

Following In The Footsteps Of John The Baptist

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
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Introduction:

“It was the time of the Morning Sacrifice. As the massive Temple-gates slowly swung on their hinges, a three-fold blast from the silver trumpets of the Priests seemed to waken the City, as with the voice of God, to the life of another day.”¹

Thus reads Alfred Edersheim’s description of the beginning of the day on which Zacharias was chosen to offer the incense to the Lord in His temple. It started out an ordinary day. Yet, we know that it was anything but ordinary. The angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias, foretelling the coming of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the coming Messiah. The promise of God was being fulfilled.

Because of these amazing events, we have a tendency to view John in a special way. His mission was greater than ours. We could never be what he was. But, in fact, when we examine John and his duty, we will actually find that we are to follow in his footsteps. John was the forerunner of Jesus’ incarnation, turning people back to God to prepare them for Christ’s first coming. We, in our turn, are forerunners for Christ’s revelation, turning people back to God to prepare them for Christ’s second coming. Examine five key aspects of John’s mission that we must mirror today.

Discussion:

- I. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (**John 3:30**).
 - A. According to **Matthew 3:5**, “Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan” went out to John. You can imagine what kind of ego-boost that could be. But John understood his place. Some of his disciples did not (**John 3:26**), so he instructed them in **John 3:27-30**.
 - B. John understood that the ministry he had was not from his own greatness. He understood that the success he had among the people was not because of himself. What he had was given to him by God. It would only last as long as God wanted it to. His purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus. His job was to turn the people’s attention away from himself and focus it on Christ.
 - C. That is also our job. It is too easy to allow our religion to center around ourselves, working to let people see how good and religious we are. Jesus spoke about this in **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18**. These hypocrites performed religious duties, but their religion was for their own glory. We, on the other hand, are to conduct ourselves in such a way that men see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:13-16**). Remember our mission as stated in **John 15:8**. We prove ourselves to be Jesus’ disciples when we bear fruit that glorifies God, not ourselves. In our lives, God must increase and we must decrease.

- II. “He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah” (**Luke 1:17**).
 - A. Upon first reading this statement in **Luke 1:17**, one might believe this means John would work amazing miracles. However, the scripture never records even one. This stands out to me because God so clearly wants us to see that John fulfilled the prophecy in **Malachi 4:5** that He even told us how both men dressed (**II Kings 1:8; Matthew 3:4**). Yet, while the Bible tells us about great wonders wrought through Elijah, it never speaks of any through John.
 - B. What did the angel mean when he said John would go in the spirit and power of Elijah? The main thrust is that John would have the same mindset, the same attitude or spirit, the same authoritative manner as Elijah. Elijah boldly proclaimed the truth before kings (**I Kings 18:17-19**). John had that same boldness (**Luke 3:19-20**). Elijah confronted false prophets and teachers (**I Kings 18:20-40**). John did the same (**Matthew 3:7-9**). Elijah provoked the people to make a choice between false religion and truth (**I Kings 18:21**). John also preached a message of repentance (**Mark 1:4-5**).
 - C. We must have this same spirit. We must be bold in proclaiming the truth, willing to confront error no matter what form it takes. We must demand that people in the world choose between truth and error, demonstrating that God’s way is the one way (**Matthew 7:13-14**). We must not timidly hide the gospel message for fear of the people. Instead, we must proclaim the truth openly and boldly that people will be prepared for judgment. We must come in this same spirit and power.

¹ *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts; 1994, p. 94.

- III. "To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God" (**Luke 1:77**).
- A. John's message was not one that proclaimed merited salvation. John spoke of fruits of repentance (**Matthew 4:8; Luke 3:8**). He commanded that those who listened be baptized for the remission of their sins (**Luke 3:3**). He was quick to teach people how they must behave and to be right with God (**Luke 3:10-14**). Yet, his was a message of salvation through God's mercy.
 - B. If the people would be saved, it would not be because they earned it. Nor would it be because God somehow owed the people. It would be because God granted mercy and remitted the sins of people who did not deserve it.
 - C. We are to have this same message. People need to know that they are lost outside of Christ. No amount of good works, no amount of sincerity and honesty, no amount of religion will save them. Only Christ can save them through His mercy. Our job is to show them where this salvation is (**Acts 4:12; II Timothy 2:10**). Our job is to show them how to enter Christ (**Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:11-14**). We must teach people about faith, repentance and obedience. But we must also teach them that salvation is by the tender mercy of God. No amount of faith, repentance or obedience obligates God to save anyone.
- IV. "To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (**Luke 1:79**).
- A. An obvious allusion to **Psalm 23:3-4**, John was God's instrument to shepherd His people through the valley of the shadow of death onto the paths of peace and righteousness. John was to go to people who were in darkness and proclaim the light to them. Keep in mind to whom John went. He was sent to religious people. He was sent to Jews who read the law every Sabbath. He was sent to people who claimed to trust in God. But these very same people were in darkness and the shadow of death. They needed to be directed to the path of peace.
 - B. We are to do the same. People in the world and in false religion, no matter how much they claim to believe in God, no matter how sincere they are in their human forms of religion are in darkness and in the shadow of death. Our job is to bring the light to them and to bring them to the light. As **Ephesians 4:11-14** demonstrates that we are to expose the unfruitful works of darkness. We are to bring the light into dark places that all may know the truth.
 - C. No doubt, we will make ourselves vulnerable to persecution. Men will revile and hate us. Some of them will be against us and will even claim to be opposed to us on God's behalf. Jesus foretold all of this in **John 15:18-21**. Instead of allowing those in darkness to discourage us from the path of peace, we must continue on even in the face of their opposition. We must continue to be a light set on a hill (**Matthew 5:14-15**). We must follow in the footsteps of John the Baptist.
- V. "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (**Luke 1:17**).
- A. John's ultimate purpose was to prepare the people for the coming Messiah. He was to bring them back to the Law so they would be ready for the Christ to come and establish His kingdom.
 - B. Our mission is the same. Jesus is coming back (**Acts 1:10-11**). He will appear this second time, apart from sin, for the salvation of those who eagerly wait for Him (**Hebrews 9:28**). Our job is to prepare a people who are eagerly waiting for Him. Jesus describes the kind of people He wants to find when He returns in two parables found in **Luke 12:35-48**. We must prepare people to be ready for Christ's return at any time. We do not know when it will occur, so we must be busy preparing ourselves and others in holy conduct and godliness (**II Peter 3:10-13**).

Conclusion:

We must be like John the Baptist. We are to have his humility, his zeal, his message. It is a tall order to measure up to so great a man. And yet, remember the words of Jesus in **Matthew 11:11**. Though you are the least in the kingdom of heaven, you are greater than John the Baptist. There is one major difference between us and John the Baptist. All he did and taught was based on something that was yet to happen. We look back and proclaim what has already been done. We have God's will in its entirety. He only had a small portion of it. We can follow in John's footsteps and we can prepare a people for the Lord. Are you like John the Baptist?