

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *Living with Hope in a Broken World*, this sermon focuses on the ministry of John the Baptist. John recognized that hope did not come from life’s comforts, recognition from others, or even good health. It came first, from believing in Jesus, and then encouraging others to do the same.

Introduction: Six months before Mary delivered Jesus, Elizabeth was holding John in her arms. Angels prophesied both births. And before either child breathed his first, their parents already knew the destiny their sons would fulfill. These cousins had complimentary roles.

Both men would give their lives to a cause. For Jesus, that cause was the rescue of men from their sin. He would die on a cross and rise from the dead three days later. John, however, did not get to see that happen. His death came at the hands of Herod but not before he fulfilled his mission. He pointed people to Jesus.

1. John prophesied Christ. “He’s coming!” – “John bare witness of him” (John 1:15)

John’s ministry drew attention. Part of that was due to his idiosyncrasies. His clothing, his diet, his boldness—these all served to make him unique and to draw a crowd. He was the biggest attraction in town. Unlike most shows, though, this one was not about John, the main player. It was about his message.

John confused people, especially the religious leaders. They were very familiar with the value of putting on a show, but they had no experience at deflecting people’s attention onto someone else. Humility was unknown to them. So, they sent emissaries to determine John’s identity. “Who are you?” they asked.

Most people would have jumped at the opportunity to advance their personal agenda. John did not. He knew His place. God put him on earth to testify about Jesus, not to claim a position for which he was not equipped. John was not earth’s hope; Jesus was. John used his platform to prophesy Jesus’ coming.

2. John proclaimed Christ. “He’s here!” – “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:29)

John knew whom he prophesied, but he did not know that he knew. Imagine his surprise when he recognized Jesus’ true nature.

What was it that prompted his realization? Did Jesus open John's eyes that day like He would three years later with the disciples after they arrived at Emmaus? Or did Jesus give John a look that betrayed the secret? Whatever the clue, John immediately took up the second stage of his mission. The one whose arrival John had prophesied was now here. People had a reason for hope! Jesus would be the sacrifice for their sins.

John's message is ours. We have the same privilege that John did! We can testify about the availability of hope. Jesus has come. Hope is here! And we have even more reason than John to testify. What John foresaw, we have seen. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus are historical fact.

Only one question remains before a person can have hope. Is Jesus theirs?

3. John professed Christ. "He's mine!" – "do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3)

John's testimony about Jesus, though it provided hope for many, disturbed those who were not willing to submit to Jesus' identity or control. The words John spoke created turmoil for him. The obvious turmoil was with Herod. It resulted in John's imprisonment and impending death. While there in prison, John had time to think. A new internal turmoil began.

He had prophesied Jesus. He had proclaimed Jesus. But did *he* believe in Jesus?

From prison, John sent His disciples to Jesus. He hoped that they would return with firm evidence confirming Jesus' identity. To their questions, Jesus offered only this: the miracles He had done and the message He proclaimed. It must have been enough. John's death did nothing more than transfer his soul to God's side.

Conclusion: John died, but it was okay. He died in peace. John testified about Jesus. Jesus testified to John. As a result, John faced the executioner's blade with a confident hope.

John's disciples retrieved his body and placed it in the ground. Jesus' disciples would eventually do the same for Him. But because Jesus did not stay in the tomb, neither would John. That hope is available for all who place their faith in Jesus Christ.

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