John the Baptist (1)

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Preacher: Jim Patterson

[0:00] We're going to read now from God's Word, as we find it in the Gospel according to John, chapter 1, starting to read at verse 19.

John, chapter 1, verse 19. Let us hear the Word of God. And this is the testimony of John.
When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ.
And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the prophet? He answered, No. So they said to him, Who are you?
We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? He said, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.
[1:10] Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?

John answered them, I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know. Even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.
These things took place in Bethany, across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day, he saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Behold, a Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.
And John bore witness, I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.
[2:34] And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God. The next day, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold, the Lamb of God.

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed him. They followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, What are you seeking?
They said to him, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? He said to them, Come and you will see. So they came and saw where he was staying.
And they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.
He first found his own brother, Simon, and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which means Christ. He brought him to Jesus.
[3:38] Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter. Amen. And may God bless to us this reading from his word.

Let's pray. Let's continue in prayer. Father, we do thank you that your ear is ever open to the cries of your people.
We thank you, Lord, that you've told us, Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer you.
We thank you, Lord, that we have many, many promises.
Father, we thank you, Lord, that you are a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God.
Lord, we are a needy people, and we live in a needy world. Father, we thank you, Lord, thank you, Lord. We thank you, Lord, and I will give you the land of Ukraine.
[4:51] There was a terrible war there with Russia. Oh, Lord, we pray that you will work in the hearts of Putin, even.

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Oh Lord, turn them back from the madness that has started this war. And Lord, we pray for the Ukrainian people that you will help them.
We pray for, we think many are dying now, both Russians and Ukrainians in this war. And Lord, we pray that you will be merciful to them, that you will restrain the evil of men and bring peace to both those countries, that your gospel might flourish.
And Lord, use it, use even the suffering and the welcome of the Ukrainians in my churches all over Europe and here. We pray that you will use that, Lord, for your glory, we pray.
Hear our prayer, Lord, for your cream. And Lord, we would think too of your church around the world, in lands where your people are persecuted.
[6:07] So many places in the Middle East, in China, in West Africa too, Lord, in Burkina Faso and Niger and Mali, where Islamists are creating so much trouble.

And Lord, we pray that you will bless your people, that you will strengthen them, enable them to stand firm in you, we pray.
And bless the pastors, and bless the churches that are seeking to stand for you in these places. Use them, Lord, for your glory, we pray. Father, we think of our own land.
Think of our government in West Africa and Holyrood. Everything is in the hand of the Lord, even though they don't acknowledge you.
But Lord, we pray that they might make good laws that encourage righteousness and restrain wickedness. Oh, Lord, we pray that some of the laws proposed are against your word.
[7:16] And we pray that you will have mercy upon us and restrain our leaders, our parliamentarians. We pray that laws might be made which are good.

Oh, hear our prayer for them, Father. Hear our prayer. And Father, we pray for ourselves. We think of those who are sick, those who are elderly and not able to come out as much as they used to. Thank you. Thank you. This Lord here, bearing burdens that the rest of us cannot see, who've got heartaches, that we cannot hardly share.
Father, we pray that you will come and touch us. Father, you're the God of all comfort. Come and touch us, we pray, where you see that we need. Whether we need comfort, whether we need encouragement, whether we need challenge.
Perhaps there's some here who don't know you as saviour. Lord, open their eyes this morning to the wonder and the beauty of Jesus.
[8:25] Father, we bring these, our prayers, to you. We pray, Lord, that you'll bless your word as we shortly turn to it. Make it live to all our hearts, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's sing again. Psalm 32. We're going to sing from Psalm 32, verses 1 to 5, which is just three singing verses.
How blessed the one who has received forgiveness from his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face, whose debt is cancelled in God's grace.
There's no deceit in him. Let's praise God together. Let's praise God together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. How blessed the one who has received forgiveness from his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face, how blessed the one who has received forgiveness from his sin, whose sins are covered from God's face, But death is cancelled in God's grace, there's no desire there.
When I get silent, all my bones will go anywhere or not.
[10:19] Beneath your hand I held them trot, both day and night my strength was soft as in a sauer front.

