

John the Baptist, the Man, the Message

“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is drawing nigh.” That is not just a word given by John the Baptist thousands of years ago; it is a word for today. “Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand.” I want to share from the life of John the Baptist, and I was asked what the title would be. It will be John the Baptist, the man and his message. For this time I will be considering John the Baptist, the man. The next time we will share on John the Baptist, his message.

There are times in life, and it happens numerous times, when you either read something or somebody says something that really grabs you. That happened to me the other day as I was preparing for this ministry. It was actually a phrase that was on a t-shirt, and it said this: “Normal is not coming back; Jesus is.” That kind of sums it up for me in John the Baptist’s ministry and where we are today. We know we are living in what is referred to as troubling times. Obviously, there were troubling times when John the Baptist came into his ministry. But today we know that what we have experienced in the last couple of years with the virus and now with the war in the Ukraine is very troubling. The nations are in turmoil, and we are experiencing that today. But the Lord has, and is encouraging us in these times. When we see these things happening, we are to look up, “His redemption draws nigh.” So as we come together and hear these words of John, “Repent for the kingdom of God draws nigh,” it is a very current and imminent message for us concerning our Lord’s return.

The King is at Hand

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. Of course, Jesus was *The Prophet*, but John the Baptist summed up the law and the prophets. The Lord Jesus said, “What is the sum of the law and the prophets?” And He said, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your mind, and all of your being.” That summed up the law and the prophets.

When John the Baptist came on the scene, God was about to transfer the age of the law to the age of grace, the age of the church. When you read the prophets, you will discover that this age of grace was a mystery, and it was hidden to the prophets. It was not revealed until Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and it is through the apostles that we have discovered this mystery of the church, the body of Jesus Christ.

So the age was about to change, but the problem was that the people of that day, including John the Baptist to a great extent, thought that when he gave his message, “the King is at hand,” that the millennial kingdom was about to occur. They also thought that when the King came, He would immediately overthrow the Roman government, and the Jewish people would rise in prominence once again, establishing the Jewish religion as the religion of the world. God was preparing His people. He had to prepare His people because they were not ready. So John was a transitional man. For the day in which we I want us to see that we are that transition man for this time. We live in an age of transition. Soon indeed, the Lord will end the church age, and we will go into the millennial kingdom, the one that they were expecting. It will be a kingdom in which the Lord will reign upon this earth, and it will be a spiritual kingdom as well as an earthly kingdom. John the Baptist became the voice in that day to prepare the way of the Lord.

I want to say right up front this morning, that is our calling, that is our ministry, that is our purpose in the hour in which we live, to prepare the way for the coming King. Brothers and sisters, it is a tremendous calling that we have, and I hope the Lord will enlighten us to see it.

We know that the Word says, "John was the voice." John was like a herald. In those days and even today, when a king or queen or our president at the State Of The Union is coming to make an address, there is a herald who goes before them and announces their entrance. That is what a herald does. They are not anyone of great prominence themselves, but they are the ones who introduce the king, and that was John's ministry. His call meant the presence of the King was imminent. The time was at hand there would be no more delay.

Malachi's Call to Repentance

Now it is very interesting that John's message was "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," because there had also been a prophet 400 years earlier, Malachi, who was the last one in the Old Testament. He had called his people to repent, but his message was not to the world, it was more specifically to his own people, the Jewish nation. And even more specifically it was given to the remnant who had returned to Jerusalem out of captivity in Babylon. They built the temple, they restored the priesthood, and the sacrifice, but over time their Love for the Lord had grown cold. Malachi had given them a message of repentance which said, "Return to God and He will return to you." It was a call of repentance from their lives of lukewarmness with the Lord, from their lives that were not really given to the Lord. He said, "You need to repent and come back to the Lord."

