

## COMMENTARY ON JOHN

### LESSON NUMBER 3

“ JOHN 1:6 *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.* <sup>7</sup>  
*The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men  
through him might believe.* <sup>8</sup> *He was not that Light, but was sent to  
bear witness of that Light.*” ..... (John 1:6-8)

### THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD

#### INTRODUCTION

The Son of God will not simply begin His ministry without due attention being drawn to it. In fact, apart from the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1-3, there was not much said about the coming Messiah having a ministry, or going about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38). In fact, it appears that even after Jesus had read the Isaiah passage in His hometown synagogue, and announced that it was fulfilled in Him, no one received it. The people in that very synagogue tried to take His life that day (Lk 4:18-19). It appears that the general idea people had of the Messiah was that He would once again bring Israel into prominence – similar to how it was perceived during the reigns of Solomon and David. Only perceptive people had in any way perceived the fallen condition of Israel, or the need for the resolution of the matter of sin.

Now, the Son of God has been in the world for three decades, and, so far as the record is concerned, had only been recognized by Simeon and Anna at the time of His dedication to the Lord after Mary's purification – which was forty days; seven days prior to the circumcision of the child, and thirty-three days after it (Lev 12:2-4; Lk 2:22). Now Jesus is ready to be manifested to the people. How does the Living God prepare the people among whom He will minister for the commencement of that ministry? What needs to be done to sensitize the people, as it was, to what His Son came to do? Will He cause them to be discontent with the government of Rome? This is what Luke now endeavors to show us. He will, as he is moved along by the Holy Spirit, lead us to see what enables the people to see value in Jesus Christ. Throughout His prodigious ministry, we will see that very few people associated His presence with deliverance from sin. To this very day, people have a lot of difficulty discerning the Son of God as the appointed means of remitting sin, and causing it to lose its power over the individual. People have largely come to the same conclusion as those among whom Jesus ministered – seeing Him as the One who can ease life's burdens, make life more tolerable, and provide resolutions to the hardships of life. Also, that is the kind of gospel that is being preached.

### THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD

<sup>John 1:6</sup> *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John."*

Ordinarily, when God prepared men for some great work He was going to do, He sent an angel. He sent an angel to bring Israel out of Egypt: *"And when we cried unto the LORD, He heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border"* (Num 20:16). Even at the

giving of the Law, angels were employed to be *"ordain"* it, delivering it to the people (Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19). When Israel was threatened by the Assyria, *"the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land"* (2 Chron 32:21). When Israel failed to throw down the altars of the heathen, *"an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim,"* and delivered a chastening message to them (Judges 2:1-3). During the days of Hezekiah, when Israel was being oppressed again by the Assyrians, *"Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses"* (Isa 37:36).

But when it came to the matter of introducing the Messiah, God did not send angels. They did announce His birth to a limited number – Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds (Lk 1:35; Matt 1:21; Lk 2:11). They did lead Joseph in the protecting of the child when but a babe (Matt 2:12-15). But when it came to preparing the people for the ministry of His Son, God sent a man!

**THERE WAS A MAN.** This was no ordinary man. He would be *"filled with the Holy Ghost, even from His mother's womb"* (Lk 1:15). He would live a life of total separation as a Nazarite, and living in the deserts (Lk 1:80). Jesus said He was God's messenger, sent to prepare the way for Him (Matt 11:9). He said that from that time backward, *"Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a great than John the Baptist"* (Matt 11:11). That included men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all of the Prophets. Whatever men may think about ordinary people, they are not the ones who show forth the majesty and work of Jesus Christ. The closer one is to Christ, and the more involved they are in His work, the more extraordinary they are—i.e. the more they are separated from the masses.

John the Baptist stands as a towering example of what God can do with and through a man! He is set before us as an object lesson of the kind of commission that can be given to a man. We know this is the case, because Jesus said, *"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"* (Matt 11:11). This is not greatness as measure by achievement, nor is it greatness that can be seen by standing, as it were, next to John the Baptist. John was like a giant standing in a valley, while the least in the Kingdom is like a midget standing on a great mountain.

Brethren, you do not have the faintest idea what God can do with a man who is submitted to Him. We are not capable of plumbing the depths of Divine possibility. But we have John – without formal training, and without religious prestige. His parents were aged, and of note only among those who worshiped God. His father was priest, and had not gained the attention of anyone outside the Jewish community. John himself only lived to be about thirty-one. But his name has been etched into the stone of history, and every one who is in Christ has heard of him. He was the first prophet to whom the people gathered, and who did not himself go to the people.

**SENT FROM GOD.** John was *"sent from God."* He himself was not planned by his parents, who could not have children. His parents did not train him for his work, apart from raising him according to the Law, and in keeping with what they had been told by the angel concerning him. No one went before him to prepare the way for him.