Then I lay bare my sin to you, the guilt that lay within.
I said, O Lord, I have transgressed, and you forgive when I confess.
You pardon all my sin. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. If you turn again to John chapter 1, we're going to be looking at this chapter together.
[11:48] This morning, down at the Jordan, a new preacher had appeared.

He was a bit of an eccentric, was this preacher. Matthew tells us that he wore camel's hair clothing, itchy, uncomfortable stuff, and ate locusts and wild honey.
In Matthew also, we read that he wasn't a man to mince his words. When a deputation came from the Pharisees to him, important people, important in the religious world of their time.
He didn't say, well, it's nice to see you gentlemen, thanks for coming to my meetings. He said, oh, generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come.

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Not a good opening sentence to make friends and influence people. John wouldn't have fitted well into our politically correct world today.
[12:58] Now, maybe these Pharisees that Matthew told us about were the same group who John tells us about in verse 19 and 24.

He reminds us that they were Pharisees. They came to see John. And John tells us they asked him questions. Up in Jerusalem, you see, they had heard about this preacher.
Crowds were flocking to hear him. And they wondered, well, who is he? He's not part of the establishment, as it were. What's he doing down there baptizing people in the river?
You see, Jews weren't baptized in those days. Only proselytes were baptized. That is, Gentiles, non-Jews, who wanted to join the Jewish faith.
They were baptized, but Jews weren't. And what's he doing baptizing Jews? There were days of great messianic expectation.
[14:07] People were expecting God's anointed one, the Messiah. And they said, well, who is this guy, John? Is he the Messiah? In verse 20, they must have asked him that question.

When they said, who are you? They must have said, are you the Messiah? And verse 20 tells us, he confessed. He did not deny. I am not the Christ. Oh, so he's not the Christ.
Well then, in verse 21, they knew that the prophet Malachi had written, I will send the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord.
And here was John. He even dressed a bit like Elijah. In rough clothes. And he ate very basic food. Just like Elijah. And he was out in the desert.
In the wilderness. Just like Elijah. Are you Elijah? Well, no I'm not. Well, Moses had promised that there would be a prophet like himself.
[15:11] Deuteronomy 18, you would read that there. Are you that prophet? They asked in verse 21 again. And he answers, no.

You can almost feel the frustration of these men. Good interview, did he? We can't go back to Jerusalem. Who are you?
Tell us who you are. And he replies in verse 23 with the words of Isaiah. I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord.
As the prophet Isaiah said. That's me, John said. Just a voice in the desert. A voice telling you to make straight paths.
For the Lord is coming. He took no credit for himself. Just a voice. What are we to make of John? Jesus himself would later say that John was the greatest of the prophets.
[16:19] Well, I want to think about John with you this morning and this afternoon as well. Because John stood at the end of all the preparations for the coming of Jesus, for the coming of the Messiah.

And he heralded in the Messiah himself. For about 2,000 years, God had spoken to the people of Israel through prophets, through psalmists. And John was the last of those prophets.
Earlier prophets have said, the Messiah is coming. The Messiah is coming. Isaiah 9 verse 6, we often look at it at Christmas. For unto us a child is born.
Unto us a son is given. The Messiah is coming. And the people had wondered, when? When will he come? And Zechariah 6 verse 12, Zechariah writes, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the branch.
For he shall branch out from his place. He shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord. And shall bear royal honour. And shall sit and rule on his throne.
[17:32] A Messiah is coming. A Messiah is coming, you see. And the people thought, when? When? And John had the privilege of saying, this is him.

