

John the Baptist

by Will Graham

John the Baptist's life and ministry demonstrate the importance of prayer, obedience, and a call to repentance in preparing the way for Jesus Christ.

Duration: 56:36

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:15, Ezekiel 36:30, Matthew 3:1-3, Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:4, Luke 1:5-17, John 1:23

Topics: "John The Baptist"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being obedient to God. He highlights the example of John the Baptist, who preached in the wilderness without any social life or security. The speaker challenges the notion of hard ground for preaching and encourages listeners to study John's preaching tactics. He emphasizes the need for men and women who have heard from God and are willing to boldly preach the gospel, regardless of the consequences. The message of John the Baptist was centered on repentance and preparing the way for the coming of Christ. The speaker also shares a personal experience where he was asked to compromise his preaching against prayerlessness and pastors who don't seek God, but he refused to do so. He concludes by referencing the story of John Bunyan, who was imprisoned for preaching the gospel and declared that he would continue to preach even if he was released or sent back to prison.

Transcript

In the midst of an indifferent and apathetic generation was search in vain for passion. There was something different about those heroes of days gone by. Something they had that many of us know nothing about.

Abraham had something, his was a passionate faith. You can't sacrifice Isaac if you don't have a fire burning within your soul. This man had let God down many a time, but he had a fire for God burning within his heart.

Passion marks the man of God. We can think of Martin Luther in the 16th century. That man of God was in constant pain and torment, in self-affliction and constant tribulation until he got that assurance of the new birth from God.

He was a warrior. He was a man who spat and snapped. He fought with sweat and blood.

Luther was the exact opposite of indifference and of apathy. Passion fights like a drowning beast that refuses to go underwater. Faith puts fire in the belly of the man or the woman of God.

It gives us steel in our bones. It sets us ablaze for the gospel. And standing high in the biblical account of the pillars of passion is a man who refuses to be written off as a mere apathetic.

He was a prophet of truth, of righteousness, of wholehearted obedience to Jesus Christ. His name is John the Baptist, or as I prefer to call him, John the Pentecostal. Glory to God.

He transcends the ages as a monument of what God's grace can do in a life that is wholly yielded to Him. This day and this night, we're going to be talking about bond slaves of Jesus Christ. And in this morning, we're going to deal with this man, John the Baptist.

When I was a young lad, the teacher told me in the school, William, there are three things that are going to happen to you in life. Number one, you're born. Number two, you live.

Number three, you die. You're born, you live, and you die. So what I want to do with the help of the Holy Spirit, at the light of God's word this morning, is talk about the birth of John the Baptist, the life of John the Baptist, and the death of John the Baptist.

And may we catch something of this heavenly flame that burned with inside his bones. Why don't we open our hearts to prepare our hearts for the word of the Lord in this morning. God, we give you thanks, Lord.

We praise you, God. You're high and you're lifted up. Your glory fills the temple, O God.

We hunger and thirst for righteousness, O God. We long for your spirit to come this morning, God. Speak to your church, O God.

Give us eyes to see. Give us ears to hear. Give us a heart to understand what is your good and perfect will, O God.

We need a movement, O God. I pray that you take this useless preacher out of the midst, O God, and that it would be the Holy Spirit speaking, God, that it would be a word from your throne, a word from heaven, O God. Shake us, O God.

Break us, O God, and fill us afresh with the Holy Ghost. Set us ablaze with the fire of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, we give you glory.

In Jesus' name, we give you praise. Thanks be to God. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Glory to God. Glory to God.

We're going to open our Bibles in the first chapter of the book of Luke, and we're going to read from verses 5 to 17. Luke chapter 1, verses 5 to 17. Someone wants to read that passage out loud there, please feel free to do so.

Luke chapter 1, verses 5 through to 17. I'll be making reference to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, other passages of the Scriptures, but we're going to use this as the base for our study today. Luke chapter 1, verses 5 through to 17.

Do you want to read that one? Okay, Candice? Praise God. Thank you very much. John the Baptist's passion of the loyal service to King Jesus have been an example for a multitude of preachers, of prophets, and for the people of God.

John the Baptist was a man prepared to go Christ's way regardless of the consequences for his own life. His life had brought forth much fruit, but the irony is that he was born in a barren and a stricken land. The Scripture tells us there in verse 7 that Elizabeth was barren, and they were now well stricken in years.

Stricken there in Greek is advanced, that means they were in old age. They were a personification. Elizabeth was the embodiment of the spiritual state of Israel.

Barren, past itself by date, fruitless, old, stricken in years. God belonged to a past generation. Israel had the law, had the ordinances, had the commandments, had the promises, but where was the life? Religion was well past itself by date.

There was no future for the things of God. They were dying off, all but gone. A dying ember lay where a fire of glory, a pillar of power once stood.

The people said the church has gone. It's seen its best days. The church has well and truly lost the glory, and it's never the return.

But they've always said exactly the same thing before any great moving of the Spirit of God. Elizabeth and Zechariah fed off the Scriptures. They knew all about Sarah.

They knew about Rebecca. They knew about Rachel. They knew about Manoah.

They knew about Hannah. So what did these five women have in common? They were all barren, but by the intervention of God Almighty, they brought forth and gave birth to a breed of rare man, champions, liberators, great men of faith, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, men that changed and transformed the history of God's people. Elizabeth realized the God of Rachel, the God of Sarah, the God of 2,000 years before was her God, the God of Israel.

If God did it for Sarah, He can do it through me. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's the first and the last, beginning and end, alpha, omega, author and finisher, perfecter and consummate of our faith.

If God can move through Sarah and bring forth birth to a barren woman, then God can do it through me. God has not changed. God is just the same.

