

The Elijah of the Last Days

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being ready for Christ's return and the need for Christians to be holy and one with others.

Duration: 52:17

Scripture: Malachi 4:5, Matthew 11:11, Luke 1:15, John 17:20-23, Ephesians 2:15

Topics: "Second Coming", "Spiritual Readiness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being spiritually prepared for Christ's return, drawing parallels between the need for readiness during Christ's first coming and the current state of many Christians. It highlights the ministry of John the Baptist as a model for preparing hearts for the Lord, focusing on being great in the sight of the Lord rather than men. The sermon challenges believers to prioritize holiness, unity, and readiness for Christ's return over worldly desires and superficial aspects of faith.

Transcript

Our subject for this session is how to be ready for Christ's return. And if we pay attention to what you hear, then I believe those who take it seriously can be ready. I believe most Christians will not be ready when Christ comes.

And the reason I say that is this. When Jesus came the first time, most of the Jewish people were not ready for his coming. Even though they had the Bible, they knew all about his coming, they were not ready for his coming.

Even the people who preach the word of God were not ready for Christ's first coming. Because even though they knew a lot of things about Christ in their mind, their heart was not ready. So we are living also in such a time.

Many people know so much about Christianity in their minds, but they are not ready in their hearts. There are many things happening around us in the world today that indicate that we are close to the coming of Christ. But many Christians are only interested in observing those signs.

But when Jesus spoke about his second coming, he always emphasized being ready. And God in his great goodness sent a prophet to Israel to prepare them for the coming of Christ. That was John the Baptist.

And John the Baptist was specially sent to prepare people for the coming of Christ. He was born just a few months before Jesus was born. But he started preaching and preparing people for Christ's coming before Jesus started his ministry.

The ministry of John the Baptist is very important for us to understand. And I will tell you why. Turn to Luke chapter 1. The angel appeared to his father Zacharias and told him about John the Baptist being born.

And this is how he described him. In Luke 1 verse 15 He said, this boy John will be great in the sight of the Lord. That's the first thing.

He's going to be great in the sight of the Lord. Anyone who wants to prepare other people for the coming of Christ, he must have no desire to be great in the sight of men. You may be a very ordinary brother or sister.

If you have a desire to be great in the sight of the Lord, then the Lord can use you to prepare others. And I'll tell you from my observation that 99% of Christians want to be great in the sight of men. Most preachers are like that.

So that's why they don't tell people about their sin. They tell people what will please the people. John the Baptist never preached to please people.

He only had one desire to be great in the sight of the Lord. Of course, he did not get many people to follow him. Most of the people in Israel rejected Christ.

But John the Baptist prepared a few people. And some of his own disciples became disciples of Jesus Christ. And it says in verse 16, he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.

He will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. It says in verse 17, that he will go as a forerunner before Christ in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. So his ministry was, as written in that verse, to make ready a people for the Lord.

So there was no prophet in the Old Testament who had that ministry. He was the only one. He was the only one.

And it says here, he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. Now in Malachi chapter 4, the Lord says, it was the last verse almost of the Old Testament. The last prophecy in the Old Testament.

What was that? Malachi 4 verse 5. I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. Before the coming of the Lord, the prophet Elijah would come. It doesn't mean the real prophet Elijah who lived thousand years earlier.

But like we read in Luke, someone who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. That was John the Baptist. What was his ministry? To prepare people for the coming of Christ.

Now I want you to turn to Matthew chapter 11. And then you will understand how this, all that I have said so far, applies to you and me. I am not talking about the first coming of Christ.

That's over. We are talking about the second coming of Christ now. But I am telling you what we can learn from the ministry of John the Baptist.

So here in Matthew chapter 11, we read here about Jesus describing John the Baptist in verse 11 as the greatest human being ever born. That's in Matthew 11 verse 11. And then he said, now this is the verse which is very very important.

He said to the Jewish people, verse 14. If you will accept him as then he is the Elijah who is to come. If you will accept him as then he is the Elijah who is to come.