This is him. He stood with his feet on the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. And he pointed out and said, this is the Messiah.
This is the new way of salvation. To which all the other things that had gone before. Are just models and shadows.
Models to strengthen the faith of the people who lived at that time. Shadows to help us understand what Jesus would do. John. John.
A man sent from God. Let's think about him. First of all, he was a man chosen by God. Chosen by God. Luke, in his gospel, gives an account of John's conception and birth.
[18:40] He was a child of elderly parents who hadn't been able to have children. He was a miracle baby. Announced by an angel before he was born. The angel had told his father, Zechariah,

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He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

And he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was chosen by God even before he was born.
He was a sign that God had visited and redeemed his people. God had his hand on Elijah, on John the Baptist rather, even before he was born.
John. God watched over the growing boy as he grew strong in spirit in the desert, we're told, until he started his ministry.
You know, life in the desert would have been tough. Would have toughened him up. Made him able to face difficulties. Made him able to face opposition.
[19:42] So when the time came for him to begin his ministry, he was ready for it. Young people, don't think that the Christian life begins at 16 or 18 or 21 or when you grew up.

Don't think that. Jesus calls you to live for him now. Now you see, if Jesus is your saviour, now you should be developing, by his help, the disciplines and habits that will enable you to stand firm and persevere and live for Jesus when you grew up.
So don't wait. Don't think, oh, this has nothing to do with me. This has everything to do with you. Everything to do with you. God wants you to follow him wholeheartedly when you're young.
So you can serve him when you're young and you can live for him when you're grown up. If you follow him half-heartedly when you're young, the chances are you'll follow him half-heartedly when you're grown up too.
So don't do that. Give him your all like Addy Johnson gave him his all. And what a comfort it is as a Christian, boy, girl, young and old, to know that God is in control of our lives.
[21:21] We sang Psalm 139. I'm going to read to you again from that psalm, just to remind us what control and what oversight God has of our lives.

Psalm 139, reading again verses, well, reading verses 1 to 6. The psalmist wrote, Oh, Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up.
You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down. You're acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue. Behold, oh, Lord, you know it all together.
You hem me in behind and before. You lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it.
Isn't that wonderful? Wonderful that he has his hand upon us. That he hems us in behind and before. What a comfort it is to the Christian to know that God is in control of our lives.
[22:36] Working all things out for his glory. This is a wonderful truth. A wonderful assurance for us as Christians. The hymn writer wrote, I do not know what lies ahead.

The way I cannot see. But one stands near to be my guide. He'll show the way to me. I know who holds the future.
And he'll guide me with his hand. Isn't that wonderful? If that doesn't, if you don't think that's good news, if you're bothered by the fact that God is in control of your life, then I think you need to ask yourself, is Jesus my savior at all?
Or am I just following along with friends and relatives? Because for those of us who know him, it's a great comfort to know that he is in control of our lives at all times.
He leadeth us. He leads us always. He leadeth me, O blessed thought, O words with heavenly comfort, fraught, O where I go, where I be, it is God's hands that leadeth me.
[23:56] John the Baptist was a man chosen by God. Chosen by God. Secondly, he was a man sent from God. God had a job for him to do, and he sent him to do it, as we've already seen that.

Now, perhaps we might ask ourselves, we might wonder, why John said he wasn't Elijah?
After all, Jesus said he was Elijah. So why did John say he wasn't? I puzzled a bit over that. But, I wonder, perhaps, John didn't want the people to think that he was literally Elijah come back from the dead, which is what they might have thought.
He didn't want them to think that. If they thought he was a real Elijah returned from the dead, they might have expected him to act like Elijah. He didn't want that. He was just a voice in the desert.
But Jesus knew that John came in the spirit and the power like Elijah, and he was the fulfillment of that prophecy.
[25:11] John was the fulfillment of Elijah who should come. Now, we need to remember that John the Apostle, there's too many Johns sometimes in this passage.