This remnant who had returned and had restored everything continued in all of their religious activities. They basically became religious instead of ones who were fervent lovers of the Lord. This was a great weakness among the nation of Israel. This condition had been going on for 400 years, and had worsened. Yet the Lord, the King was about to come and the people were not in the right condition to receive the King. They were expecting the Messianic kingdom to come but did not realize they were not ready. What they did not see or understand, which we do today, is that you cannot have a messianic kingdom unless you have a spiritual people. That is why we are of the kingdom of God today, the Lord's kingdom, because we have been born into that kingdom. That is why you have to be born again. His spiritual kingdom had to be established before His earthly kingdom could come upon this earth. There had to be that spiritual element of His kingdom. So this was the period and the time in which John the Baptist was raised up.

John the Baptist was an Instrument of Change

He was the herald, the voice. He was the one chosen and called to serve as the transition man for that hour. To bring in the King.

Brothers and sisters, the burden that is on my heart is for us to realize that today we are that transition vessel, that voice that is needed on this earth to bring in the coming King. As I said in the beginning, "Normal is not coming back, Jesus is."

We remember in the first coming that God did not set His Son up as King upon the earth. He came as the Lamb of God because He would have to give His life on the cross to have a spiritual

people and a spiritual kingdom. We know that the Lord is coming soon, and if we are not yet awakened to the Lord's imminent return, we have become spiritually drowsy. I think it should be obvious to everyone that the Lord's return is very soon because the nations are in great turmoil as it says in Psalms.

Brothers and sisters, it is at hand. The people in the Ukraine were interviewed a few days before the invasion. They knew the troops were all around, they knew everything was ready for the invasion, yet when they interviewed people in the crowd you could tell they were not ready. They said "No, we don't think they are going to invade. They will not do that." I remember a guy drinking his coffee as he was saying, "Everything is going to be okay. We are fine." And everybody was kind of milling around just like usual going to the mall, buying things and looking at things. Everything was just normal until two or three days later, and now we know that Ukraine is being destroyed.

Are You Ready

The point is that we need to be awakened to this hour. I know we have said it many times over the last years, and our brother, Stephen Kaungs message "Are you ready?" has been his burden. "The Lord is coming, are you ready?" We need that voice today, we need that herald. It is the responsibility of the church to be that voice, that testimony to the coming King. But we know that in general the church has failed. We know even among those who returned to honor the Lord and love the Lord, there is a lethargy among us at times. Even in my own life, I confess that at times I lose that sense of awareness of the Lord's soon return.

I remember in the book of Revelation this message, "He that has an ear to hear." That is what He kept saying over and over. But in all but two of the churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, there was another word that is very prevalent which is repent. When we come to the book of Revelation at the end of the first century, that was the Lord's word to His people, "repent." To Laodicea His message was, "You are lukewarm; you are not ready. Repent." Brothers and sisters, I do sense this is the hour in which we live.

The Life of John the Baptist

I want to take a few minutes to go over John's life. We need to see the fulness of John's life and his ministry. I decided to do it in chronological order because when you read the Scriptures, you know there are the accounts of John the Baptists life in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which you can draw from.

John the Baptist was born to a priestly family. His father was a priest, an active priest, at the time, and his mother Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron, the priest.

Luke 1:5-6: "In the time of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God."

Many were religious in that day, but for John's parents it was not just religion. They were not just following the rules; they had a heart for God, a heart for the Lord. And it says that they observed all the commandments, but they had no children. Elizabeth was barren, and they both

were elderly. You had to be at least sixty years old to be considered elderly in their day. So we know that probably they were sixty or older. They could have been up to seventy years old. But we do not know exactly. Suddenly, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zachariah while he was serving in the temple. He was getting ready to burn incense and offer up prayers for the nation.

In Luke 1:13-17 it says that Gabriel said to Zachariah, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.” He is never to take wine or fermented drink, (he was to be a Nazarite) and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go before the Lord, 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 righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Remember that is what the Lord is calling us to.)

Elizabeth was about six months pregnant with John when Mary, her cousin, came to visit her. And it says in Luke 1:40-41, “Mary entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby, (John) leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” And I am sure John was too. At that time Mary was pregnant with the Lord Jesus. But I think it is interesting that John the Baptist responded to the entrance of the King, even though He was still in Mary’s womb.