So Jesus was referring to that prophecy in Malachi 4. But there was a condition. If you Jewish people accept John the Baptist and his message, then he is Elijah. But did the Jewish people accept John the Baptist's message? No.

They rejected him, they killed him. So that means, he was not the Elijah who was to come. Because the condition Jesus said was, if you accept him, then he is that Elijah.

If you don't accept him, then he is not that Elijah. So then that prophecy in Malachi 4 verse 5 is not yet fulfilled. So go back to Malachi 4 verse 5. What did the Lord say? No word from God can ever fail.

Every word in scripture will be fulfilled. And here is a word that is not fulfilled when John the Baptist came. Because Jesus said that will be fulfilled only if you accept him.

So they didn't accept him, so the word was not fulfilled. What is the word? Verse 5. I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. Now when Jesus came the first time, that was not the great and terrible day of the Lord.

The great and terrible day of the Lord will be when he comes the second time. When he is going to come with judgment. When he will come not as a little baby, but as king of kings and Lord of Lords.

Now if the Israelites had accepted John the Baptist, things may have been different. But now we know the great and terrible day of the Lord is in future still to come. And so here is a prophecy.

I am going to send you someone in the spirit and power of Elijah before that day. That was not John the Baptist. Who is that going to be? Because that prophecy has to be fulfilled.

Now I want to tell you something about old covenant prophets, about the old covenant and the new covenant. In the old covenant, the prophet was always one person. All of them were individuals, Isaiah, Jeremiah, even John the Baptist.

But after the day of Pentecost, there was a big change. After that day, God is not working only through individuals. He works through a group of people called the church.

If they are really pure and united. And that is called the body of Jesus Christ. And in Ephesians 2, that is called one new man.

See Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2 we read. The Jews and the Gentiles who were separated for many many centuries. It says here when Jesus died on the cross.

He abolished the enmity between these people. And on the cross, when he stretched out his hands. He was bringing both these groups together.

And it says in Ephesians 2.15. He made these two people into one new man. Who are these two? The two greatest opposites in the world. In our Indian villages, you can understand this situation.

You know there are high caste and low caste people. And you know they can never come together. If there is any village in India where that happens, that will be a miracle.

The distance between high caste and low caste is so great. Three thousand years they have not been able to come together. The distance between the Jews and the Gentiles was much greater than even that.

Among all human beings, very often there is a distance between people. Even husbands and wives who are supposed to be one, they have fights with each other. Even though they live in the same house.

People say in America they divorce their husbands and wives. We say in India we don't do that. Do you think the Indian marriages are happier than those marriages? There they fight and separate.

Here they fight and stay together. Because there they can afford to rent two separate houses. Here we can't afford to rent two separate houses.

Even Christian husbands and wives fight. It's very difficult to be one. Churches fight with other churches.

Because their doctrines are different. What about one church where all the doctrines are the same? There also they fight. Just like it says here, there is enmity in our flesh.

Against everybody. Parents and children fight. Neighbors fight.

There is enmity in everybody's flesh. Even Jesus' twelve disciples, after he preached to them, they were still fighting who is the greatest. If you can get two people to become one, That is a greater miracle than raising the dead.

That is what Jesus prayed in John 17. Oh Father, I pray that they will be one. Henry, I pray that they will be holy.

If you read John 17, there is only two things Jesus prayed for. Lord, make them holy. Sanctify them.

They live in the world, but don't let them get polluted by the world. And make them one. Not just externally one.

Not that they just sit in the same church. But he said, one as you and I are one. That is not by just making a committee of all the denominations.

That is not what he is talking about. You cannot organize this. You cannot organize this unity.

It has to be built by people who have accepted the cross. I am not talking about the cross where Jesus died. That everybody accepts.

Everybody accepts that. I am talking about the cross where we are crucified with Christ. Those who accept that cross, who take up their cross everyday, who are crucified with Christ, such husbands and wives will be one.

And such people, if they are Jew and Gentile, they will be one. If they are high caste or low caste, they will be one. Because on the cross, the enmity is destroyed.

That is what we read in Ephesians 2.15. And when God can gather together a few people like this, Now today, many Christians are impressed by basically two or three things. One is a large church. We have twenty thousand people in our church.

