

## John the Prophet

Matthew 11:1-15

Usually he goes by the name, “John the Baptist,” a reference to his task of baptizing Jesus. However, you might hear me identify him as “John the Baptizer,” a more accurate description given both the Greek verb form that is used and the clear reference to his actions. But actually, I have an even better name for John, a fuller description of his place in God’s redemptive history. I know that the idea of changing his name is an impossible dream, thus any hope to change the conventional label we are all so familiar with is not ever going to happen, but he really should be called, “John the Prophet.” More significant than his role as a baptizer was his role as a prophet. John was a spokesman for God. A mouthpiece for God, so that God could speak to his people.

And the point this afternoon is that he is actually an Old Testament prophet; indeed, the last and final of all the Old Testament prophets. His prophecy brought to an end the administration of the Old Covenant and ushered in the reality of the New Covenant. He stands precisely at that point of transition; he embodies that transformation with his own life and ministry. And so today, as he remains imprisoned by Herod for rebuking the Roman ruler for taking his brother’s wife, we read that he hears of Jesus’ presence and power.

v.1-3

John, of course, had been fearless. We read of what happened to him in,

Mat. 14:1 “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.” 3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put

him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. 4 Because John had said to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”

So now John hears about Jesus’ miracles. And his own expectations represent the whole of the nation. His own expectations, as the last of the Old Testament prophets, demonstrate what all of those prophets expected; he demonstrates what was expected throughout the whole of the Old Testament, namely, the Messiah. So with John, we see,

### I. THE OLD TESTAMENT EXPECTATION OF JESUS.

Notice the language John uses in verse 3, ““Are You the Coming One?” Simple words, in English. Simple words in Greek. But the idea is at the very heart of the message of the Bible from beginning to end. Old Testament and New. The one who is to come.

From our vantage point, he is coming again. Jesus is coming again.

Rev. 22:6 “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.” 7 “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

Again, later in that same chapter,

Rev. 22:12 “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”

And the whole of our Bibles ends with these resounding words,

Rev. 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

So we, today, are expecting Jesus to come again, soon. The Old Testament people of God were also expecting Jesus to come, and they expected it soon! That’s John’s point when he hears about Jesus. “Are You the Coming One”

So let’s do some cross-referencing this afternoon, looking at some of the reasons for those specific expectations from the Old Testament.

Ps. 118:26 “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.”

The context in that Psalm helps us identify Jesus even more clearly,

Ps. 118:22 “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. 23 This was the LORD’s doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.”

What is the day the Lord has made? Why, it is the day of Jesus’ coming! And Matthew’s gospel will remove any doubt of the application of this verse to Jesus personally. When Jesus entered Jerusalem one week before his resurrection, the day we call Palm Sunday, this is what we read,

Mat. 21:8 “And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!” 10 And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, “Who is this?” 11 So the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of

Galilee.”

The point is simple.

### **A. The Old Testament predicted a Messiah “to come.”**

Even that woman to whom Jesus spoke at the well in Samaria understood this Old Testament hope. She had tried to change the subject when Jesus brought up the matter of her marital unfaithfulness and sexual immorality. But when Jesus spoke of a hour that coming “when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,” she responded with these words,

John 4:25 “The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

“I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ).” Beloved, that was the faith of the true people of God in the Old Testament! A Messiah was coming, he would come, and he did come. That’s what John figured out as he heard about Jesus from his prison cell. And the Messiah would have power. Specifically, the power of God.

### **B. The Old Testament predicted the gospel power of the Messiah.**

That’s what John heard about with the message that came back to him from Jesus.

v.4-6

Where was that found in the Old Testament expectations?

Isa. 35:3 “Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. 4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted, “Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.” 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the

tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. 7 The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, There shall be grass with reeds and rushes.”

That’s the power of Messiah! Similarly,  
Is. 42:6 “I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.”

Perhaps, more familiarly,  
Is. 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn.”

So the gospel comes with power, yet as it would be most clearly explained, it is the power of God unto salvation. And thus there would be a messenger, who according to verse 10, “will prepare your way before you.”

### **C. The Old Testament predicted a messenger for the Messiah.**

And it is Jesus himself who identifies his own messenger. It was John, of course. So we read in,  
v.7-10

That’s not hard to find.