Eight days after John was born, they brought him to be circumcised. They were expecting him to be named after his father, but Elizabeth told the crowd that his name was John. Now Zechariah had not been able to speak since that encounter with Gabriel the angel. The Lord rebuked him because he did not quite believe that he was going to have a son at such an old age, so he was not allowed to speak until John was born. So he wrote on a tablet and said, “His name is John.” Then the Lord opened Zechariah’s mouth and he spoke a prophecy for his son in Luke 1:76-77.

“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.”

What a message from such a voice! Is that not our message today to the lost world? Salvation through the forgiveness of sins by the Lord Jesus Christ.

John grew, and in Luke 1:80 it says, “The child grew and became strong in spirit.” That is all we know about his childhood other than as a child he was raised by very elderly parents. I guess you could say they were more like grandparents to John.

Then it goes on to say in that verse, “He lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.” We know from Mark 1:6 that he went into the desert, and we are not quite sure how long he was there. We know that John’s public ministry began when he was thirty. So if his parents were in their sixties, probably he was in his late teens or maybe early to mid-twenties when he went into the desert, and probably his parents had passed away by that time. He spent those years in a secret life with the Lord. He was before the Lord, reading the Word of God and seeking

the Lord for His purpose. He was full of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit was feeding him with revelation during that time. He was being prepared for his ministry which would last maybe six months before he was imprisoned. At age thirty John makes his first public appearance.

John's Ministry Out of His Wilderness Experience

In Luke 3:2-6 it says, "The word of the Lord came to John the Son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet, a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths for Him. Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill made low, the crooked roads made straight, the rough ways made smooth, and all mankind shall see God's salvation.'" This King was also God's salvation.

What was his message? In Matthew 3:2-3 it says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

That message electrified the whole nation. It is like the way we were electrified when we saw the invasion into the Ukraine. It just changes your whole world perspective, your whole view. And it did to the people in his day. Now John was not a wishy-washy preacher trying to preach what people wanted to hear. You remember, when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to him where he was baptizing, and John looked at them and said, "I want you guys to come over here, I have to tell you something." He looked them in the eye and said, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" What a word to hear from this guy. "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."

The Coming Messiah

John continued to preach, and his message was the coming of the Messiah. Luke 3:15-16: "The people were waiting expectantly and wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. And John answered them this way. "I baptize you with water, but one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." This was a voice speaking, "Prepare the way of the Lord. There is One who is coming and He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

A little later Jesus Himself came to be baptized, and at first John was reluctant. He sensed the holiness of this Man, and he said, "I need to be baptized of You." And the Lord said, "All righteousness needs to be fulfilled."

In Luke 3:21-23 says, when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. As He was praying, heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven and God spoke: "You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased." That was God Himself speaking.

After Jesus was baptized, He was led of the Holy Spirit into the desert and was tempted for forty days and forty nights. And while he was away in the desert, a delegation from the Sanhedrin who were the legal eagles, the supreme court of the Jewish nation, came to John and questioned him as to who he was and what authority he had.

In John 1:20, 23, John said, "I am not the Christ. I am the voice of one calling in the desert, make straight the way for the Lord." That was John's calling. The next day after the delegation had questioned John, Jesus showed up after having been tempted in the wilderness and John announces:

John 1:29:33-34: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. I would not have known him except the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, the man on whom you see this Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

John 1: 35-36: "The next day John was there again with two of his disciples (Andrew and John). When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God." When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus." These were the first two of His disciples to follow Jesus.

Then there was a period of time, maybe six to nine months, that there was a parallel ministry. Jesus went off to minister in Judea and John was around Samaria still ministering and giving his message of repentance. During that time Jesus began His public ministry, and that began when He went to the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee and turned the water into wine. Then He cleansed the temple for the first time. There were two cleansings. He had also met with Nicodemus, telling him that to enter into the kingdom of God you must be born again. So this happened during John's ministry. Also during that time John's followers became concerned that so many were beginning to follow Jesus and were being baptized by Jesus's disciples. So they came and questioned John about that.