People are impressed by that. Three lakhs people came to my meeting. That is the first thing a lot of people are impressed by today.

Large numbers. God has never been interested in that. We know that Jesus said in Matthew 7, The way to life is narrow and very few find it.

And very few find it. So how can you have great crowds if very few are finding this narrow way? But Jesus said great crowds will go along the broad way. And the second thing that many Christians now are impressed by is physical miracles.

They are not interested in holiness of life. But miracles of healing. Which is more important? Let me ask you a question.

Will sin send you to hell or will sickness send you to hell? Tell me which sickness can send you to hell. Even AIDS cannot send you to hell. I have met people who had AIDS and then got converted and were born again and died of AIDS.

They didn't go to hell. But there are millions of people who have no sickness who go to hell. But there are millions of people who have no sickness who go to hell.

If you learn one thing, the worst sickness cannot send you to hell. There are people in heaven who had leprosy, AIDS, cancer when they were on the earth. But there are many people in hell who never had any sickness.

But do you think Christians have learnt that lesson? No. Most Christians are more interested in healing from sickness than in deliverance from sin. They are more interested in healing from sickness.

Not healing from their sinful life. So, that is why Christians are drifting away today. So, one, they are more interested in numbers than in quality.

Secondly, they are more interested in healing from sickness than freedom from sin. Another thing a lot of Christians today are interested in, they are more interested in hearing good Christian music than hearing a challenging word of God. A challenging word of God can prepare you for heaven.

Good music will only entertain you temporarily. If we don't get our priorities right, we will never be ready for the coming of Christ. What did Jesus pray in John 17? Did he say, Lord, Father, make my disciples all good musicians? He never even prayed, heal them of all their sicknesses.

He never even prayed, make them great in number in every city. We need to learn to pray like Jesus prayed. There were only two things that Jesus prayed for his disciples in John 17.

Make them holy and make them one. So, in order to be holy, you have to be crucified with Christ. In order to be one with others, you have to be crucified with Christ.

To sing good Christian music, you don't have to be crucified with Christ. And if you want to gather a large church, you must definitely not preach being crucified with Christ. No, you must preach how to make

money.

You must preach that God will bless you with material things. Well, who in the world is not interested in getting material things? Every businessman will join your church. But if you teach them not to love money and to die to your own self-life and to stop lusting after women and if you preach that internet pornography will take you to hell, you won't have a big crowd.

But you'll have a church that Jesus approves of. And such a church will be one new man. And such a church will be the Elijah in the last days.

Doing what? Doing the ministry of John the Baptist. Preparing people for the coming of the Lord. That is the most important ministry that any Christian should fulfill in these days.

Now, I am not talking to people who are not born again. Let me mention this. If you are just born in a Christian family, I am not talking about, this is not for you.

If you are just born in a Christian family, the first thing you need is to be born again. Which means you have to repent of your sins and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord. That means you have to get married to Christ.

And your whole life will change. Being born again is like getting married. You know, a young girl's life completely changes when she gets married.

Look at the number of things that change in her life. Before she is married, she can go where she likes, live where she likes, do what she likes. But the moment she gets married, first of all she has to change her name and get a new name.

She gets her husband's name. Imagine, she gives up her father's name which she has had for 20 years and takes her husband's name. She may have to give up her job and go and live with her husband a thousand kilometers away.

She has to leave her parents' home and go and live with her husband. Her life completely changes. Did your life completely change when you gave your life to Christ? If it did not change, then I don't know whether you are really married to Christ.

Maybe you just became a church member and you take the name of Christ without being married to him. There are a lot of people like that. But you can't say you are a Christian if you are not married to Christ.

The word Christian means married to Jesus Christ. See, my wife got my name only when she got married to me. Now if a hundred women go around saying they are Mrs. Zakpoonan, that doesn't make them Mrs. Zakpoonan.

No, they got to get married to me. You got married to your husband, that's why you got his name. And when you get married to Christ, then you can say I am a Christian.

