baptizer with the Holy Spirit, and the bridegroom to find His bride and create a new people for Himself.

Duration: 1:13:19

Scripture: John 1:19-34, John 7:37-38, John 8:11, John 9:1-7, John 11:1-44

Topics: "Repentance And Faith", "Preparing The Heart"

Description

In this sermon, a missionary who had spent many years in a foreign land requested five minutes to speak on a subject. Despite not being a learned doctor, he was given the opportunity due to his experience in the field. As he walked towards the platform, he shouted, 'I'm going to hell,' which electrified the audience. The sermon then delves into the message of repentance that John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, emphasizing the importance of preparing a prepared people for the Lord. The sermon also references the biblical story of the bridegroom and the bridesmaids, highlighting the joy of fulfilling one's mission.

Transcript

will you please turn to the gospel according to john the gospel according to john chapter one we read from verse 19 to verse 34 the gospel according to john chapter 1 verse 19 and this is the witness of john when the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites that they might ask him thou who art thou and he acknowledged and denied not and acknowledged I'm not the Christ and they asked him what then art thou Elijah and he says I'm not art thou the prophet and he answered no they said therefore to him who art thou that we may give an answer to those who send us what sayest thou of thyself and he said I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness make straight the path of the Lord as said Isaiah the prophet and as they were sent from among the Pharisees and they asked him and said to him

why baptizes thou then if thou art not the Christ not Elijah not the prophet John answered them saying I baptize with water but in the midst of you stands whom you do not know he who comes after me the form of whose spindle I'm not worthy to unloose these things took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing on the morrow he sees Jesus coming to him and says behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world he is of whom I said a man comes after me who takes a place before me because he was before me and I knew him not but that he might be manifested to Israel therefore have I come baptizing with water and John bore witness saying I beheld the spirit descending as a dove from heaven and it abode upon him and I knew him not but he who sent me to baptize with

water he said to me upon whom thou shalt see the spirit descending and abiding on him he it is for baptizes with the Holy Spirit and I have seen and born witness that this is the son of God chapter 3 John chapter 3 verse 22 after these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea and there he abode with them and baptized and John also was baptizing in Enon near Salem because there was a great deal of water there and they came to him and were baptized for John was not yet cast into prison there was therefore a reasoning of the disciples of John with a Jew about purification and they came to John and said to him Rabbi he who was with thee beyond the Jordan to whom thou bearest witness behold he baptizes and all come to him John answered and said a man can receive nothing

unless it be given him out of heaven he yourselves barely witnessed and I said I'm not the Christ but that I'm sent before him he that has the bride is the bridegroom but a friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices in heart because of the voice of the bridegroom this my joy then is fulfilled he must increase but I must decrease may we look to the Lord in prayer our Heavenly Father how we praise and thank thee through the blood of our Lord Jesus and by the new and living way that he has opened for us through his flesh we have this access we have this holy boldness to approach thy throne of grace and there we find our Lord Jesus as our great high priest making intercession for us that he might save us to the uttermost oh how we praise and thank thee for such privilege we

commit ourselves to thee this evening trusting thy Holy Spirit to open thy word to our hearts to convict us to convince us to bring us to that place without able to do anything everything that thou does desire to do in our midst tonight and to thee be all the praise and glory in the name of our Lord Jesus in the fullness of time God sent his only begotten son into this world but before his son was sent into this world God first sent a man six months ahead of his son and this man's name was John John was the forerunner of Christ he was sent by God to prepare the way for his son John King he bore witness to Christ to the Son of God that is coming into this world it is a voice in the wilderness it is a prophetic voice it is a voice that stirred not only Jerusalem but Judea and all around

Jordan why because before that voice was raised for 400 long years God was silent to his people the last voice that was heard by the children of Israel was heard 400 years before this time he was the voice of the Prophet Malachi but after God spoke through the Prophet Malachi for 400 long years God didn't say a word to his own people not because God did not want to speak to his own people but because God could not speak to his own people and if God could not speak to his own people whom could he speak to?