In John 3:28-30 John said, "You yourselves can testify that I said, I am not the Christ but I am sent ahead of him. 'The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must increase and I must decrease."

John's Imprisonment and Death

What a humble servant of the Lord! Then John's public ministry ends with imprisonment. Herod the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas, the son of the great Herod was over a certain region in Judea. And in Mark 6:17-20 it says, "Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, (his wife) his brother Phillip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife so Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him."

Now once again you cannot quite nail down the period of time, but it appears that John was in prison ten to twelve months, but we do not actually know. But during that time it is interesting that Herod would call to have John brought to him, and he would talk of these things with John. This was a man who was drawn but never captured. Eventually, he is the one that called for John's death, and the Lord's death. Many times people are drawn to the Lord, but they just do not make that commitment; they do not come through. And that was certainly true of Herod. In fact, his rejection of John's words ended in Herod's horrible death..

During that time, John was in prison for about a year, and that can be very discouraging. He had been preaching faithfully for six months at least, and he was the Lord's man. He was anointed from birth, but now he was in prison. And you have to remember that John, along with the rest of the nation, still had this thought that the millennial kingdom was going to be set up by the Messiah at that time. John began to have doubts and began to be puzzled. He did not understand the Lord's ways, and the enemy began to attack him with doubts. So he sends two of his disciples to question Jesus.

In Luke 7:19 it says, "Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

Jesus sent back a response in Luke 7:22-23: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is he who is not offended because of me."

Brothers and sisters, just a word of caution. Sometimes we come into very perplexing times, and we do not understand the ways of the Lord. We do not always know what He is doing, and the enemy can attack us with doubt, and certainly he did John.

But after John's disciples leave to go to speak to John and give him the message, Jesus turned to the crowd that was there and said this:

Matthew 11:7-13: "As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? (in other words, a wishy-washy politician?) If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? (Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees lived in fine houses and had fine clothes.) No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. (John certainly was not in a king's palace. He had been living in the desert, living off of locusts and wild honey.) Then what did you go out to see? A Prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' And I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven is taken by violence and violent men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come."

Then we remember that Herod had a big feast on his birthday, and Herodias' daughter danced before the king. He was so pleased that he said, "I will give you up to half my kingdom." So she conferred with her mother, who hated John and said, "I want John's head on a platter." And we know that happened, and the voice disappeared. But I always remember John's own prophecy. He said, "I must decrease and He must increase."

A Chosen Vessel

That is the scriptural life of John the Baptist; now to the application. John was obviously a chosen vessel, wasn't he? He was filled with the Holy Spirit even in the womb. He had a

miraculous birth because his parents were already elderly and not able to have children. We would look at John and say, "Yeah, we believe he was chosen. He was a chosen vessel of God; it is very obvious." But what I want us to think about this morning is that we also have to be the voice of today. We need to know, it really needs to hit us that we too are chosen. God has chosen you.

In Ephesians 1:4: "For He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world."

I want all of us to realize that we were chosen by God first. Often we think we chose God, but He chose us. You are a chosen vessel to be a testimony, to be a voice of the coming King. You were not chosen after you were born, you were chosen before you were born. In fact, you were chosen in Christ in eternity past. You are a chosen vessel of the Lord. That is your destiny. God has chosen you. He did not choose you because of any merit. Obviously, you were not even born when He chose you, but He chose you in spite of all your great demerit. We had no merit, but we had plenty of demerit. Nevertheless, the Lord chose you in eternity past. I think about this even though it is beyond human understanding. But it is as if He looked at His Son, and He saw you in Him. He saw me in Him, and He said, "I choose you." I look at My Son, and you are there; you are a chosen vessel."