Elizabeth may have been barren, but her hope was placed in the God of Israel. Scripture says in Isaiah 44, verse 3, that God was going to pour out floods on the thirsty soul. He was going to pour out water on the dry ground.

And God many times brings us to that place of barrenness to see if we are hungry and thirsty for Him. If you're satisfied living in a barren place, if you're satisfied in the desert, you're never going to get any blessing from on high. God brings you to those places to see if there's hunger and thirst for you.

And if there is, the floods are coming. The water's just around the corner. God brings you to the desert place to see what's in your heart.

Are you hungry for God? If there's any sign, if there's any symbol of 21st century spirituality, it's that of a desert place where the winding dizzy paths of mysticism and the New Age cult have led multitudes off into confusion and bewilderment. But true biblical spirituality brings us to the feet of Jesus Christ in worship. It brings joy.

It brings a clearness of mind. And it brings refreshing and glory to God. Deborah had said in the Old Testament, the Judges 5, verse 6, I arose.

I arose as a mother in Israel. Elizabeth had taught something of that same spirit. You know, Peter, when he was preaching in the day of Pentecost, he had referenced the Jewel's prophecy.

And he says at one point, you know, the old men will dream dreams. And that word there, men, in Hebrew is a generic term. It means both men and women.

Not only were the men going to dream dreams, but old women like Elizabeth too could dream again. You know, it seems like a paradox where for us outside of Jesus Christ, old age is a time of recollection, of reflection, of the days gone by. But in Jesus Christ, even old age, even for a woman like Elizabeth, she could look to the future in the hope of the glory of God, awaiting the victory, awaiting the outstretched arm of God Almighty.

She could dream dreams. She had expectation. She had hope.

She had anticipation. She may have been barren. She may have been old.

But hope had got a hold of Elizabeth's heart. In the barren land, there is hope. In old age, there is hope.

Zechariah went into the temple. Zechariah went into the temple to minister unto the Lord. He is a man of prayer.

You know, the first thing the angel says to him, you know, your prayer is heard. Elizabeth will give birth. It says as well in Luke 1 verse 10 that when he was in there ministering, the people were outside praying.

So here we've got Elizabeth, a woman of prayer. We've got Zechariah, a man of prayer. We've got the people of God praying and crying out to God, you don't need to be a theologian to work out something's gonna happen here.

When God's people start to pray, God's hand starts to move. God ignites that hunger for him in our hearts to fulfill the hunger that he puts within us. Matthew Henry said, prayer is the appointed means for obtaining what we need.

So go to God. There was a time when the churches were filled with people before the meeting. They were all here in this altar crying out to God.

And nowadays, it's all the people at the altar after the meeting. But Mr. Ravenhill said there on Friday morning, it was listened to him. He said when the people used to come to the altar before the meeting started to cry out to God for him to move, then the glory fell.

You see, when the people were hungry for God, something happened. And if you're not hungry for God, forget all about revival. Forget all about depths in the river of God.

Forget all about it. You've got to be a people of prayer. You've got to cry to God.

You've got to be thirsty and hunger for righteousness. Elizabeth was going to conceive. Against all odds, new life was going to come from an old barren religious couple.

Gabriel came. Gabriel announced John will be born. Gabriel himself was a foreshadowing of the ministry of John the Baptist.

You know, the word angel in Greek and the word messenger when it talks about John the Baptist, it's exactly the same word in Greek. Gabriel stood in the presence of the Lord. And that's why he could announce the word of the Lord with boldness and assurance.

He had been in God's presence. John the Baptist could preach and thus saith the Lord because he'd been alone with God. If you get up in this pulpit and you haven't been alone with God, everybody knows about it.

You can't hide it. But when a man's been alone with God, when a woman's been soaked in his presence, there's a glory, there's a power, there's an authority that they recognize. When John preached, when Christ preached, if you've been alone with God, you will enjoy that divine back in every word that you say from the holy righteous God who governs eternity.

The people marveled. Zechariah, he's taken so long to come out. No one had been in the temple that long.

Why? Because there was no fire. There was no glory. There was no spiritual life.

Religion was dead. There was the people that waited and prayed. Elizabeth waited and prayed.

Zechariah waited and prayed. I know there's a time for faith. There's a time for believing.

But the scripture says in Hebrews 6, 12, we've got to be followers of them who through faith and patience receive the promises of God. If you've got true faith, true faith holds on. True faith keeps believing.

True faith presses on. The scripture says of Abraham, he believed in hope against hope. True faith believes on the patience, waiting, carrying, or forgotten values in our microwave society.

The life that was birthed in prayer and obedience to God produced holiness and fruit. That lad that's about to be born when he's older, he's going to tell people, you've got two coats, you're a rich person. He's going to tell the tax collectors, take what you're allowed to, take the legal amount.

He's going to tell the soldiers, don't do violence to any man, accuse no one falsely, and be content with your wages. When John started the preaching, give the word of God, it says in Luke 35 that the people were in expectation. That's what happens when God starts to move.

The people of God feel a stirring within. There's a moving of the Holy Spirit. People start to believe maybe all things are possible.

Maybe God does listen to my prayers after all. David says in Psalm 62, 5, my soul wait only upon God for my expectation is from him. And if you have expectation in God, if your hope is in him, then it will be evident by your life.

You will live a holy life. You will live a pure life. You will bring your life into subjection to the word of God.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 7 verse 1, he says, having therefore dearly beloved such promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and of the spirit. The promises, the hope leads to a holy life. 1 John 3 verse 3 says, he that has this hope within himself purifies himself even as he is pure.