Outwardly the remnant of the Jews had returned to the promised land. Outwardly the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt. Outwardly even the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt.

Outwardly for 400 years the priesthood was restored. Outwardly for 400 years there were sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple. Outwardly the Jews, the remnant, the people who returned to the promised land seemed to be a most godly people.

Why? Because they not only kept the law of Moses in sacrificing in the temple but they also have many synagogues all over the land. They not only worship God in the temple and offer sacrifices there but they also worship God in all these synagogues scattered all over the land. Outwardly they were a most religious, pious, godly people.

But God was silent. God could not speak to his people for 400 long years. Then suddenly a voice in the wilderness.

God spoke again to his people and no wonder that voice electrified the whole nation. People just went out to the wilderness to hear that prophet. John bore witness to the one who was coming.

The Jews sent priests and Levites to John and said, who are you? Are you the Messiah, the Christ that we have been waiting all these years? John said, no, I'm not the Christ. Are you the prophet Elijah? God promised that one day the prophet Elijah will come back to prepare the way of Messiah. Are you the prophet Elijah? He said, no.

Are you the prophet that was prophesied in Deuteronomy by Moses saying that one day among the brethren God will raise up a prophet and you must hear him because if you do not you shall perish. Are you that prophet? He said, no, I'm not. Of course these people were puzzled.

You are not Christ? You are not Elijah? You are not that prophet? Then who are you? Tell us who are you? And he said, I'm just a voice. I'm a voice in the wilderness as it is written in Isaiah. A voice in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord.

Then people asked him, if you are not the Christ, if you are not Elijah, if you are not the prophet, if you are just a voice in the wilderness, why do you baptize people with water? And he said, I baptize people with water but there is one among you that is greater, much greater than I am. I'm not even worthy to unloose his sandal. This was the witness of John concerning Christ Jesus.

And the next day the Lord Jesus passed by. And when John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus passing by, that voice was raised again, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the one that is going to baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit.

The testimony that John the Baptist gave to our Lord Jesus is a most complete testimony. It is a threefold testimony. Number one, he testified that the Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This Son of God who came into this world, He came as God's Lamb. And of course with the Jews, at that time they understood very well what a Lamb means. Because for many, many years they have been offering lamb to God.

Not only on the day of Passover, every family must prepare a lamb without spot, without any blemish, and they must offer a lamb for each family to celebrate, to remember the day when they were in Egypt. How God delivered them out of Egypt by that Paschal Lamb. The blood of the Lamb was put on the doorpost and the lintel.

And the whole family will be gathered behind the blood in the house. And at midnight when the destroyer passed through the whole land of Egypt, if there was no blood on the door, the destroyer would go in and slay the firstborn of every family. Not only of men but even of animals.

God delivered the children of Israel by the Lamb. So on the day of Passover they offer lamb to God, remembering that by the blood of the Lamb they were delivered. But not only that, you find that they offer the Lamb every morning and every evening.

In other words, thousands, tens of thousands of lambs have been offered to God through all these years. But suddenly the voice came, Behold the Lamb of God. All the blood of the Lamb and bullets that were sheathed could not take away sin.

They only cover sin for a while. But here, the Lamb of God, God prepared that Lamb in the person of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And in that Lamb of God, God took away the sin of the world.

This is why our Lord Jesus came into this world, as the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world. Once upon a time when that great preacher Spurgeon, you know Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers that the world had ever had. He had a golden mouth and a silver tongue.

And one day he was going to have a campaign in the Crystal Palace in London. The Crystal Palace in London was a huge auditorium. And it was before the day that they had microphone.

So before the campaign, Charles Spurgeon, he went to the Crystal Palace, trying to test his voice. To see that if his voice would carry through the whole auditorium. So he was there testing his voice.

He cried out and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And after a while, he tested again. Behold the Lamb of God.

