

Prepare the Way

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

- [0 : 0 0] Well, we've begun a bit of a series working through the Gospel of John, and we kind of started it back about Christmastime, and we're still pretty close to the beginning here.
- So far we've seen that there's a couple things that John wants to make clear before he starts telling the story. And this morning we're actually looking forward to getting into the story, to seeing the first event that John records for us.
- This morning we're going to be talking about John the Baptizer. Just like in the Gospel of Mark, this is where John chooses to start the story.
- John has been very clear that this isn't the beginning of Jesus' story, that his story actually goes back to the very beginning. And back then he was with God and was God.
- But as far as the events of Jesus' story goes, this is the place that he chooses to begin with John the Baptizer. And we kind of skipped over some of those verses in verses 6 to 8 and in verse 15, so we're going to go back and look at those this morning.
- [1 : 1 3] So I'm going to actually just start right from verse 1, and we'll read verses 1 to 9. If you have your Bible, feel free to open it up. If you're using the Pew Bibles, it's 860. John 1 verse 1, John writes this, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made.
- In him was life. And the life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all might believe.
- He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.
- [2 : 3 6] And so as John begins to ease us into the story of Jesus, he lets us know that there was a man named John, a different John. He's referring to John the baptizer.
- And this man, he says in verse 6, was sent from God. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. And John's purpose, John tells us, was to be a witness and to testify concerning the light.
- He came as a witness to testify concerning the light. Now what light is John referring to? We see this in the context, in what has come before and in what comes after.
- John is talking about the Word, who was with God and was God, even back in the beginning, before all things were made. And in verse 4 he says, in him, in the Word, was life.
- And the life, he actually names the Word using a different name, and the life was the light of all mankind. The light is a person.
- [3 : 5 4] And we see that really clearly down in verse 9. He says, the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world.

So the light that John came to bear witness to and to testify about was a person. And if we keep reading this all the way down, we see very clearly that it's Jesus.

He is the light. John tells us that John the Baptizer came as a witness to testify concerning him so that through him all might believe.

So that through John's testimony, others might hear what John is saying and come to the right conclusion about this one, Jesus, who is walking among us.

John is very careful to help us avoid any confusion. In verse 8, he says, he himself was not the light.

[5 : 00] John the Baptizer, he wasn't the light. Don't make any mistake here. He came only as a witness to the light. John comes back to say a little bit more about John the Baptizer down in verse 15.

And we'll read that, but we'll start it in verse 14. John writes this, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, This is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

So John, the Apostle, who's writing this, makes it quite clear that John the Baptizer testified concerning Jesus, the Word, who became flesh, the Son, who came from the Father.

[6 : 18] John testified about him, and this is what he records of this. He says, He cried out, John the Baptizer cried out, saying, This is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me.

And he goes on. You can almost imagine John the Baptizer standing in the river or at the water's edge and maybe pointing with his hand or with his finger.

This is the one. There was a time in John's ministry when his message changed. And you can see that very clearly in verse 15.

His message for some time was, He who comes, there is one coming. But there came a moment where his message changed from He who comes to this is the one.

This is the one right here that I spoke about earlier. Do you remember what I said? I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.

[7 : 36] What is John the Baptizer meaning as he says this? He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.

Well, ordinarily, the one who comes first is greater than the one who follows. It's not always true, but generally there's some truth to that.

But John the Baptizer wants it to be known. He wants it to be clear that the one who follows Him is greater than He is.

He is kind of a forerunner just because He's first, He's on the scene of ministry, attracting people's attention first doesn't mean that He's greater.

In fact, we even know that from Luke's Gospel that John the Baptizer was born before Jesus was born. And so in a very true sense, Jesus came after John.

[8 : 40] But John does not want there to be any confusion, even though He appears to the crowds and is known to the crowds after me. He comes after me.

He has surpassed me. He ranks higher than I because He was before me. And I think John is already beginning to point to the reality that John the Apostle has been letting us in on here, that Jesus, His story goes back to the beginning, to long before John was on the scene, to long before John was born.

And so there was this moment where John's message changed from He who comes to this is the one. And we're going to get to that next Sunday.

This is how the first event in John's account of things unfolds.

Let's read it in verse 19. Now this was John's testimony, John the Baptizer, when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask Him who He was.

[10 : 02] He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Messiah. They asked Him, Then who are you? Are you Elijah?

He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? He answered, No. Finally, they said, Who are you?

Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness.

Make straight the way for the Lord. So, here John is out at the river.

He's teaching. He's preaching. He's baptizing people. people. And the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem catch word of this.

[11 : 03] And as we know from the scriptures, they kind of saw themselves as the spiritual authority of the nation, of the people.

And so naturally, they need to send someone out. They need to do something about this guy who's out there in the middle of nowhere preaching, teaching, kind of administering religious rights.

And so what do they do? They put together a delegation. They send some priests and some Levites and as we see in verse 24, some Pharisees were among them and they send them out to John at the river to ask him, who are you?

What are you up to? What are you doing here? Verse 20, again, John, the one writing this, makes it crystal clear.

John the baptizer did not fail to confess but confessed freely, I am not the Messiah. That was kind of the thoughts rolling around in some people's minds.

[12 : 13] Who is this guy out there? Is he the Christ? The one that we've been waiting for, God's promised king. John the baptizer made it crystal clear, I am not.

I am not the Messiah. So they asked him, who are you? Are you Elijah? Why did they ask him if he was Elijah? It's kind of a strange question.