If you're expecting in God, if you're waiting in God, if you're hoping in God, it will be evident because the fruits of holiness will be seen in your life. A holy man, a holy woman obeys God. If you're a holy man, you will pray.

And if you pray, you'll obey. And if you obey, you'll pray. Yeah, there's no shortcut to holiness.

If you say your hope's in Christ, if you say you're a son or a daughter of God, it will be evident by the fruit that's in your life. Don't come telling me you belong to God when your life contradicts everything you say. The land was old and barren, yet through prayer and obedience, there came life, joy, and gladness.

The scripture that Candace read this in verse 14 says, thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. You know, his birth gave great joy to his father. John was born.

There's life, joy, and gladness. You know, our heavenly father also rejoices at the new birth. Scripture tells us heaven erupts in glee over one sinner that repents, because God gives glory.

Christ has another vessel in which he can manifest himself. The new birth brings glory and joy to God. But now John heads off to the desert, and we're not going to hear of him for the best part of 20 or 30 years.

John, in the Greek, it means God shows favour. God shows favour. Many people objected when Elizabeth said, I want to call him John in Luke 161.

They said, well, you can't call him John. No one in our family's been called John before. Well, it had to be that way.

Of course no one's been called John before. No one's ever been like this lad before. He's got something from God.

He's going to change things. This lad's not going to be a doctor when he's older. He's not going to be a politician.

He's not going to be a lawyer when John gets older. He's going to be a fireman. He's going to bring fire from heaven.

Glory to God. This one's not going to be filled with wine and drink. He's going to be filled with the Holy Ghost and bring a nation back to its knees in obedience and submission to Jesus Christ.

Elizabeth said that the birth of her son was to take away her reproach. Luke 125. Revival always works along those lines.

If you look back into the book of Ezekiel, one of the great chapters on revival in the Old Testament is chapter 36. And there explicitly two times God says he would send the revival. He would send his glory that the reproach would be taken from the people.

Where did God says in verse 15 of Ezekiel 36, neither will I cause men to hear in you the shame of the heathen anymore. Neither shall you bear the reproach of the people anymore. And then on down in verse

30, I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field that you shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.

God sends his glory to take away the reproach of his people. He said in the book of Joshua 5 verse 9, he says in Gilgal this way, I have taken away the reproach of Egypt from you. God sends his glory to take away the reproach of his people.

Glory to God. But any moving of God is always a moving of great mercy, of great grace. You see, God, he doesn't have to step in.

God doesn't have to change the thing. He could just let the whole thing go on down the way it's going. But God in his mercy decides to step in, decides to revive his work.

He descends from heaven and shows his glory. He rises up souls. He rises up warriors.

He touches men. He touched John and John was different. You know, when Moses was in the Sinai desert, if he'd seen one bushfire, he'd seen a thousand bushfires.

I mean, that's as common as muck out there. But just so happens one day he's walking and here's a bush that's not consumed. Here's a bush that burns with the glory of God.

It's very interesting in Exodus chapter four or Exodus chapter three, that God never said a word to Moses until he started to draw near to the bush. You see, here's Moses. He can spend, he's been spending 40 years with those sheep of his father-in-law.

He can go off just taking care of those sheep until he dies, no problem. But God has him before the bush and the sheep. What is Moses going to do? Is he hungry for God? Is he thirsty for the reality of God? Is he crannied for the glory of God? And then when God sees that Moses starts to draw near to the bush, then God calls him not a moment before.

Are you hungry for God? Are you longing for God? The book of Exodus, where God used Moses, shows God to be a savior, shows God to be a liberator, shows God to be a guide. And John the Baptist was a guide for the people of God. You read the Old Testament.

Anytime there was an ungodly leader ruling that nation, they always ended up in confusion and ungodliness, worshiping idols. But when there was a man of God at the front bringing the things back to God, that nation prospered, that nation went forth in the blessing of Almighty God. All flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Luke 3, verse 6. John showed the people that glory. He led them to Christ. He didn't come to lead them to John the Baptist, no, no.

He came to lead them to Jesus Christ, the one who is mightier than I, the rock that is higher than I. The prophet has no other task but to lead people back to the path that leads to God. Get the people back to Jesus Christ. Get the people back to the word of God.

Get the people of God back to prayer. That's the task of the prophet. We're nobodies.

We're dust of the earth. Jesus Christ is all in all. He's everything.

Glory to God. In the midst of a generation that was barren and old, there came life, joy and gladness because there were people prepared to walk in prayer and obedience. John's birth, John's life.

We'll touch on the preacher, his proclamation and the prison cell. Preacher, proclamation, prison cell. John, first and foremost, was a preacher.

Scripture tells us time and time again that he came preaching. You know, when you read the scriptures, you can feel his heat emanating from those pages. He came preaching obedient to the impulse of the Holy Ghost.

Scripture says there are three times John came preaching. John came preaching. John came preaching.

Very interesting. He didn't come singing and he didn't come dancing. John came preaching.

All he had was a mighty voice that broke over 400 years of prophetic silence. He had absolutely nothing but a voice and a pure dress sense that you would appreciate. He wore clothes like those of Elijah.

Didn't come with a nice gel in his hair, a little purple tie and a fancy suit. He came dressed in camelskin to call the people back to God. Like Elijah said, repent, repent.

John said, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. He showed self-denial. He called for self-denial and surprise, surprise, he was a lonely man.

He was a lonely man. Yet this loner in the desert became the greatest attraction that everybody wanted to see. What a strange sight it must have been.

All went out to him. Matthew 3, 6 says, then went out to John, Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about the Jordan. The synagogues emptied overnight.