His voice reached to the end of the auditorium. He didn't know that a carpenter, a worker was on the roof, repairing the roof. And this worker was deeply troubled by his sin.

He was convicted by the Holy Spirit of his sins. And he was just wondering how could his sins be forgiven. He was asking God, God, speak to me, say to me, how can my sins be forgiven.

And while he was praying, suddenly he heard a voice, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But he didn't know whether it was God's voice. He said, Say it again.

And the voice came, Behold the Lamb of God. And there on the roof, this man was saved. O dear brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God.

He takes away the sin of the world. There is no need for any sinner to die. Why? Because the Lamb of God has taken upon Himself the sin of the world.

There is no sin that is too great for Him to wash away the precious blood of the precious Lamb of God. But the testimony of John concerning our Lord Jesus is more than just that He is the Lamb of God. As the Lamb of God, anyone who believes in Him, his sins are forgiven.

He will receive eternal life. Thank God for this marvelous, wonderful Savior and His salvation. But John bore witness to the Lord Jesus and said, He is more than the Savior of the world.

The Lord Jesus is also the baptizer with the Holy Spirit. O yes, our Lord Jesus not only died on the cross and by His shed blood our sins are forgiven, but our Lord Jesus is also the baptizer. John baptized people with water unto repentance, but the Lord Jesus baptized His people with the Holy Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you know that our Lord Jesus is the baptizer with the Holy Spirit? To be baptized with the baptism of John is unto repentance. But to be baptized with the baptism that our Lord Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit is unto union. Not only union with Him as our head, but to be united with all those who are redeemed of the Lord as members of the body of Christ.

You remember in Acts chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and the hundred and twenty that were gathered in that upper room, they were baptized in one Spirit. And when that happened, the whole city was stirred. People came to them, they were wondering what was happening, because

everyone was speaking their native tongues.

Tongues that were spoken by people that came from all over the world. In other words, people that came from all over the world heard their native tongues were being spoken, magnifying the Lord. They were wondering what had happened.

And you remember Peter stood up with the eleven and explained what had happened. And at the end of his explanation, in Acts chapter 2, he said, This Jesus has God raised up whereof all we are witnesses. Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which ye behold and hear.

God has raised the Lord Jesus up from the dead, and the Lord Jesus has ascended upon high, He has been exalted by the Father, and has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, and He has poured down the Holy Spirit which you behold and hear. This is what happened. Let the whole house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made Him, this Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

What is the meaning of the baptism with the Holy Spirit? What the baptism with the Holy Spirit does for us? Number one, by the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we see that Jesus is Lord and Christ. We see that He is the head over all things to His body. Number two, the meaning of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is explained in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 13.

For in one spirit ye were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, and ye were made to drink of one spirit. Dear brothers and sisters, when we receive our Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, we are saved individually. But with the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we were being baptized into one body, with Christ as our head, and we become members one of another.

Our Lord Jesus is the baptizer. He is not only our Savior, He is our baptizer. He has baptized you and me, individuals, to become members of one body.

Now, what a difference that is! Before the day of Pentecost, you find a hundred and twenty believers, and maybe the best of the believers at that time. Certainly the best. You know, when our Lord Jesus, after our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, at one time He appeared to five hundred brethren.

Probably that happened on Mount Olive. When our Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, probably five hundred brethren saw Him going up. But unfortunately, only a hundred and twelve remained in Jerusalem for ten days, praying with one accord.

These hundred and twelve were the elite, were the best among the believers, and yet there are a hundred and twenty individual believers. If you take every one of them out and look at them, they are just beautiful. But when you put a hundred and twenty together, well, ten days may be alright, a hundred days will be like hell.

But on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came, they were baptized in one spirit, and they become one body. No longer a congregation of a hundred and twenty members, but a body of a hundred and twenty members. What a difference! O brothers and sisters, do you see the Lord Jesus as the baptizer? You know the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God.

