

The Identity of the Forerunner

Mark 1:2-5

October 13, 2019

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God sent a messenger ahead of the Messiah to prepare the way for the Lord's ministry.

I. God promised through the prophets both the Messiah and His forerunner. (v. 2)

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"*

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all...

After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:5-6, 11-12)

And, behold, I send my angel before thy face, that he may keep thee in the way, that he may bring thee into the land which I have prepared for thee. (Exodus 23:20 –LXX)

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 3:1)

II. John's purpose was to prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah. (v. 3)

*A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!*

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
And all people will see God’s salvation.’” (Luke 3:1-6 quoting Isaiah 40:3-5)

This is the one about whom it is written:

“‘I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’ (Matthew 11:10)

III. John's message was: to find forgiveness with God you must turn from your sins. (v. 4)

And so John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 3:1-2)

Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. (Daniel 9:13)

Why then have these people turned away?

Why does Jerusalem always turn away?

They cling to deceit;

they refuse to return.

I have listened attentively,

but they do not say what is right.

None of them repent of their wickedness,

saying, “What have I done?”
Each pursues their own course
like a horse charging into battle. (Jeremiah 8:5-6)

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. (Isaiah 30:15)

“Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live! (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 3:7-10)

“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.
John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”
Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”
“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.
Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”
He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”
(Luke 3:10-14)

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

IV. Many people accepted and identified themselves with John’s message by being baptized. (v. 5)

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.
(Matthew 3:5)

I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.) (Luke 7:28-30)

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:1-5)