He was a man who lived what he believed and believed what he lived. John, what is it that makes you preach with such conviction? What is it that gives you such boldness? John says, because I preach what I live and I live what I preach. I believe every single word comes out of my mouth and I live it.

I put it into practice. You see, our great problem is in the 21st century, half the things we say here in the pulpit, we don't believe them. And if we do believe them, then we don't live them.

I'm just sick of making people who preach one thing in a pulpit, give a message of holiness, and then midweek they're living like devils. God doesn't have time for people like that. Let me say, if you're going to preach a message in holiness, you've got to live in holiness.

You're going to preach on prayer. Make sure you're a man of prayer. You're going to preach in obedience to God.

Make sure you're a woman of obedience to God. John came preaching. John came preaching.

They didn't come singing. They didn't come dancing. They didn't come eating.

They didn't come drinking. John had no friends, no social life, no social security. And of all the places he goes to preach, he goes out to the wilderness.

He goes out to the backside of the desert. Everywhere I go, I find people when I travel around Europe and especially Spain, oh William, you know, we've just such hard ground here. Oh, it's ever so hard.

Oh, the work. Oh, dear me. Let's have a little pity party.

I'll play our violins and have a little cry. You know, listen, go study John the Baptist's preaching tactics, and then come and tell me about hard ground. Here's a man who goes out to the desert.

Spirit of the Lord comes upon him. Just starts to preach the gospel of God. All these people from Jerusalem today and all the region about the Jordan just start to show up.

I mean, that doesn't make a speck of sense, but the wonderful thing is it doesn't have to make sense because it's God. God sends the revival. God quickens the people.

God brings them out to the wilderness. John didn't go to Jerusalem to run a preaching crusade or a priest convention. He stayed back in Jerusalem.

He stayed back in the wilderness, never went to Samaria city center. The people went to John, just like the people came to Jesus when he went to Matthew's house. Matthew, you know, people say, well, you know, in the name of sinner friendly evangelism, I've met plenty of people that say, well, William, why didn't you come with us? Let's go and evangelize in the clubs and the pubs.

Let's go there and dance with them, take their pranks and then tell them how wonderful Jesus is. You know, I was about 19, 18 years old when he invited me to that. Every single one of them, now they're knee deep back in the world.

They're deeper than they ever were before. That doesn't work. You see, when Jesus went to Matthew's house to eat, the scripture tells us that Jesus sat down at Matthew's house to eat and then all the people came on to him.

He just didn't go to their discos. Jesus didn't go and take a little pint with them. Jesus didn't smoke their joints and sleep with their women.

He just lived the gospel filled with the Holy Spirit. No jokes, no guitar, no little tricks up his sleeve. Just preaches the gospel.

Lives in communion with God. All the people start to show up again. Doesn't make sense.

Doesn't make sense. Doesn't have to make sense. God does the work.

The truth was being proclaimed in the Jordan. People repenting. People being baptized.

All was going according to plan. All was going ever so gloriously until the religious lukewarm showed up. Oh yeah, you're going to know that.

You're going to know that's true. You're going to experience that. Then come the lukewarm religious.

Repentant people were the only one who heard John's message. There were Pharisees and Sadducees. People who had the appearance of godliness.

People who were hypocrites. Who said something that they didn't live. They were just interested in numbers.

All those Pharisees and Sadducees wanted was little John's pulpit. Oh he's got the influence. Oh he's popular.

We've got to go and find out about this guy. John didn't take a moment's notice of him. John never been a day in Bible school in his life.

And these guys, you see them coming towards him. Oh no, we would say, we would say, oh here comes the establishment. Here comes the religious system.

Oh no, what am I going to do? They're going to confine me. No, John didn't twitch an eyelid. I tell you, I've read the scriptures.

I believe I've captured something of the heart of God. I believe I can, of the heart of John. I believe I can almost, can understand his character.

And I can see him that day in the Jordan. When the Pharisees and Sadducees start to draw near. I just see that man standing at attention.

Flexing those own muscles. Points his finger. Says you've got no time for me.

And rest assured I've got no time for you. Off you go you bunch of venomous vipers. Slither your way back to Jerusalem on your stinking filthy bellies.

Here's a man never a day in Bible school in his life. And he tells the religious two things. Number one, what they've got to do.

And number two, where to go. John had no time for them. John didn't get messed up with a theological debate or argument.

Just proclaim the word of God. If you're not here in Christ's terms. If you're not here to repent.

If you're not here to lay your heart down before Christ. Then off you go home. You're not needed here.

Got no time for you here. God doesn't need you. God doesn't need me.

If you're not here because you mean business with God. Then off you go. Stay at home Sunday morning.

Don't waste your time playing religion. Come on. Get right with God.

Seek God. Be repented. Be baptized in Jesus name.

He told the experts what to do. You're obviously not doing a very good job Pharisee. You're obviously not doing a very good job Sadducee back in Jerusalem.

Because the first sign of spiritual life. Everyone's right here in the wilderness like a click of a finger. You've obviously haven't got something from God.

Well people have got something from God. People are people long for reality. We live in a society that's sick to the back teeth of all the tradition and rubbish that we've accustomed ourselves to.

We need life. We need men and women that have heard from God. We need people that are going to be free and preach the gospel regardless of the consequences.

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

Will you be such? Will you be that man? Will you be that woman? The messenger of the necessity brings a message. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.

Matthew 3 verse 3. Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 3 verse 2. His was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins and his message was Christ centered from day one. He said that then there's coming one greater than me.

There's coming one mightier than I. I've baptized in water. This guy he's going to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. You think I've been tough going.