Thank God for that. But do you know the Lord Jesus as the baptizer? Don't you know that you were baptized by Him with the Holy Spirit? Don't you know that you are no longer just an individual believer, that you can live independently, isolatedly, all by yourself, shut up the door and be a good Christian? You cannot do it. Why? Because you were baptized by the baptizer, our Lord Jesus, into one body.

You cannot do without Him, because He is your head. And you cannot do without me, because I am your member. And of course, I cannot do without you.

Don't you see that our Lord Jesus is the baptizer with the Holy Spirit, and you were baptized already? Thank God we are one body. Members, one of another. But the testimony of John go and even further.

John said, Our Lord Jesus, this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John said, He is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Oh, but he said more.

He said, The one who takes the bride is the bridegroom. In other words, he testified that the Lord Jesus is the bridegroom. Not only the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, not only the baptizer with the Holy Spirit to baptize us into one body under one head, but He is the bridegroom.

And He is the one who is to take the bride. What a perfect testimony that is. Do you not know that our Lord Jesus came into this world for one reason? Now it is true, you'll find it is said, the Lord said, the Son of Man came into this world to seek and to save the lost.

That's true. It is true that the Lord Jesus does baptize us with the Holy Spirit, that He might have a body. That's true.

But why is it that He became the Lamb of God? Why is it that He saves us? Why is it that He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, that we may become one body? Why? Oh, you know the reason why. The reason is, He is the bridegroom. And what will be to the bridegroom if he does not have a bride? The reason why our Lord Jesus came into this world is to find His bride.

That is why. When He was on earth, He was the Lamb of God. Now He is in heaven.

He is the baptizer with the Holy Spirit, because He baptized the church with the Holy Spirit after He ascended on high. And one day, when He shall return, He will take His bride to Himself. You know, the apostle John, his ministry is very different from the ministry of other apostles.

The apostle John, his ministry is the ministry of the ultimate. With John, he always goes back to the beginning, and he always goes on to the end, the ultimate. If you really want to know why the Lord Jesus came into this world, read the gospel according to John.

Now, I do not say, if you read the gospel according to Luke, you will not know why the Lord Jesus came into the world. Because if you read the gospel according to Luke, you will find the Lord Jesus came into the world to save the lost. That is why He came.

But if you read the gospel according to John, you discover something. You discover the ultimate, the eternal will of God in sending His Son into this world. Now, why did the Lord Jesus come into this world according to the gospel of John? It is because He is the bridegroom.

And as the bridegroom, He came into this world to find His bride. From John chapter 1 through John chapter 12, you will find that this bridegroom had come into this world, but the bride was nowhere to be

found. It was almost like Adam.

Adam was in the garden of Eden, and God let all the animals passing through him. And he saw all these animals, the giraffe, and the elephant, and the crocodile, and Hippopotamus. And he saw all these animals passing by, you know, but he could not find his bride.

That bride had to be created, had to be built. And the same thing with our Lord Jesus. He came into this world with the one purpose of finding a bride for Himself.

But there the bride was nowhere, non-existent. And because of this, He had to create that bride. Oh, if you read the gospel of John with that perspective, how beautiful it is.

Here you will find He touched this man, He touched that woman. Oh, and you will find that He was talking with Nicodemus, that religious, that rabbi of Israel, that great theologian. And yet He discussed with that great theologian on new birth, the very basic.

And then you will find our Lord Jesus had a conversation with a Samaritan woman, that wicked, sinful woman, and yet He discussed with her on this matter of worship, the highest of the gospel. There you will find He healed a man that was sick for thirty-eight years, and it was because he sinned terribly. So after the Lord healed him, the Lord warned him, saying, Say no more.

And there you will find our Lord Jesus, how He saved a woman that was caught in adultery. And there you will find our Lord Jesus stood on a high place and cried, Anyone who is thirsty, come to me and have the water. And the water shall flow from him as rivers of living water.

And there you will find our Lord Jesus, how He healed a man that was born blind. How He recalled Lazarus from the dead. Here you will find our Lord Jesus touched this one and that one, and all are all different conditions.