Is. 40:1 “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. 2

“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the LORD’s hand Double for all her sins.” 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Then the last book of the Old Testament,  
Mal. 3:1 “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts.”

If you know a little Hebrew, or have some good footnotes in your Biblek, you may realize that those words translated in English as “my messenger” are, in Hebrew, a single word, malachi. So the prophet’s own name represents the very message the Lord would put in his mouth. My messenger. To prepare the way. We know that preparation means a call to repentance. The angel of the Lords spoke these words to John’s father, Zachariah,

Luke 1:14 “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

So Jesus identifies John as the one who would prepare the way. He was a man in the wilderness. A reed shaken by the wind. A man dressed in soft garments, in other words, a man in the service of a king.

And a prophet? Yes, to be sure, that's the real point. John would be a prophet. As Jesus puts it, "more than a prophet," verse 9. He is my messenger, Jesus says, verse 10. And then Jesus says something astounding.

v.11

So John the prophet belongs to the Old Testament, for "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." He belongs to the line of Old Testament prophets, but the point is that,

## **II. THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS COMPLETED WITH JOHN.**

He belonged to the revelation of God in the Old Testament, but he was the completion of it. He, John, was the climax of that Old Testament revelation because he was the preparation for the New Testament. He was the transition that ended the Old and inaugurated the New. So,

### **A. John was the final and greatest prophet of the Old Testament.**

That has to be the meaning of Jesus' words,

v.11a

And so there would be great and excited anticipation of the kingdom, which I believe is the meaning of,

v.12

The violence there is the excitement of the crowds, the widespread awareness of the greatness of this kingdom. John

Calvin explains that verse this way, "The meaning therefore is, A vast assembly of men is now collected, as if men were rushing violently forward to seize the kingdom of God; for, aroused by the voice of one man, they come together in crowds, and receive, not only with eagerness, but with vehement impetuosity, the grace which is offered to them...Let us also learn from these words, what is the true nature and operation of faith. It leads men not only to give, cold and indifferent assent when God speaks, but to cherish warm affection towards Him, and to rush forward as it were with a violent struggle."

Thus we read,

v.13

All the prophets of the Old Testament pointed toward Jesus, and all of them find their climactic voice in that of John, who was the greatest of them because he came at the end of their long line of witness. He was the greatest of them because he took all that the prophets had spoken previously and brought it together in a way that would prepare the way, immediately, for Jesus. That transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant was never clearer than when John had first seen Jesus. The last, great Old Testament prophet would declare,

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

So the greatest Old Testament would look at Jesus and identify him rightly, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

One more thought in all of this before I make some applications. And that has reference to Elijah. Elijah was

prophesied to return, at the very conclusion of the Old Testament.

Mal. 4:5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

So what does Jesus tells us about John the Prophet?

v.14

**B. John was the final prophetic preparation for Jesus, identified as Elijah.**

And then, as a personal exhortation, Jesus declares,

v.15

So let us hear! That’s the invitation of the gospel. Let us hear the gospel, as it was prophesied by all the prophets before Jesus, announcing the coming of Jesus. Let us hear the gospel, as it was declared by John the prophet. And especially, with John’s emphasis, let us hear the call to repentance. For that is the final call of all the prophets in anticipation of Jesus. That is the preparation necessary for the coming of Jesus.

Go back with me again to,

Mat. 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.”

People of God, that is still the call of God’s prophet. That is still the call of the preacher of God’s word. Repent. John was God’s messenger to proclaim that message when Jesus came as

a man to live among men on earth. His message was to turn away from sin, to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And that kingdom is here, and we know that Jesus will come again.

That is the gospel preached on the day of Pentecost, for Peter ended his sermon that day with these words,

Acts 2:38 “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

That is the message that continued as the church was built,

Act 3:19 “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

Repent, and turn away from your sins. That is the message that must still be declared today, here in this place, and in every place. It is what I would preach to you. “Repent therefore and be converted [be turned away from your sin], that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before.”

God has, of course, already sent Jesus into the world, who lived and dwelt among us. So I will continue in the role of a prophet this afternoon, telling forth the truth of God’s word which he has revealed. Turn your hearts toward God. Come to Jesus, trust in him, for the forgiveness of all those sins. For then, and then only, will you know times of refreshing.