Wait till he comes along. You think I've been rough. Wait till you hear what he's going to say to you.

There's coming one greater. There's coming one mightier than I. I must decrease. He must increase.

I am nothing. He is all in all. Repent.

Repent. Repent. That's imperative.

When someone preaches that you know where they're at. He didn't bring an argument. Didn't bring it to be it.

Just a command. Repent. Repent.

You don't want to repent and be baptized. That's no problem. Off you go.

I was preaching there last Saturday in a conference down there in southern Spain and Michael's dad was at the meeting and he asked me to preach in London this Sunday. So I forgave the message on Sunday night. He invited me to go to a man's house.

Said he'd been saved 29 years but he said he just didn't want to be baptized. So he said to me you know I love Jesus. I love him.

I just don't want to be baptized and I said well what you've just said to me is a complete contradiction. Word of God says he that loves me is he that keeps my commandment and obeys him. I'm not making that up.

That's John 14 verse 21. If you love God it will be manifest in your obedience to God and if you don't obey God don't come telling me you love God. You're telling me a lie and then he says I know but I would never deny the Lord.

Someone puts a pistol in my head says deny Christ. Deny Christ or die. Well I wouldn't deny Christ when you're just telling me another lie.

You say you expect me to believe that at the moment of your death you would have denied Christ and for these 29 years you've been living and you're denying him every single day. He says repent and be baptized. If you're not going to obey him don't tell me you love him.

Don't tell me that you're not going to deny him. Don't tell me that that's contradiction. That's not in the scriptures.

If you love God you will obey God. Jesus never says in the scriptures oh by their profession you will know them. Oh because they attend church on a Sunday morning you will know them.

No no no. You'll know them by their fruits and if there's no fruits there's nothing. If there's no sanctification there's been no justification.

The kingdom of heaven is coming and it only it only has a place for people who are walking in wholehearted obedience to Christ. Christ-centered people. Are you one of them? John jumped in his mother's womb at the presence of Christ.

His whole being was caught up in the glory of God. He knew that Jesus was going to bring separation but he knew which side he was on. He was with Christ to the end.

He knew where his loyalties lay. In Luke 3 verse 1 and verses 1 and 2 we'll have several political and religious authorities that are mentioned. Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Annas, Caiaphas but then the scripture says in verse 2 that same passage but the word of God came on the John son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

The authority wasn't with the political regime. The authority wasn't with the religious crowd. The authority was with the little old preacher right there in the wilderness.

The word of God came on the John in the wilderness. John was kept apart in the wilderness. It had to be that way.

If John started to preach his message in Jerusalem he would have been killed in half an hour. Would have cut his throat in five minutes. Same thing happened with Jesus.

You know what's amazing? Jesus wasn't born in Egypt or in Cairo, the center of world culture. He wasn't born in the center of world religion. Jesus was born in a little place called Bethlehem in a little stable that stunk of animals.

There he was born outside the establishment. John was kept in that wilderness outside the establishment. Did the same thing with Moses.

Kept him for 40 years in the desert. Why? Because if Moses spent 40 years with those people he's going to be as enslaved as they are. God has to keep you in the wilderness to let your mind be free.

To let you dream for God. To let you say God sent the Lord. God kept John the Baptist in the wilderness.

And if you're going to rise up in God's name somewhere along the line you're going to be called away there too. There's your fella Philip in Acts 8 preaching revival. Conversion after conversion.

Healing after healing. Devil cast out again and again. And then all of a sudden of all the things God says to him.

Off you get now Philip. Out you go to the desert. For what? I'm here preaching revival.

I'm here giving the gospel. People converting left right and center. And you want me to go to the desert?
No Philip.

You're not needed. Off you go. You're my servant.

I'll take care of what's going on in Samaria. You just get out to the desert. God will take you apart.

God many times has to take his faithful servants apart outside of the system to have a bowl to speak in the name of Almighty God and righteousness. John wouldn't have survived half an hour in Jerusalem. The people felt the fire.

It was an aggressive heat. It hit them hard. The people said what shall we do? They asked exactly the same thing in the day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost started convicting souls.

People lay their heads low and bow in humility to Jesus Christ. It must be the Holy Spirit that brings conviction. We can't manipulate men's feelings.

We try to do God's work. God was telling me there's people here in Ireland in their meetings and they're teaching people how to talk in tongues. My God what is happening? What a decadent generation.

When you get that low where it has to be man manipulating everything. God when he steps in. It's like God said to Ezekiel, preach to the dry bones.

Preach to them and all the prophet has to do. You're a prophet of the Lord. I'm a prophet of the Lord.

We're called to preach the gospel. Our responsibility is proclaim the word and Ezekiel if you preach the word, God himself takes care of giving life to the army. You can't manipulate that army.

You can't give new life to that army. You just preach. You just be faithful.

You just give the gospel. God will take care of the rest. Leave it in his hands.

Not the might. Not the power. By my spirit saith the Lord.

Common folk felt the fire and were prepared to walk in the ways of the Lord. John the preacher. John the proclamation.

John the prison cell. Men and women heard him gladly. The true disciple rejoices when the truth of Christ brings him to his knees.

But the lukewarm couldn't stand him. The indifferent keep the flame of fire. It's the same in every single generation.

John was a messenger. John had a message and it led him to prison and prison to death. That's the thanks you're going to get for being a spokesman for God in this generation.

That's the thanks you're going to get for saying, thus saith the Lord. He told Herod, he says there in Mark 6 verse 18, he says, it's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. I believe 95% of our church, we would have just said, we would have just let Herod's sin go unnoticed.

He's an important man. We would have given him a little pat on the back, invited him to our carol service and then thank God in the mean for having such a wonderful person to be with us. No, no.