And yet here you will find He was gathering a people to Himself. From chapter thirteen to chapter seventeen, you will find there He gathered with His own. And there He told them that when the Holy Spirit shall come, they will discover that as He was in the Father and the Father is in Him, so they shall be in Him and He shall be in them.

And how He prayed that they may be one, and not only they, but all those who believe in the Lord Jesus through them, may be one as He and the Father are one. One body. That's the gospel according to John.

Out of His side come blood and water to build the body. And if you read the epistles of John, the epistles of John tells us how this body is being built. So that this body may be matured.

You know you cannot have marriage if the bride is still unmatured. So here you will find according to John's ministry in his epistles, you will find it in the epistles of John, you will find how this body is being matured, grown up. And then in the book of Revelation, when the wife has made herself ready, the bridegroom came to claim His bride.

This is the testimony. One day, John was baptizing people, and the Lord Jesus and His disciples were also baptizing people. Actually it wasn't Jesus who was baptizing people, it was His disciples.

And yet here you will find a disciple of John had a discussion with a Jew about purification. And this disciple of John came to John the Baptist, and he was really envious and jealous for his master. So he

came to John and said, Master, the one whom you baptize, and whom you bear witness to, now He is also baptizing people, and people are going to Him.

You are losing ground now. How about that? And here you listen to what John said. John said, I told you I am not the Christ.

He that has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears Him rejoices in heart because of the voice of the bridegroom. This my joy then is fulfilled.

Who is this John the Baptist? Yes, he is a voice in the wilderness, but he is also the friend of the bridegroom. Unfortunately, today we do not really know for sure about the marriage procedures among the ancient Hebrews. We knew a little bit, but somehow we are not able to put them together into a complete picture.

So I have to apologize tonight that I am not able to find in all the references that I could, I am not able to find a way to really put everything together and show you how among ancient Hebrews this matter of marriage was being done. But we need a few things. Number one, of course, with the Hebrews, with the Jews, they consider marriage as a very important thing.

They thought that marriage is the normal life of a man. According to Talmud, it says that a Jew who is not married is not a man. They look upon this married life as the most normal life and they also even look at marriage as more than the union of a man and a woman.

According to their belief, according to the rabbinical writings, they consider that whenever a marriage is consummated between a Jew and a Jewish, it is a representation of the union of God with Israel. So you find how they look upon marriage as a most holy and sacred matter. And in a Jewish marriage, the first thing is the betrothal, the engagement.

Now today in this country, engagement is almost nothing. But among the Jewish people in the old days, the betrothal, the engagement is part of the marriage procedure. And it is the most binding part.

Because when a man and a woman were engaged, they were considered before the law as husband and wife. The only thing that they haven't done was they did not live together. But before the law, they were considered as already belong to each other.

So first thing, they will have that ceremony of betrothal. And on that day, the man will give a piece of money or a letter saying that he will take the woman to be his. And there the most important thing in an engagement is, of course, the dowry.

But the dowry was not paid to the maiden, but to the parents of the maiden. And usually, this betrothal will not last over twelve months. Within twelve months, there will be the marriage.

Now this is the part that we are not too clear about. Because from all the references that I can look into, it seems to me, now I'm just putting it out, and if I'm wrong, forgive me and correct me. But from what I have learned, it seems as if there is some confusion there.

Why? Because in such a marriage situation, the most important part is the wedding procession. But it seems to me that there are two wedding processions instead of one. Otherwise, I just cannot reconcile all the records that I looked into.

You know, usually, if I may put it this way, I just put it before you, but if the procedure is not correct, it's alright, as long as when we apply it, we'll find there's scriptural background to it. So anyway, you'll find on the day of marriage, the first thing will be the wedding procession. It usually happens in the night.

There you'll find the friend of the bridegroom. You know, in a Jewish marriage, the friend of the bridegroom is the go-between. He is the one who will go to the maiden's home and negotiate the marriage.