Brothers and sisters, you did not choose God first; He chose you. It was not because of your merit. Why you? Why me? Why did He choose you and me? Well, I think John's name gives us the clue. The name "John" means 'God is gracious, the grace of God. 'That is how you were chosen. It was God's grace. We sang about it this morning, "Grace was free." We have been chosen by the grace of God, by His unmerited favor. It is a great honor and a privilege to be chosen.

When I was in school, they had a society that all the kids who had high grades were in, the National Honor Society. I always wanted to be in that society, but I never got close; it was beyond me. But I remember them sitting in those seats, and they would call their names out. And even though I knew it was impossible, somehow I still wanted it to happen, but it never did.

Well, brothers and sisters, you were chosen. God Himself chose you, not the National Honor Society, but God Himself. That is the great grace of God. But if that hits you in any kind of spiritual depth that you are chosen of God, that should make a great difference in your life. Of all the people in the world He has chosen you and me. But neither should we let that go to our heads because I Corinthians 1:27 says, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." So maybe that is the answer. He chose the foolish things to confound the wise.

Even though God has chosen you, you have to choose Him. We do not fully understand the mystery of predestination, but we do know that we have to choose Him. This is on my heart that we not only have to choose Him as our Savior but as our King. That was John's life: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The King is in your midst." That was his message, and brothers and sisters, how can we be a voice of the coming King if He is not King of our lives? That is the decision that we need to make if we have not already. "Lord, You are my Savior, and I am so grateful for that. I am grateful that You have chosen me, but I need to make You my King. You

are the King, and I want to be the voice. I want to be the testimony on this earth, but Lord, I need You to be King of my life."

The Calling

He chose you, and now we need to choose Him. Interestingly enough not only was John chosen; he was called by God. God called John to be this voice; it was God's calling upon his life. Eight hundred years before John was born, through the prophet Isaiah, God said these words: "A voice crying in the wilderness." That was John the Baptist. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." That was John's calling, and it became evident 800 years before he was born. So not only have you been chosen in eternity past, but there is a calling upon the chosen. There is a calling in your life.

I remember when the priests questioned John as to who he was, they asked him, "Are you the Christ?" And he said, "No." And he was not. They asked him if he was Elijah? Now we know that even the Lord Jesus said, "He was the Elijah to come." He was not Elijah raised from the dead; he knew that. That is why he could honestly say, "I am not Elijah." But we know he came with the same spirit that Elijah had. And they asked if he was the prophet, and he said, "No, I am not the prophet either." Now we know *The Prophet* is Christ. There was no pride in John. He was a humble man, and he lived a humble life. And it is so marvelous that John never tried to draw anyone to himself. It was not his ministry; they were not his disciples; it was not his nation; it was the Lord's. He never tried to draw anyone to himself. I am so thankful that the Lord gave us a voice here in Richmond that has never tried to draw anyone to himself or tried to develop a great following but only to give the message of the Lord, and I am so grateful for that. You all know who I am talking about.

So the voice was heard, but it was not to be seen, and that was John. The voice comes and goes, and it does fade away. But the reality remains; Christ remains. That is our calling.

You remember when John's disciples came to him, concerned that the people were following Jesus and not him. John said, "I rejoice; he must increase but I must decrease." John knew who he was. He was not some great preacher, and he knew that. He was just a voice. He knew what he wasn't, but he knew who Jesus was, and that is what he preached. That is John the Baptist. He was a great prophet, as the Lord said, "No greater among men."

But we need to realize that we are called; we are the called ones in this last hour. In II Timothy 1:9 it says, "God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace."

Romans 8:28: "All things work together to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose and grace."

God has not only chosen you, but He has called you, and the calling is holy because it comes from God Himself. There is no other calling like God's calling on your life. It is a special one-of-a-kind calling, so to speak. It is your calling, and it involves you and God's purpose. You and I are called to be a voice in this hour. However, a voice is not just what He speaks, It is not just the mouth. The voice has to come from a life, and certainly John the Baptist had that life. The

testimony that we give has to come from our experience of Christ, not just our Biblical knowledge. It has to come from the life that is within you. Kenny recently spoke on, "Christ in you." That is where the voice has to come from.