John called sin by its name. Cut sin by the throat. John knew what he had to preach.

The gospel message has a stain to it. And if your message hasn't got stained, it's a pretty good indication that you're not preaching the gospel. Ecumenical religion, alternative worship centers, worship centers play down the concept of sin.

The whole cry nowadays is positivity, self-esteem. Tell people how wonderful they are. Seven steps to success.

Man called me in his office back in February, March time. Had a national ministry there in Spain. Says to me, William, he says, I've got your CD.

I've got a CD of your sermon and I want to put it online. But what you're going to have to do if you want me to put this sermon online is two things. He says, number one, stop preaching against prayerlessness in the church.

And number two, stop giving such a hard time to pastors that don't see God, the preachers that don't live with the preach. I said, thank you very much for this invitation. Keep your little CD to yourself.

There's no deal. Just walked out the door. That's Satan incarnate sitting there before me.

Just calm it down. Just take it all easy. Don't be so hard on those that don't pray.

Don't be so hard on those that don't love God with all of their hearts. Just calm it down. Just play the whole thing down.

That's all they ever wanted. You know, John Bunyan, he, they were about to release him from prison. Guy goes through hell and high water for the gospel.

Stands before his prosecutor, Mr. Justice Winsgate, and they say, well, John, you know, you spent these months and years in prison. You know, 16th, 17th century prisons aren't 21st century prisons. Our prison's 21st century.

You go there to have holidays and have a good time. Back in those days, people suffered in prison. Rat infested, water everywhere, people being killed left, right and center.

The man, Mr. Justice Winsgate, stands before this great man of God, great Puritan soldier, John Bunyan, says, well, John, will you have freedom or will you go back to the prison cell? They wouldn't let him preach. And he says, if you release me today, I will preach tomorrow. That's the way it is.

If I go back into prison, don't care, couldn't care less. Put me there, I'm going to preach in prison. I can't lose.

You release me, I'm going to preach in the streets. You put me in prison, going to preach in a prison. You can't kill a man like that.

That's the fire of God. That's the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon a preacher, upon a man, upon a woman. Jeremiah preached and they threw him in the prison, threw Joseph in the prison, John the Baptist in the

prison.

If you end up in prison, let me tell you something, you're in mighty good company. The religious can't stand it when they can't silence someone. And if they can't control you, if they can't manipulate you, then they're coming to slay you.

Mark my words. I'm not just saying it from the scripture. I'm telling you from your own experience.

This is the truth. A man in the establishment can never preach like John the Baptist. Our preachers nowadays are walking in eggshells in the pulpit, scared stiff of offending anybody.

Don't want to mention sin. Don't want to talk about hell. They're scared of the people.

They're birds without wings and little cages that don't give the word of God, that tiptoe about everything. Acab said of Micaiah, the great prophet and first king, 22-27, he said, thus saith the king, put this fellow in prison, give him the bread of affliction, give him the water of affliction until I come in peace. Why did Acab put Micaiah in prison? Because Micaiah told Acab where he was with God, revealed his sin.

He said, you're a rebel. God's abandoned you for your sins. That's the thanks you're going to get if you tell people where to stand up for God.

No Pharisee could ever preach like John the Baptist. When the people walked in obedience to God, there was no problem. But when those new gods started coming into the nation, then there were problems.

Judges 5 verse 8 says, when there were new gods, then there was war in the camp. Then there was war. We've got our gods of prosperity, of self-importance, and then there's war.

You see, if John would have preached that message to a repentant people, there's no problem. But when you're preaching the word of God, the pure doctrine of the scripture to men and women that aren't right with God and that don't want to get right with God, well, persecution's your lot. If you preach the word of holiness, the seed of God will bite down and give thanks to God.

But if you preach the obscene word of holiness and someone there doesn't want to let go of something they've got in their heart, you are a dead man. They're coming after you. They can't stand that because you're revealing something that's inside of them that they won't let go.

You will be upset and you will face persecution. John's birth, John's life, and finally, John's death. The messenger's message leads him to prison and prison to death.

If everybody tells you how wonderful you are after you've preached the sermon, I'd say it's a pretty good indicator that you haven't spoken from God. Wherever I find that God speaks through men in the scriptures, I always find just around the corner comes persecution and rejection. Great man of God, John Wesley, once went two days without suffering for the gospel.

He got off his horse, bowed down in the crowd and said, God, what have I done wrong? Why am I not suffering? The gospel reaps suffering and persecution. Adam Clarke, a great Bible commentator said, there are few who preach the gospel faithfully that do not lose their lives by it. John was passed into prison, lived like a poor man, ate like a poor man, drank like a poor man, dressed like a poor man, but he preached like a possessed lion.

When he spoke, there was all you had to take notice. You know, when you looked at John, wasn't much to look at in the physical realm. But when that man of God opened his mouth, all else disappeared into the distance.

It was the preacher and the listener. It was one on one. Everything else lost importance.

They were caught up in the voice of the man of God. John's preoccupation was Jesus Christ. Sometimes we hit out at John a bit hard and would say, well, in prison, you know, he had a moment of doubt.

You know, he said, is this the Messiah? But you see, John in that prison cell, he wasn't concerned about his liberty. He wasn't concerned about getting his freedom. The only thing he was concerned about in that prison cell when he's about to give his life is Christ, is the person of Jesus.

And whenever Jesus answers, I'm going to believe with all my heart. You know, most people that criticize John there, I find them to be people from our Western society who've never been through a suffering in their lives, don't understand anything. Jesus, when they came to him and said, John's asking, are you the Messiah? Jesus is only too pleased to offer, pleased to answer the cry of his servant.