And on the day of marriage, the friend of the bridegroom was the one who will go to the paternal house of the bride. He will lead the bride to the house of the groom. That is the job of the friend of the bridegroom.

So there he was representing the bridegroom. He went to the bride's house and usually at night started the wedding procession. There will be music, of course, and the bride will be escorted by his bridesmaid and his relatives.

You know, and even you'll find sometimes on mules or sometimes porters will bear the furniture and the things like that. They will go into the husband's house and as they proceed in the night with tortures and things like that, of course, if it's in the city, the whole city will be stirred. And people will all be standing on the street or looking from the balcony and they will be distributing wine and oil to people and nuts to the children.

And it was almost a religious duty. All the onlookers, when the wedding procession passed by, it was almost a religious duty that they have to praise the beauty, the merits and the wealth of the bride. And this will go on until they reach the house of the bridegroom.

Now that's where the confusion came. From what I can gather, when the bride came to the bridegroom's house to be married, the bridegroom was elsewhere. He was not there.

He could not be there. He had to stay in the home of a relative or a friend. And there he had his friend around him.

And they will be singing and maybe writing poetry and celebrating the time, you know. They will have a very good time together until the bridegroom said, now we can start. And usually it's almost midnight.

So here you'll find another procession began. He was the bridegroom. And there his friends were with him and with torches and with lamps.

And they were start to go. And as they start, go to the street and on to his own house. And of course, voices will be raised.

Behold, the bridegroom comes. Behold, the bridegroom comes. And this will be relayed and relayed and relayed.

And you know, there was a bride waiting there in the house after a very busy day. And the bridesmaid there, you know, they were very busy and they were waiting and waiting. They never know when the bridegroom will come.

And usually at midnight, some went to sleep. And suddenly the voice arrived, the bridegroom coming. And they all rose up.

Now that was the Bible story, right? So after the bridegroom came and there will be the marriage. Actually, the real marriage was very simple. And when the friend of the bridegroom heard the voice of the bride, he said, I am happy.

Why? Because his duty is finished. His mission is fulfilled. Dear brothers and sisters, John said, I am the friend of the bridegroom.

When I hear the voice of the bridegroom, oh, my joy is filled. Why? Because I have fulfilled my mission. He must increase, I must decrease.

Dear brothers and sisters, John, as the friend of the bridegroom, he prepared the way for the bridegroom. He did all the preparation and the negotiations until he was able to lead the bride to the bridegroom's house. How did he prepare the people? Historically, we know that all the early disciples of our Lord Jesus were disciples of John.

Those who rejected the baptism of John, rejected Christ. But those who received the baptism of John unto repentance, they received the Lord Jesus, because they were prepared. They were led.

How did John prepare a prepared people for Christ? What is the message that God used him to prepare the people? When John cried in the wilderness, what did he say? Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh. Oh, brothers and sisters, for four hundred years, God hasn't spoken to his people. You remember in the days of Eli, it is said that the word of God was rare, and the vision was seldom.

Not that was bad enough. But now you find at that time there was absolutely no vision, no word, for four hundred years. Now maybe you think, how could the children of Israel, how could the return to the remnant, how could the Jews even exist, continue to exist, for four hundred years, without the word of God? But they did.

Everything went on as usual. In all outward appearance, they were amongst religious people. In a sense, it was a nation that was waiting for the Messiah.

But when the Messiah came, they were frightened. What was God's message to his people? To prepare a prepared people for the Lord. You find there is only one message, and the message is repent.

Repent. Dear brothers and sisters, it is a strange voice. You know, even in John's time, no wonder the Pharisees and the scribes, they rejected the message of John.

They rejected the baptism of John. Why? Because they thought that it was a wrong message. That message should be given to the Gentiles.

They need to repent. We Jews, the chosen people of God. We worship God.

We have the oracles of God in our hand. We offer sacrifices. We are God's chosen people.

Do we need to repent? No. Probably we need to reform. Probably we need to improve.