Brothers and sisters, what this meant to John, and what that means to us is we too have to have a life of repentance before the Lord. That was the key to being a voice. All our flesh must be dealt with, not just sin but the flesh itself, all that we are, the self-esteem, the self-knowledge, all of the self-life must be dealt with. John said it well: "All the valleys must be filled." In other words, our sins of omission, commission, our depravity, our corruption has to be taken out, but of course, it is in Christ.

When he said, "All the valleys must be filled." He was responding the whole group, when they asked Him what they must do. They knew they were short. They knew they were not ready for the kingdom, but they did not know what to do. However, John did, and he said, "Repent."

And it says, "The mountains must be leveled." That is the pride and arrogance of man, of who we think we are, that independent spirit that is not able to be a part of the whole. When He said this he was responding to the Pharisees and the religious ones, the proud ones.

Then he said, "The crooked places made straight." Deceitfulness, manipulation, intrigue, all of these things must be dealt with. There must be repentance. When he said, "The crooked made straight," he was responding to the tax collectors.

It also says, "Make the rough places smooth." We can be rough at times; we can be oppressive, we can demand of others what we will not demand of ourselves. And when He said that, He was speaking to the Roman soldiers. They were oppressive of men.

The Call to Discipleship

So you have been called with a holy calling, and I want us to remember that when you were first called, it was a calling to come unto Jesus. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest," the Lord said. But then the Lord went on to say, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." That is your next call, the call to discipleship, the call to the way of the cross, to be a Nazarite. When you were born again, you were chosen to be a Nazarite. In other words, a Nazarite was not in love with the world and the pleasures of the world. A Nazarite lived a simple life before the Lord, but it was a dedicated and separated life. His whole life was centered on the Lord.

The Calling to Be the Body of Christ

Brothers and sisters, I do not know if you realize it, but in Ephesians you find another calling. It is the calling to be the body of Christ, to be a member of His body. It says, a living stone not a dead stone, living stones, active, not passive and you were called to that because that is the way Christ is manifested on this earth. That is the way the testimony is built in fulness through us being joined together in the life of our Lord Jesus.

The Calling to be Overcomers

We find when we come to the book of Revelation that we are called to overcome, to overcome all that is in us that is opposed to Christ, to overcome our enemy who wants to destroy the testimony in your life.

The Calling to Prepare the Way of the King

And I believe that today we have a specific calling as well, and that is to prepare the way of the King, to be the voice, the testimony, to prepare the way of the King's coming.

II Peter 3:12 says, "We are waiting for and hastening the coming." The Lord Himself is not waiting on certain world events to take place. He is waiting on His church to be made ready. He is waiting on us to be made ready. He is waiting on the bride to make herself ready. We are called according to God's purpose, and purpose is extremely important. It was important to our Lord Jesus Christ. While the Lord was on earth, we know how overwhelming His ministry was to give; He was pressed out of measure, but the Lord had purpose. It was God's purpose for Him to become the Lamb. Through all the resistance of the enemy and the people, He stood fast. He was strengthened because He was a Man of purpose. So we are not only chosen and called, but we are called according to purpose.

As we consider John, we wonder why he was such a strong man. Why was he able to be that Nazarite? Why was he able to give that message? It was because he too had a purpose. His father prophesied of his purpose at the time he was circumcised, that he would be the one to prepare the way of the Lord. That gave much strength to John. I think we all realize that purpose matters in our lives. I do not know what your purpose is, but I do know what God's purpose is for you, and that is for you to be a voice, to be His testimony, to prepare the way for the coming King. We gain much strength when we have that purpose from the Lord, that inward consciousness of His calling upon our lives. That purpose from God is the central purpose of your life, and all other purposes you may have must come under that umbrella of the one great purpose of God for you.