God prepared John to go to the people, and He prepared the people to go to John. That was all part of John being *"sent from God."* God Almighty orchestrated things so that

when Jesus began His ministry, John could point to Him and say, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me”* (John 1:29-30). By the time Jesus came, which was six months after John commenced his ministry, he had said enough to point the people to the Savior of the world. Although he had unparalleled popularity, he never drew attention to himself, promoted himself, or left even the faintest suggestion that he was the primary person. This is because he was *“sent from God,”* and his significance was limited to what God was going to do through Jesus of Nazareth.

**WHOSE NAME WAS JOHN.** Later in this narrative, Luke will inform us that John’s name was given to him by the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:13). He is mentioned 47 times in Matthew, 27 times in Mark, 58 times in Luke, and 42 times in John. He is part of the Gospel of Christ – associated with the purpose and ministry of the Savior. His ministry will reveal things about what Jesus came to do, who He is, and what He expects from those whom come to Him. Truly, he was *“a man sent from God.”*

### **THE SAME CAME FOR A WITNESS**

*“ 1:6 “The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.”*

**THE SAME.** This is an elaboration of the man sent from God, whose name was John. It is the nature of God to lead us to see those of whom He speaks, and whom He sends, **within the context of His purpose.** He is not merely speaking of individuals, bringing us into a casual acquaintance with them.

**JOHN CAME FOR A WITNESS.** In this case, a *“witness”* is not someone who has only observed something, but one who testifies of something. When Jesus said to His disciples, *“Ye shall be witnesses unto Me,”* or *“you shall be My witnesses,”*<sup>NASB</sup> (Acts 1:8), He was referring to what they would SAY about Him. John the Baptist came to SAY something; to declare a message. God would give Him something to affirm, announce, or declare. In God’s Kingdom, this is His manner. He gave Moses something to say. He gave the prophets things to declare. In our text He will give John the Baptist something to say, and later Jesus will give His apostles something to say.

God has something to say to men, and they are obliged to hear what it is. A disinterest in what God has to say is far more serious than men think. An ignorance of His Word is not a minor offence. God’s words are never insignificant or meaningless. They are never irrelevant. The fact that they are treated as though they were meaningless and invalid only accents the grip that sin has upon the human race. Any message delivered by God is not to be overshadowed by some word from man.

**TO BEAR WITNESS OF THE LIGHT.** This is the One whose life is *“the light of men.”* It is the light that shined into the darkness, and *“the darkness comprehended it not.”* John would draw attention to the light of which men were unaware. Thirty years before John started his ministry, *“the light”* entered into the world. At twelve years of age that *“Light”* was found in the Temple, sitting among the experts in the Law of Moses, both asking and answering questions – but the darkness did not comprehend Him. He was raised in Nazareth, together with His half-brothers and half-sisters, but the darkness comprehended Him not. He had to be pointed out in the capacity in which He was sent into the world. Someone had to tell the people who He really was – and John was the appointed harbinger who was assigned that work.

He not only had to tell the people who Jesus of Nazareth really was, he had to

prepare the people by telling them what they had to do to ready themselves to gain the benefit of the presence of the light. The other Gospels tell us John said, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2), "*preaching the baptism of repentance*" (Lk 3:3), and telling the people to "*bring forth fruits worthy of repentance*" (Lk 3:8). It is interesting that the words "repent," "repentance," "repented," or "repenting" are not found in the Gospel of John – not in any form, or any version of Scripture. This does not diminish the importance of repentance, but it does reveal the accent of the preaching of John the Baptist, and the purpose for the writing of this Gospel – "*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name*" (John 20:31). That is the ultimate objective. If repentance is not followed by believing (Mk 1:15), it is of no value. Repentance is not an end of itself, but an appointed means to an end. Judas "*repented himself*" (Matt 27:3), but not being accompanied by believing on Christ, it only added to his condemnation.

All of this accents the importance of getting to the main thing in preaching and teaching. If men are not brought to believe, or have faith, all effort has been wasted. This is what is so wrong about a problem-solving, behavior-correcting emphasis. Such approaches do not get to the critical reality: "*without faith, it is impossible to please God*" (Heb 11:6).

**THAT ALL MEN THROUGH HIM MIGHT BELIEVE.** In its varied forms, the word "*believe*" is mentioned over sixty times in this book. This is a remarkable declaration, meaning that through John "*all men might believe.*" This had particular regard to all Israel, for they are the ones to whom Jesus was "*sent*" (Acts 3:26; 7:37; 13:26,32-33). It was John who was appointed to prepare the way of the Lord – not for Italy, or Greece, or Mesopotamia, but for Israel. They are the ones who had been told of the coming Messiah – no one else! All of the prophecies of a coming Savior were delivered to the Jews through the Prophets, and John himself was a prophet (Lk 7:28).