But certainly not to repent. That's why they rejected that message, that voice. What is repentance? What is repentance? That word repent or repentance in Greek original, it means a change of mind.

And that change of mind is a 180 degrees change. Not just a little correction. A little deviation.

But it is a turn around completely. When you are going in one direction, you have to turn around and go to the other direction. That's repentance.

And that is why John baptized people with baptism. Because what is baptism? When you go into the water, you repented of your past. Your past sins, your past life, your past success, your past moral achievement.

Everything that is yours, you considered as worthy to die. Buried out of sight. And when you come out of the water, a new person.

In other words, it is not reform. It is not a change, a little change. It is death, burial and resurrection.

Now that's repentance. You need not only to repent of the sins you have committed, you need to repent of the good that you have done. Now will you do that? Is it wrong to offer sacrifices in the temple? God commanded us to do that.

Is it wrong to read the Torah, five books of Moses? Certainly God commanded us that we shall meditate upon it. Is it wrong to pray to God? Certainly we should. Is it wrong to go into synagogue to assemble together? Certainly they should.

Is it wrong to exhort one another, encourage one another? Certainly they should. Repent, O brothers and sisters, but hear the voice of God to the people, for preparing the bride is repentance. Even death had to be repented.

Why? Because the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh. Repent, not because you have sinned. Repent because the kingdom of the heavens is coming.

All that you have done will not get you into that kingdom. You have to repent. The time has changed.

The reality has come. The shadows must pass away. If you hold on to the shadow, you will pass away.

Holding on to the shadow is a sin that you have to repent. Brothers and sisters, no wonder these Pharisees, no wonder these scribes, oh how they rose up against John and against him. Once upon a time there was a great convention.

All theologians, professors, gathered together for a convention on Christian truth. They discussed about different truths in the Bible. And all these learned doctors, they wrote their dissertations, and they read their dissertations, and one of the topics was on repentance.

So these worthy or unworthy doctors of divinity, they all wrote their great dissertations, and they presented their dissertations to the audience. But the more they presented their dissertations on repentance, the more confused the people became. Finally, an elderly missionary to the foreign field retired.

His hair was white. He was sitting at the back. He was not a learned person, not a theologian, just a missionary in the foreign land for many, many years.

He listened, and listened, and he couldn't stand it anymore. So he raised his hand, and the chairman said, what do you want? He said, will you please give me five minutes to speak on that subject. And the chairman looked at that missionary, white-haired missionary, and he knew this missionary was not a learned doctor.

What could he say? But because he was such a missionary in the field for so many years, so out of respect he said, alright, I'll give you five minutes. So this missionary got up from the chair. He was at the very end of the auditorium, and he began to start walking to the platform.

And as he was walking, he shouted, I'm going to hell! I'm going to hell! Oh, that electrified the whole audience. People looked at this missionary. He shouted all the way to the platform.

He got to the platform. He turned around, faced the audience, raised his two hands, he said, I am going to heaven! I'm finished. This is repentance.

I think this is the best dissertation on repentance. What is repentance? You were heading hell, now you turn around and head in heaven. That's repentance.

Brothers and sisters, how did John, as the friend of the bridegroom, negotiate the marriage? How did he prepare the people for Christ? With the message of repentance. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn nigh. And all those who repented came to the Lord.

They eventually became the bride to the bridegroom. Dear brothers and sisters, historically, of course, this was already fulfilled. John's mission was fulfilled.

Because he had prepared people for Christ. So when they went to Christ, he lost them. But he was happy.

Because it was the bridegroom that had the bride. He wasn't holding anybody to himself. I'm just a friend of the bridegroom.

Just a voice. The voice will pass away. But he shall remain forever.

Historically, it was already fulfilled. But dear brothers and sisters, spiritually, in spiritual application, do you know that in the time of John the Baptist, the bridegroom was just coming to the world to find his bride? But today, we are approaching the day when the bridegroom will return to claim his bride. And do you not think that as the marriage day is so close, that the negotiation has to be more intense? That the preparation has to be more intense? Do you not believe that there should be people like John be raised up? Now here I want you to use your imagination.