I remember that Paul when he was in prison wanted to strengthen Timothy. Just before he was to be martyred he sent a second letter to Timothy, and these were his words:

The Tactics of the Enemy

II Timothy 1:9: "God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus, even before the world began."

We are all called with a divine purpose. We need to know there are no exceptions. We are all chosen, and we are called to serve a purpose, which will be our response to Jesus. Do you have that purpose? Are you in that purpose? Are you dedicated to that purpose? We need that motivation in our lives, that sense of purpose. The enemy knows this; he knows the strength that purpose has in us, and he wants to raise doubts in us. He wants to discourage us. And I think we have all been there. He will say to some, "You do not matter. You are a brother or sister in the Lord, but concerning what God wants, but you really do not matter. You cannot really contribute anything to this calling." Maybe to others he will say, "You are laboring for the Lord, but your

labor is in vain. It is not producing anything. Where is the fruit from your labor?" For others, he will say that we are too old, but certainly, our brother Stephen defies that. The enemy says to me: "You are just too old, Jerry. Your bones are creaking, your knees are weak, your back hurts, you are just too old."

Then he hits us with this one: "You are not what you should be." He always hits us with these partial truths. You are not what you should be. That really brings us down because there is truth in it, and until we are with the Lord that truth always hangs around our neck as a heavy weight.

Overcoming the Tactics of the Enemy

So how do you resist all of these tactics, all of the doubts, all of the lies, all of the fears? How do we come through? And this is the only answer that I can give you. It is not what you are in yourself; it is what you are in Christ that you have to lay hold of. If you want to displace what you are outside of Christ, the old man has to be put off, and you are going to have to put on the new man. In other words, you have to lay hold of what you are in Christ, lay hold of it by faith. That is why the enemy wants to bring doubt, because doubt puts a hole in faith. Lay hold of what you are in Christ, then He will make it true in your life. It takes faith. The just shall live by faith. If we lose the sense of purpose, we lose heart. Our testimony is weakened, our willingness to serve the Lord and suffer for His name sake is greatly damaged, and we can just become passive. I think that is our predominant reaction we are hit with fiery dart of doubt and it is deadly.

We can also, like John, become offended. You know John was attacked with doubt in prison. John had given himself to the Lord totally, lived for the Lord, prepared for his ministry, served faithfully, and he did not pull any punches with anybody. He told them exactly where they stood in the eyes of God. And he had such revelation of who Jesus was—the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, the Bridegroom. He had all this revelation, and yet he was hit with doubts that assailed him. Then the Lord said to John, "Blessed are those who are not offended in me."

Whether we want to admit it or not, sometimes we get offended with the Lord in our lives. There are dire, desperate, unexpected things that happen in our lives, and we cannot fathom what God is doing. It can really get to us, yet the Lord warns us. He did not rebuke John; He just warned him. He was exhorting John, I know what I am doing. I have been raising the dead, healing, preparing. It is okay, John. It is all right, just do not become offended. Do not fall away because you do not understand or you cannot see it all. Stay faithful. And John did. He became a martyr for the Lord.

We know from the Scriptures that all those who have been martyred are under the altar of God. That is a special group that the Lord recognizes and honors. I have to say that there is probably no greater honor than to be a martyr for the Lord. I may be wrong, but I do not think so. We may never be called to be a martyr. I do not think any of us would desire to be one, but brother Stephen Kaung has said to us so many times, "We may never be called to be a martyr but we are called to live a martyrs life."

Vision

John was a man of vision, and it is vision that really reveals to you what your purpose is. It is vision by which you come to see that God has chosen you, that God has called you, and you have purpose. And John had vision. He saw Jesus as the Son of God when he baptized the Lord Jesus. This was his testimony: "I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." That was an amazing testimony. They were expecting the Messiah, but they were not expecting the Son of God to be the Messiah. And it opened John's eyes: "This is God." It is God. Do you know Him as the Son of God? That is a great revelation. He is God of your life.