By Divine appointment, the Jews could not come to Jesus independently of John the Baptist, who was the one appointed by God to prepare the way. He did this by calling men to repentance; by exhorting them to "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt 3:2). Just as Israel had to wash their clothes and prepare to receive the Law (Ex 19:10), and the priests had to wash and prepare to enter the Tabernacle (Ex 29:4), so the people had to prepare themselves to confront the Savior, that they might believe on Him. Amos admonished the people, "*prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*" (Amos 4:12).

There remains the necessity of preparing people to believe, and of personal preparation to believe God, trust Him, and lean upon Him with all of your being. Many a soul has failed miserably in believing simply because they have not prepared.

### **HE CAME TO BEAR WITNESS OF THAT LIGHT**

*"1:8 "He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light."*

**HE WAS NOT THAT LIGHT.** Other versions read, "*He himself was not that light.*"<sup>NIV</sup> That is, John was not the light that was "*the light of men*" (John 1:4). He truly was "*a burning and shining light*" (John 5:35), but he was not "*that Light.*" Through him men could believe, but through him they could not be made alive! The people recognized John as an extraordinary man, but they rejoiced in him only for a season. Jesus said of John, "*He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light*" (John 5:35). Of course, John was not intended to be a perpetual source of rejoicing. Repentance is the way to Christ, but it is not the environment into which we are called.

Jesus went on to say, *"But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me"* (John 5:36). Jesus came to take sin away, not to perpetuate repentance. He came to lift men out of the quagmire of sin, not to leave them wallowing in it. I fear that this is still not clear to many professing Christians.

It is equally true of those who are in Christ Jesus. They are told, *"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light"* (Eph 5:8). But, like John, they are not *"that Light."* As long as we have this treasure in *"earthen vessels"* (2 Cor 4:7), contend with the *"fleshly lusts that war against the soul"* (Pet 2:11), are required to *"put off the old man"* (Eph 4:22), and have *"another law"* in our members that wars against the law of our minds (Rom 7:23), there is an element of darkness about us. This is why we are admonished to *"put off the works of darkness"* (Rom 13:12). This circumstance is to be compared with God Himself, of whom it is written, *"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5). Our light is reflected light. The light of God and of Christ is inherent light. That is why it was said of a man of John the Baptist's caliber, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Lk 1:15), *"He was not that light."*

**HE WAS SENT.** Other versions read, *"he came,"* <sup>NASB</sup> *"his mission was,"* <sup>CEB</sup> *"but was to give,"* <sup>DOUAY</sup> *"he existed,"* <sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> *"he came into being,"* <sup>MONTGOMERY</sup> *"but that he should,"* <sup>ABP</sup> *and "he was there."* <sup>MESSAGE</sup>

This is a difficult text to express. It may sound to some as though it is defining the purpose of John's a ministry – and, in a sense this is true. However, the fuller meaning is that this is why John was born – this is why there was a John the Baptist. There was no other reason for his birth, or for him coming to the earth. Jesus also spoke after this manner when He told Pilate, *"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth"* (John 18:37). Through Moses, God spoke after this manner to Pharaoh: *"And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth"* (Ex 9:16). This was the reason for which Pharaoh was born, and existed in the world. Speaking for God, Amos told Israel *"I raised up some of your sons as prophets, and some of your young men as Nazarite. Is it not so, O you children of Israel?" Says the LORD* <sup>NKJV</sup> (Amos 2:11). That was the reason for which they were born! There was no other valid reason for them being alive.

The same is true of the gifts Jesus gave to the churches: *"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers"* (Eph 4:11). That is why they were born; it is why they came into the world; it is what they are intended to do, and why they were alive.

Thus, there was a reason why John was born, why He was sent into the world. The Lord revealed the purpose for which John was born to Zecharias (Lk 1:13-17). John now states that purpose in summary form. This is why John was born, and it is what he was intended to do – to bear witness of that Light!

**TO BEAR WITNESS OF THAT LIGHT.** Other versions read, *"testify to the Light,"* <sup>NSRV</sup> *"give witness about the light,"* <sup>BBE</sup> *and "tell the truth about the light."* <sup>IE</sup> John's ministry was to identify the promised Messiah. **That is the ultimate reason why he came baptizing, in order that the Son of God might be revealed in His baptism.** He himself said, *"And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water"* (John 1:31). The secondary reason he was baptizing was to ready

the people to believe in Christ.

This is the point of preaching Christ. Philip *“preached Christ”* in Samaria (Acts 8:5). Paul *“preached Christ in the synagogues”* (Acts 9:20). To the Corinthians Paul wrote, *“But we preach Christ and Him crucified”* (1 Cor 1:23). **By this he meant that he identified Christ – the real Christ.** That was bearing *“witness to that **Light**.”* People had their own ideas about who Christ was (Matt 16:13-14). However, that is not sufficient! Someone who is acquainted with Christ, and has some comprehension of the purpose of God, must identify Christ to the people – *“bear witness of **that light**.”* There is such a thing as *“another Jesus”* (2 Cor 11:13), and *“false Christ’s.”* The real Christ it to be identified, clearly and in truth!