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There's John the Baptist and there's John the Apostle. We need to remember that John the Apostle who wrote the Gospel of John, his aim in writing the book was that his readers should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
And John the Baptist is presented as the first witness to who Jesus really was. He was God's man sent to prepare the way for Jesus.
That was his job. And as John was sent to prepare the way for Jesus, John was sent by God.
So, really, we all are sent by God. Every Christian is sent by God into the world. John was sent. Jesus was sent.
[26:17] Remember John 3, 16? God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. And in John 20, verse 21, Jesus said to his disciples, he said, as the Father has sent me, so have I sent you.

Can you imagine that? As the Father has sent me, so have I sent you. You and I, ordinary folk, no great gifts, yet we're sent by Jesus to be his witnesses in our world.
John was a man sent by God and so are we. Him writer wrote, a charge to keep of eye, a God to glorify, a never-dying soul to save, and fitted for the sky, to serve this present age, my calling to fulfill.
O may I all my powers engage to do my Master's will, be I eight or eighteen or eighty, may I all my powers engage to do my Master's will.
Thirdly, John was a voice in the wilderness. His voice had been foretold by Isaiah. We've seen that in Isaiah 40.
[27:51] I'm going to read you a little bit more of that passage, Isaiah 40, reading verses one to five. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, cry it to her, that her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned, she is received from the Lord's hand, double from all her sins.
A voice cries, in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low, the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
Level the path. That was John's job. The king is coming. Level the path. Fill the hollows. Dig through the mountains. Build a straight path for God.
You see, John realized that he was simply preparing the way for somebody else, somebody greater than him. He was suffering.
[29:14] He was willing to go into the wilderness to announce the coming of the Messiah, to suffer the hardships of that life, to prepare the way.

He is a bit like a footman. You know, when you see in some of these period dramas, when the rich folk are going to their country house, and they send a team ahead of them, a personal servant, ahead of them, to open up the house, to light the fires, to air the beds, and bring in food, so that when they arrive, everything's ready for them.
They don't come to a cold, empty house and have to warm it up. It's all ready for them. And during that preparation time, if you were to call it the house, the servant, the steward, as it were, would be the person you would deal with.
But when the owner comes, the servant fades into the background. And that's John. John prepares the way.
He was a voice, just a voice. He prepares the way, claims no credit for himself, and eventually fades into the background.
[30:37] In John 3, verse 30, John the Baptist says, he must increase, that's Jesus must increase, but I must decrease.

That's the way we grow as Christians. You see, John is a great model to us there. That's, that's, we want, as Christians, we should be those who desire that Jesus grows in us, that Jesus becomes more and more visible, that we become more and more like him, to be like Jesus, to be like Jesus, all I ask, to be like him.
Is that the desire of your heart, of my heart? Jesus, that he might become more and more the same of our lives.
We, O Jesus Christ, grow thou in me and all things else recede.

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My heart be nearly, nearer, dearly, dearly nearer thee, from sin be daily freed. Each day let thy supporting might my weakness still embrace.
[31:51] My darkness vanish in thy light, thy life, my death, if this. I think it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German evangelical, who was killed by the Nazis at the end of the Second World War, who said that when Jesus says, come, follow me, he says, come and die, come and die.

Die to your own ambitions, die to having your own way. First, from now on, put me first, follow me and live for me.
Serve me in the spiritual wilderness of Scotland or wherever, wherever I send you. Are we like John in this?
Are we willing to be lost in a willingness, willing to give our lives, willing to become less and less that Jesus might become more and more?
May God make us that way. May God give us that desire to run the race and finish it like John. John was chosen by God.
[33:17] John was sent by God with a message and John was a voice in the wilderness. Are we willing to put our own ambitions and desires behind us and to live for Jesus?

May God bless his word to all our hearts this morning. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the example of John the Baptist. We thank you for the way you used him.
And we thank you that he's a model and we see so many lessons in his life. We pray you'll write your word on our hearts, Lord, and make it that the desire of all our hearts might be to be like Jesus. all I want to be like him. Grant it, Lord, we pray, and write your word on our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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