There's going to be times when you need consolation. There's going to be times when you're going to need comfort. You and I, we're not supermen.

We're not superwomen. There are going to be times where we go through the fight, where we go through the battle and we're going to need consolation from the Lord. And Jesus gave that word to John in his final hour.

I am that I am. Go and tell John the poor have the gospel preached unto them. Go and tell John the sick are healed.

Go and tell them the lame are walking, the dumb are praising, the blind are seeing, and the deaf are hearing. Go and make sure you tell John, give him that consolation. Give him that comfort.

I comfort those that love me. I put my balm upon them that faithfully follow in me. Jesus was only too pleased to give John encouragement in his final hour.

Christ was John's all in all. He said, behold the lamb. His love for Christ brought a great humility to his life.

He said that Jesus in the Jordan, but surely you should be baptizing me. All for him was the greatness and glory and splendor of the person of Jesus. Well, what about you? Well, I kind of hear the day in churches.

Well, my car, my new house, my favorite football team, or it can even be more subtle than that. Well, my ministry, my name, my church's importance. Very, very subtle.

No John, no time for none of that. The glory of the person of Jesus Christ. I'm living for him.

I'm giving glory to him. I'm not mine. I'm his.

I must decrease. He must increase. John the Baptist's faithfulness in public and private ought to put a good part of us to shame.

His testimony burned for Jesus Christ. Jesus himself said in John 5 verse 35, he was a burning and shining light. Burning in Greek means set on fire.

It means a consuming flame. It's the same word where Jesus says, you know, uh, let your loins be good advice and your lights continually burning. It's the same word in the Greek.

That's Luke 12, 35 and Luke 24, 32. Did not our heart burn within us? And Revelation 21 verse 8, the leak which burns with fire and brimstone. John burned.

John burned for Christ like that leak burns with fire and brimstone. It's passionate. It's zealous.

It's sold out for Jesus Christ. When Herod promised Herodias' daughter that he would give her up to the half of his kingdom, she goes off and asks her mom what she wants. Of course, her mom is Herod's wife.

And of all the things that woman asked for, she's in a party. Her daughter's been there dancing, you know, in that carnal atmosphere of emotionalism, of glee, of happiness, of drinking, of debauchery. And of all the things that woman wanted and not being caught up with all that atmosphere.

The only thing that woman wanted was the death of a little itinerant preacher out there in the backside of the wilderness. Nothing else mattered to her. She could have asked for pearls, could have asked for jewels, could have asked for social status, academic privileges.

The only thing that was on that woman's mind was the death of that man that tells me I'm living in sin. I want him dead. I want his head in a plate.

Kill him. Cut his neck off. That's the only thing I want.

A little lone preacher out there in the wilderness doesn't seem to make any sense. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were only too pleased to see John off. Why so? Because John told them where they were at.

He didn't look at them through their social privileges. He didn't look at them through the academic attainment. He just held up the myrrh of the holiness of God.

And those wicked wretches didn't like what they saw on the reflection. John was faithful to God and paid with his life. Disturb the religious elite.

Disturb the religious elite. And pretty soon you're going to find yourself in trouble. John came in the spirit and in the power of Elijah.

That's all we want nowadays. Oh, give us the spirit. Oh, give us the power that John had.

Well, if you want the spirit of John, if you want the power of John, get ready for persecution. Get ready for prison. Get ready for death.

If you're not prepared for that, don't waste your time praying for revival and the fire of God. But in spite of that powerful spirit that laid a hold on John, he kept his head low. I must increase.

I must increase. He must increase. The only thing that mattered to him was fulfilling his purpose that God had called him for.

The reward for spiritual power, the reward for being a spiritual firebrand is death. But it's worth it all to face the hatred of the lukewarm. The one thing I read about in Revelation that Jesus said he would do with the lukewarm was to spew them out of his mouth.

You can translate that verb two ways in Greek. You can translate that as spew, or you can translate that as vomit. No matter what way you want to translate that verb, I can guarantee you one thing.

It's going to be an ugly ending. It's going to be an ugly ending for the lukewarm, spewed or vomited out of their mouth. Jesus says, blessed are you when men shall hate you, when men shall separate you from their company, when they shall reproach you and cast out your name as evil for the son of man's sake.

Rejoice in that day. Leap for joy, for behold, the prophets did the same thing to the prophets. And then he adds in Luke 6 verse 26, woe, woe unto you when all men speak well of you, for so did they unto the false prophets.

Thomas Watson said, how many people have been blown into hellfire by the applause of popular acclamation. It's very easy to get caught up when men tell you how wonderful you are, but be very careful when a flattering tongue comes near. When someone's flattering you, it's a pretty good sign that they want something out of you.

They're there, says the scripture, they'll lay a trap before your feet. Keep your head low, keep yourself humble, keep yourself in humility before the king of kings. The greatest reward that the enemies of the cross of Christ can offer you is persecution, because it shows that you're not one of them, that you're of a different spirit, that you are hungry for God, that you do long for him.

John died for the gospel. John died because he was faithful. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints.

Christ said there was none greater in the kingdom. He was the prophet of the most high, great in the sight of the Lord. One thing to know what the religious think of you, it's another thing to know what Jesus says about you.

That's worth it all. They kill me, I don't care, as long as Jesus loves me, as long as Jesus names upon me. One man came up to Martin Luther one day, says to him, Martin, Martin, the whole world is against you.

Martin says, not so. I am against the whole world. God is for me.

Who can be against me? John did good to all men, showed men where they stood out with God, and you can do no greater service to humankind. The word of judgment is a word of mercy. The word of truth is a word of grace and a word of love.