But that word Christian has become devalued. I remember in my younger days, one rupee was a lot of money. One rupee.

When I was ten years old, that was a lot of money. Today even the beggars will throw it away if you give them one rupee. The money has devalued.

The same way, in the early days, we read in Acts 11 and verse 26. In Acts 11 and verse 26, it says the disciples were first called Christians. The last part, the disciples were first called Christians.

So who were called Christians first? Disciples. Disciples of Jesus Christ. Do you know what disciple means? I am a learner and a follower.

Those who wanted to learn from Jesus and follow Jesus in his footsteps were called Christians. Look at the people who called themselves Christians today. They cheat, they tell lies.

They drink, they get drunk, they fight. They do all types of wrong things just like anybody else. So the word Christian has become devalued just like the rupee.

So we need to come back to the meaning of that word. Married to Jesus Christ. That's the meaning of that word.

I am married to Jesus Christ. I have given up my own will now. I have given up my own plans.

You know, just like a newly married girl says. You go and ask this newly married girl, what are you going to do? I don't know, ask my husband. Do you say that? You say, I have to seek the Lord, I don't know what he wants me to do.

Those are true disciples. You have given up their plans because they got married to Christ. You get two, three people like that.

I am not talking about 200, 300. Two or three. Even two.

The Lord says, I am in the midst. And that will be the beginning of a church which is the body of Christ. And that number may increase.

You know, that's how a baby is formed in a mother's womb. Two very small units become one. They are very small.

You can't even see it. But it has become one. And that's the beginning of a body.

It's not 200 or 300. It's just two. They become one.

And that's the beginning of a body. And then it grows and grows and grows. But all the cells are united.

When the cells stop being united, then we call it a miscarriage or an abortion. Then the body rejects that. That baby can't be born.

Not because it's not good looking or not healthy. No, they were no longer one. In a mother's womb, when all the cells are not one, it's not a body.

It's a miscarriage. And I tell you, most churches in the world today are miscarriages. Why? They're not one.

They're not one. So what is a body? Where all are one. You know, that's what happens.

You see what happens when a person dies. See, as long as you and I are alive, all our cells are united. But the moment somebody dies, everything starts separating.

And in a few years, it's completely separated and becomes dust. You don't expect to go to a cemetery and see a body buried one year ago still united. No, you expect it all separated.

The church is not a dead thing. The true church of Jesus Christ may be small, but it's living. And when it's living, like your body, the cells are all united.

That's called a new man. One new man. There may be hundreds and thousands of people or ten people.

But the main thing is they're holy and they're one. And that is what the Lord is preparing in these days to be His Elijah. So the last Elijah is not going to be one person.

It's going to be the church, the one new man. And what is the function of this one new man? What did the Lord say? I will send Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. His ministry is going to be the same as John the Baptist.

Like the angel Gabriel told Zechariah, he will make people ready for the coming of the Lord. Any true servant of God will have that spirit. I don't want to make people rich.

I'm not even interested in making them healthy. That's not number one priority. My number one priority is to get them to be ready for the coming of Christ.

So that's the only type of church that's fulfilling God's ministry on earth today. Those are the only servants of God who are doing God's will today on earth. Do you think we are preparing people for the coming of the Lord by helping them to get a better car or a better house? You can't even get them ready for the coming of the Lord by making them healthy.

You can't prepare them for the coming of the Lord if you make them holy. This is the ministry of the church. That's what we want to think about today and tomorrow.

If you take this seriously, it will be the most important message you've ever heard in your whole life. And then God can use you to prepare other people. You don't have to be some great gifted person.

Every member of the body of Christ can fulfill this function. Let's pray. I want you to bow your heads for a moment.

And say Lord please prepare my heart to hear your word in these days. I want to hear a word from you to my heart. I know this is important for me.

This is the most important thing I need to hear in this time. This is your message for this time. Help me to have ears to hear and to obey.

Change my life during this weekend. And turn my life around. And make me a different person with a different set of values.

Values that are more in tune with your values. I want Jesus Christ to be Lord of my life. Thank you Lord for hearing me.

In Jesus name. Amen.

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