The Lamb of God

And He is the Lamb of God. I was so touched this morning that there was such an appreciation of the Lamb. The Lord gives us that revelation that comes from the Father Himself about His Son. The Word tells us very clearly that we cannot recognize Him as the Lamb of God unless God reveals it to us, and that has happened to most of you. That is a great revelation, and I am thankful that we are called every Lord's day to come back and remember the greatness of this Lamb of God, what He has done for us.

The Baptizer of the Holy Spirit

He is also the baptizer of the Holy Spirit. John saw that. What does that mean? That means when you accepted Christ, it is through the work of the Holy Spirit and the holy spirit now dwells in you. Do you have any idea of how immense that is, that you have the Holy Spirit in you to guide your life? You do not need to look up rules and regulations as a Christian. You do not need to be told what to do. You need to listen to the Holy Spirit who is within.

Not only that, there is the baptism of the Holy Spirit which we see in the book of Acts with the tongues of fire, and the mighty wind that came. So many people focus on that because they are looking for that power. But what really happened on that day was that we were baptized into the body of Jesus Christ. When you accept Christ, the Holy Spirit puts you into a special place in the body of Christ by which you are to serve the Lord and your brothers and sisters, to build the house of God, to build the priesthood of God, to prepare the bride for the Lord. We need that fresh vision. I have to say that we need to continually receive freshness to the vision the Lord has given to us.

The Bridegroom

Also, John saw Him as the Bridegroom. Do you know the Lord as your Bridegroom? Now He is the Bridegroom to the body, and we as His body should love Him as our Bridegroom. He loves us and wants us to be with Him and serve Him as His helpmate. I do not know if you have had that vision. You may have the knowledge, but has the Lord really touched your heart with the fact that He is the Bridegroom looking for His bride? When He came to earth, He did not come just to save people. He was looking for His bride, and she was not there. And He had to die on Calvary's cross to bring in the material to build the bride, who are the Christians united in one body.

He became that Lamb that He might have the bride, and it says that He washes us with His Word that we might be without spot or wrinkle. My burden is that the Lord would give freshness to the vision that He has given to us.

A Man of Spiritual Character

John was also a man of spiritual character. As I said before, he was a Nazarite, and you too are called to be a Nazarite as well. He was totally committed to the Lord, whatever that may mean in your life personally. The Lord testified of John that he was not a reed; he was not swayed by the world, he was not swayed by other people's thoughts or opinions of him. He stood strong for the Lord. He had that testimony of a strong man. The Lord also said that he was not one who desired rich clothing nor one who lived in a palace. He was satisfied to live in the desert, a simple life, so that he could serve the Lord effectively. He did not indulge himself.

Then it says he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and the Lord testified of that. The spirit of Elijah was that he was jealous for the Lord. In Kings 19:10, 14 it says that he was very jealous for the Lord, for the Lord's purpose, and for the Lord's people. That was his character. He had a great zeal for the Lord. That was the spirit of Elijah. He had a zeal for the rights of the Lord in His people.

James tells us of the power of Elijah. He said that Elijah was a man just like we are, and the prayer of a righteous man prevails with God. His power was his prayer life. That was his character.

I do believe that the Lord wants to awaken not only the world to their need for a Savior, which I think is part of what all the current shaking and tribulation is about, but He also wants to waken us, His people, that the King is at hand. He wants us to be the ones preparing the way of the King and hastening His return. God Himself chose you, God Himself called you, and He called you according to His purpose and according to His grace. In other words, you do not have the power to fulfill God's purpose in your life, but by His grace you can lay hold of who you are in Christ Jesus. Choose Him, answer His call, and serve His purpose.

Lord, we come to You. We thank You for this man, John the Baptist, our great example that You have given to us. Lord, in this hour that we live in we are grateful to be chosen. We are grateful that we are called, we are grateful that we are not only called but called according to Your purpose. Lord, we do not want to be found falling short of Your choosing of us, of Your calling for us, of Your purpose in our lives. I want to say that I am thankful that You named him John, 'the grace of God. 'In Jesus 'name. Amen.