The man that loves you is the man that tells you the truth. John turned the hearts of the children of Israel back to God. John turned fathers back to their children and vice versa.

Our unbridled age witnesses one broken family after another. I'm the fruit myself of a broken marriage. I know what it's like.

I came from a family that had a broken marriage. I know the pain, I know the misery, I know the heartbreak, but I'll tell you, in those situations, I've seen the most hardened, better people against their own parents, who go years without speaking to them, and then years down the line, they read of their death and the obituary, and they rejoice, and they're happy about it. I mean, this hatred, this bitterness, this venom that we sense in our generation, but it says John turned the hearts of the children back to their fathers.

His gospel of holiness broke the carnal, broke the hatred, broke the bitterness. The gospel forgives, the gospel forgets, the gospel brings liberty. John's gospel preaches repentance and forgiveness.

Jesus says, love your enemy. Stephen fell with the Holy Ghost, about to die, says, Lord, don't lay this thing under charge. I know they're killing me.

I know I'm done for. I know I'm going in the glory, but don't lay this thing under charge. The gospel forgives, the gospel presses on, the gospel promotes humility and holiness.

Our kids today don't even know who their parents are anymore. Things I used to joke about when I was a kid, I've seen them come to pass. Teacher says to kid, well, where's your dad today? Why is he not collecting you from school anymore? Well, miss, daddy ran off with the next door neighbor, but your next door neighbor's a policeman.

Yeah, daddy's a homosexual. Things I used to joke about as a kid, I've seen him come to pass with his own two eyes. We don't even know the difference between a man and a woman anymore.

You think I'm inventing this? This is where we're at. Apostasy, decadence. We need men like John the Baptist.

We need women filled with the fire of God to bring the nation back to their knees. Get back to God. Get back to prayer.

Get back to the Word of God. There is hope, but will you let hold of God? Don't spend your time weeping about the state of things in our streets if you're not prepared to be a man or woman of prayer. Get a hold of God.

Believe God. Press on. Seek Him with all of your heart.

The prophet turns the foolish to wisdom. Listen to wise counsel. Listen to Christ.

Listen to the Word of God. John put all in place and then the glory came. Moses in the book of Exodus put everything into place.

Then the glory filled the tabernacle. John filled every valley. John laid low every mountain.

John made that crooked place straight. He made the rough smooth and then the glory came. Jesus Christ, God manifested in flesh.

God of glory revealed in humanity. Praise God. John puts the thing in its place and God comes forth to a decadent generation.

John saw the glory of Christ and John in this moment 20th of July 2009 is in glory with Jesus. You can't kill a man like John. He lives on.

John's not dead since. He's just changed his address. John lives on the day.

John's in the presence of Jesus Christ. He's gone on home. He knew he was a stranger on this planet.

He knew he didn't belong here. Many men interpreted his passion for pride but you can't shake a man that's heard from God. I've read the book of Ezekiel.

Those opening chapters. I've read the vision he saw of God and I said God I want to know what he saw. Oh God would you show me what Ezekiel saw.

I've tried to imagine it. I've tried to draw it out and I've never seen what Ezekiel saw. But if there's one thing that when Ezekiel saw what he saw, when Ezekiel saw the manifested glory of God, he was never the same again.

He was prepared to give his life for God. On that mountain of Transfiguration, Peter, James and John saw the glory of Christ. Very interesting.

Judas Iscariot didn't get up the mountain. Those three that got up there were ready to shed their blood for the gospel. When you've got a vision of Christ, you can't be shaken.

You can't be moved. You cannot kill John the Baptist. I conclude this message by saying that John the Baptist sealed in his death what he had lived in his life.

His blood burned for the glory of God. If your heart is fixed on earthly things, you are not of the same spirit as John the Baptist, as these great men of God. John stayed faithful unto death.

The consuming fire of the Holy Ghost possessed him. This zeal ate him up. Passion was the seal of God upon his life and his name is synonymous with zeal and fervor and fire.

I propose to you that there is no hope for our contemporary churches except we get fire back in our pulpits and a flame again in our pews. We need the fire of God. I'm not here promoting some little empty emotionalism that'll disappear at the first sign of trouble.

I'm talking about a solid substantial work of the Holy Ghost that will give us fire in our bellies and steel in our bones. John was born into a barren land, an old land stricken in years, yet his name today speaks of life, joy and gladness, because there was a people prepared to walk in prayer and obedience. John was hated.

John was an outcast of outcasts. John was murdered, but John, like those great saints of old, being dead yet speaks. His legacy is nothing else but a love for the God of the gospel and the gospel of God.

If we are to experience revival in this 21st century, I suggest to you we need a revival of John the Baptist ministries. It's time to give back the prayer. It's time to seek God.

It's time to cry out to the Father that he would reign the heavens and come down. Blessed be the name of God Almighty. Blessed be the glory of the Lord from this place.

Why don't we just cry to God to finish off, and then our brother will come. Glory to God. Glory to God.

You're worthy of our praise, O God. You're high and you're lifted up. Your glory fills the temple.

O God, for fire in these bones. O God, for steel in these spurs, God. Make us a people of prayer.

Make us a people of obedience, O God. We're sick of the barren land. We're sick of the old crowd.

Give us revival. Reign the heavens. Come down again in our generation.

Rise up a people hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Come, O God, new and great God. Let your hand be strong upon us, O God.

Raise up prophets. Raise up preachers. Raise up evangelists.

Raise up pastors for Jesus' glory. And in Jesus' name, we give you praise. We give you honor.

We give you glory. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Glory to God. Glory to God.

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