

DISCOVER PROPHECY



The Voice in the Wilderness

22

The Greatest of the Prophets

The Bible tells us about the prophet John the Baptist. “Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’ Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair, and a leather belt about his waste; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

“Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins” Matthew 3:1-6.

Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist” Matt. 11:11. Jesus is saying that there is no one greater than John the Baptist. What do we know about this solitary man whom Jesus called the greatest among the prophets?

When John began preaching in the wilderness of Judea, people came from miles around to hear this powerful, fearless, and humble messenger. In glaring contrast to the religious leaders of the day, his life was marked with holiness and simplicity. While the priests wore luxurious clothing, John wore a modest garment of camel hair with a leather belt. While they were feasting, John was fasting and eating locusts (carob pods) and wild honey. He refused to drink any wine or strong drink, that he might be filled with the Spirit of God (Luke 1:15). Rather than ornate synagogues, John chose rivers and rocky valleys as his cathedral for preaching. Soon people were asking, “Could this man be Elijah?”

You see, in the book of Malachi, the Bible says that there would be an Elijah, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord” Malachi 4:5. Does this mean that the actual prophet Elijah would appear again? No, actually John the Baptist was the one that would come and do the work of Elijah. “It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to

make ready a people prepared for the Lord” Luke 1:17.

John the Baptist would be doing the work of Elijah; that of bringing people to repentance. The key to John’s ministry was that he would have the same power of the Holy Spirit as did Elijah to cause a revival among God’s people. His special work was to preach repentance for sin and prepare people for Jesus’ first coming. And the quality most known of John was that he followed a holy life rather than the life of the world.

Just the same, there would be many people in the last days doing a similar work in preparing the world for Jesus’ second coming.

A Spirit Filled Life

The key to John’s life was that he led a Spirit-filled life of humility. The Bible says, “John answered and said to them all, ‘As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals’” Luke 3:16. This humility is seen in another place when he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” John 3:30.

The Spirit-filled life of John the baptist was marked by humility. There was a direct connection between John’s powerful ministry and the complete surrender he had made to the Lord. It was John’s highest joy to point others to Jesus rather than to himself. All he did was designed to bring glory to God’s name.

God is calling us to be a modern Elijah or John the Baptist. He wants us too to live lives of humility. Always willing to put God and others first.

In the remainder of this study we are going to be looking at several things that God is calling us as Christians to follow; several different things he desires us to do as we follow Him.

Now, let me clarify this! What we are about to study together is designed only for those who have given their lives to Jesus. Why do we follow Jesus? Why is it that we are willing to change our lives and modify them based on the Bible’s account for our living over that of the world? Because we love Jesus. One who has given their lives to Jesus will be humble enough to follow Jesus over the world. So, if you have not given your life to Jesus, this is not for you.

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” 1 John 2:15-17. Living a humble life in Christ and forsaking the ways of the world does not mean spiritual isolation, but rather we are to live in the world and yet not to partake of its evils. Christ calls us out of the world, but He sends us also into the world to work for Him. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” Mark 16:15.

A Worldly or Christian Life?

As Christians who have given our hearts to Jesus, we no longer desire to follow the ways of the world, but rather the ways of Jesus Christ. “Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” James 4:4.

“‘Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’” says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you” 2 Corinthians 6:17. We are not to follow the ways of the world, but rather that which enhances our walk with Christ. When we choose the things of the world over Christ, they hinder our personal relationship with Christ. Just the same, when we choose not to follow the ways of the world, and instead are committed to Christ, our walk with Jesus become closer.

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” 1 John 2:15. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” Romans 12:2.

Therefore, when we are seeking to live lives for Jesus and wanting our walk with Him to be strengthened, we will avoid that which is harmful to our spiritual and physical lives. “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things” Philippians 4:8. So we want to ask ourselves, do the things in my life direct me to Jesus or Satan? This would include watching violence as a form of entertainment. Jesus taught that sins of sex and violence originate in the thoughts and attitudes (Matthew

5:22,28). Therefore, a Christian should avoid any TV programs, videos, music or reading material that would encourage impure thoughts.

Ornamentation of the Heart

As we follow Christ over that of the world, our lives will be changing. More than anything else, our hearts will be decorated with the love of Jesus. “Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness” 1 Timothy 2:9-10. Here we see that the Christian will be adorned in their lives and that we do not need the ornamentation of the outward. “Your adornment must not be merely external braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God” 1 Peter 3:3.

These verses show that it is the way of the world to adorn the outward, but the Christian has a different heart.

A good pattern for Christians to follow is a simple, modest lifestyle. The popular, sexually suggestive fads and fashions of today encourage a great deal of temptation and debt. God does not intend for us to dress in burlap; however, unduly expensive, flamboyant, or ostentatious clothing should not be part of a Christian’s wardrobe. Although the wearing of jewelry is widely accepted in the world, it has a negative image in the Scriptures. “In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings” Isaiah 3:18-21. See also Luke 16:15; Ex. 33:4-5; Gen. 35:1-5.

Do you really need the jewelry? You need not be insecure. You would be amazed how beautiful you are without it.

A Game of Chance

“For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” 1 Timothy 6:10. Note that the Bible says that the love of money is a root of evil. Money itself is not, but our love for it is. “A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished” Proverbs 28:20. Gambling can be just as addictive

as many drugs. Some have squandered entire family savings at casinos or on state lottery tickets. Most “get rich quick” schemes are associated with undue risk, unfair prices, and questionable ethics. The person following Christ desires to be faithful in using God’s money wisely.

The Love For Jesus

For some, this material may sound a bit threatening. Maybe you have a considerable amount to grow in. Well, we must look at these lifestyle issues as Christ looks at them. Once we come to Jesus, He desires to change our heart. He loves us no matter our lifestyle choices. Yet, once we have given Him our hearts, He begins changing us and protecting us from spiritual apostasy. We will delightfully change for Jesus. “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” John 14:15. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” 1 John 5:3. “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart” Psalm 40:8.

Why do we choose to do these things? Why do we choose to remain different from the world? Because we know that the world can destroy our eternal lives and because we love Jesus. When we see all that Jesus has done for us, we are willing to do whatever He asks of us. And so much easier when we know that He desires us to do it for our own best interest.

Ambassadors for Christ

Once we come to know Jesus, we are then called by God to tell others about Him. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” 1 Peter 2:9. As ambassadors for Jesus, Christians do indeed have a high calling! John the Baptist helped prepare people for Jesus’ first coming, and God has called His people today to live holy lives as they help others prepare for Jesus’ second coming.

Supplement

When a person becomes a Christian, he or she is enlisted as an ambassador from a better kingdom. The Bible says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ." 2 Corinthians 5:20.

The dictionary defines an ambassador as "a diplomatic official of the highest rank appointed and accredited as representative in residence by one government or sovereign to another, usually for a limited

length of time."

Ambassadors are just as important in the spiritual realm as they are in the political realm. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven are not like the citizens of this world. We have been sent into the world to demonstrate who Jesus is and what He is like. Through the Holy Spirit, we become His representatives--to reflect His image in everything from the way we talk and work to the way we eat and dress. In other words, when we become part of God's spiritual kingdom, we should be living demonstrations of the government we represent. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the Scriptures say that "we all ... are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

We, the Church, are the hands and feet, the eyes and mouth, and yes, even the ears of Jesus in the world today. We are the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 5: 29, 30; Colossians 1:18). Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told us, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." John 20:21.

Every facet of our lives should be a reflection of the life and person of Jesus. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16.