Why? Because it is true that we are the virgins. Those who are redeemed of the Lord are the virgins. We are the bride that the Lord is coming to claim.

But in a sense, we are also the friend of the bridegroom. We are everything. Because he is everything.

You know, so let us use our imagination. Just think of that. Here we are.

We are the friends of the bridegroom. And what is our mission? Our bridegroom has committed to us this matter of negotiating, preparing, consummating a marriage relationship between him and his church. As the friends of the bridegroom, dear brothers and sisters, we are supposed to prepare people for the Lord.

When he shall come back, he shall find the bride has made herself ready. And how are we going to make the wife? What is the message of the day? Dear brothers and sisters, I feel very deeply in my heart that the message of the day for God's people is repent. For the bridegroom is coming.

Do we need to repent? What is the message of the risen Lord to his seven churches in Asia? If you read Revelation chapter 2 and 3, you will find that the message of the Lord to his people out of seven churches, five of them, his message to them is repent. Do we need to repent? Do we appear as a very godly people? Do we look like a very religious people? Do we not meet every Lord's Day? Do we not go to prayer meetings? Do we not engage in Christian activities? Are we not reading the Bible? Are we not doing all these things? If you want to find any people that is religious, pious, godly, loving the Lord, maybe you think we are that people. But dear brothers and sisters, is God speaking to you? When is the last time that you hear his voice? When is the last time that you see him? I am not speaking of physically, I am speaking of in your spirit.

Do you see him today? Or would you say, five years ago I was filled with the Holy Spirit, how about today? Do you see him? Do you hear him? Is your religious life become a routine, traditional? There! Repent! Because you have lost your first love. Your labor may go on, your knowledge is with you, but where is your love? Your first love to the Lord? Oh, when you first love him, you don't think of yourself, but now you think a lot of yourself. Repent if you have lost your first love.

Repent if you have loved the world, because if you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. The message of the Lord to the church in Pergamos is repent, because the church has mingled with the world. You cannot see the difference between the world and the church.

Are we separated? Are we doing what the people of the world are doing? And even worse, are we seeking the things that the people of the world are seeking? Maybe worse, more. Repent! Repent! If we become so complicated that we have lost the simplicity that is to Christ, the church's entire hero. Repent! It may mean we are living, but actually we are dead.

Repent! If we have lost in touch with all spiritual reality, we live an unreal Christian life. We think we are rich, we think we see, but we are blind, we are naked. We have lost touch with reality.

O brothers and sisters, if the Lord shall come tonight, will He find us ready for Him? Do you not think there is much in us that needs to be paid? Oh, that God's people may repent in dust and ashes. God dwells with a broken and contrite heart. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.

A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise. Where is that brokenness? Where is that contrition among God's people? Dear brothers and sisters, we are not ready if we do not repent. If we think we are better than other people, if we think that we know more than other people, if we think that we have done more for the Lord than other people, I am afraid we will be like the Pharisees and the scribes.

I do believe the message of the Lord for His people today is repent. If we repent, He will receive us. He will make us ready.

He will give us grace that we may be clothed with bright shining linen, which is the righteousness of the saint. Dear brothers and sisters, as friends of the bridegroom, let us raise that voice to God's people, calling God's people to repentance. We cannot go on like this because the Lord is coming soon.

All the gorges must be filled. All the mountains must be leveled. All the crooked places must be straightened.

All the rough places must be smoothed. Because the Lord is coming soon. Oh, if we should hear the voice of the bridegroom, our joy will be filled.

He must increase. We shall pray. Oh, our cry to Thee tonight is, may that voice be heard.

May Thy people repent. May Thy people have a broken and contrite heart. May Thy people look to Thee, wait for Thee, ready for Thee, in Thy precious Name.

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