Those of you who have read, spent some time in the Old Testament might know that the Israelites have not heard from the prophets in a long time. There's been no word from them.

The last prophet that they heard from was the prophet Malachi. And these are the words that Malachi said that are written down for us, the very last words in his book.

See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. Elijah had already walked the earth, I think, about 400 years before this, when Malachi is saying this.

[13 : 32] And if you remember his story, he didn't die, he was taken up in a whirlwind amidst chariots of fire. But now the prophet Malachi 400 years later has said, see, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

And so the people have some sense of anticipation because of this word from the Lord through Malachi. Maybe this guy out in the wilderness is Elijah.

Just as the Lord's word has said, are you Elijah? I am not, said John. I'm not the guy spoken of there. Are you the prophet?

Are you the prophet? And notice that it's the prophet and not a prophet. Are you the prophet? Who are they referring to? Back in Deuteronomy chapter 18, Moses spoke of a coming prophet.

This is what he said. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites.

[14 : 47] You must listen to him. And Moses, he writes this, the Lord said to me, I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites and I will put my words in his mouth.

He will tell them everything I command him. this was the prophet that they were looking forward to because as far as they were concerned, he hadn't come yet.

Are you that one? They asked John. No. I'm not. Finally, it almost seems that they get frustrated.

Well, who are you? I mean, we've come all the way out here. We've got to give some kind of an answer to those who sent us. So, what do you say for yourself? Who would you say that you are, John?

And this is what John says. He says, I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness. Make straight the way for the Lord.

[15 : 51] John takes up the words of Isaiah, the prophet, as if he himself is the one spoken of by Isaiah.

I am the voice. I'm out here in the wilderness and I'm calling and my message is this.

Make straight the way for the Lord. I get chills just thinking about John saying those words as he's out there having this face-to-face with them.

We can't see this in our English translations here in John, but if we go back to those words that John is quoting, we can see it very clearly.

It's make straight the way for the Lord. As in the name of God, the divine name, the Lord, Yahweh, make straight the way for Yahweh, for God himself.

[17 : 09] Get ready. God is coming. Make the path straight for him. he's coming.

This is who I am. I'm the guy who has been sent to announce this, to get people ready for his coming. Whether this really struck a chord in the hearts of the religious leaders or not, we don't know.

but in verse 24 we find out what else was said there. The Pharisees, verse 24, now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned John, why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?

And there's a bit of a sense of a challenge here almost in this. So why are you doing this? Why are you baptizing if you're not the Messiah, the prophet, or Elijah?

If you're none of these big three, then who are you and what are you doing here? Who gave you authority to be doing this? This is John's answer in verse 26.

[18 : 26] He says, I baptize with water, John replied, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

John's answer is remarkable. You're asking me what I'm doing baptizing. Here I am, baptizing people in the water, but right now there is one who stands among you, the one that I have been sent to testify about.

You don't know him, you haven't seen him yet, but right now here he stands among you. And this one who comes after me, I'm not even worthy to bend down before him and untie his shoes.

What an amazing thing for John to say. John knows who he has come to testify about.

God, he has come to tell people to get ready because the Lord is coming.

[19 : 58] Yahweh, God is coming. That's who this one is. That's why John says, I'm not even worthy to bend down and untie his shoes.

He has a sense already of just how worthy Jesus is. He's the one who was before me. He's, he ranks higher than I.

He is so much greater than me. I'm here like a forerunner. I'm here like a guy to get people ready for his coming.

this is how the story of Jesus begins according to John and we're going to hear more next Sunday about Jesus as he comes on the scene for the first time in all of this.

But as I was thinking about this this week, the thing that really struck my heart was just that attitude of humility that John the baptizer had that sense of awe that he had about the one who was coming.

[21 : 16] He hadn't even seen him face to face yet. And yet he knew this one, this one is special.

He is the Lord. Lord. He is greater than I. I'm not even worthy to bend down and be in his presence to untie his shoes to serve him in the most menial of ways.

And then to think that not too much later Jesus will come walking along. this is the attitude that John had towards this person who who looked just like one of us to the eye.

And the thing that I felt I just needed to really reflect on is, is that my attitude towards the Lord? This one who is so worthy, so great, that I'm not even worthy to serve him in the smallest of ways.

For he is the Lord. He is God. What would our church look like if more of that awe and humility were present in each one of us?

[22 : 45] Last Sunday, I encouraged us to make it our prayer and our longing for this entire year that we would see more of God's glory, specifically the glory of Jesus, because that's what John said.

He said, we have seen his glory. John gives us a glimpse of just how glorious this one is, even before he saw him.

And my hope and my prayer is that as we go through, not only this week, but this whole year, that we would come to know Christ, the Lord Jesus, more and more for who he is, and that as we do, this kind of an awe and humility that John had would be present, would grow in our hearts.

And that as it does, that would spill over and out into all of our connections with other people, that they would see that we are a people who truly have awe, see someone that we don't see now as glorious.

What a testimony to this community that would be. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do ask you now as we've heard your word, we ask that you would work in our hearts this kind of awe and humility that we see in John.

[24 : 23] He had a right view of you. And Lord, we confess so often we come to you cavalierly. We just throw up some prayers and we don't really have that sense of awe as we approach, that sense of who you truly are.

You are the one who was with God and was God in the beginning and through you all things were made. Fill our hearts with awe.

Teach us to fear you the way that you deserve for your glory. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.