

Introduction to John the Baptist's Ministry as a Forerunner

I. THE FORERUNNER MINISTRY

- A. Human history is a succession of transitional generations. Throughout the centuries--from the creation of the cosmos to the exile from the Garden, from the calling of Abraham to the exaltation of Joseph, from the flood to the Exodus, from the drought in the days of Elijah to the deportation of the days of Jeremiah, and from the days of Anna, Simeon, and John the Baptist to the days of Peter, Philip, and Paul--we see that transitional generations are like hinges upon which the door of redemption and judgment swings.
- B. And in every generation that witnesses such monumental transitions as those mentioned above we observe what we refer to as *the forerunner ministry*. The forerunner ministry is *a prophetic and pastoral ministry* that is intended by God to prepare people for the unique dynamics of the transition specific to a particular generation.
- C. The forerunner ministry is a proclamation ministry. Noah proclaimed the flood. Moses and Aaron proclaimed the exodus. Elijah proclaimed drought and rain. Jeremiah, Joel, and Isaiah proclaimed invasion, exile, and deportation. Zechariah, Haggai, Nehemiah, and Ezra proclaimed return and restoration. Anna, Simeon, and John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the Lord to the Jews. And the apostles proclaimed the Gospel to the nations.
- D. In the generation of the Lord's return God will once again establish forerunners in the spirit of those who have gone before them to make known the will of God to those who will live to see it. I believe that we are at the beginning of that generation now. I believe that many who are now alive will witness the coming of the Lord with their own eyes. And I believe that in light of the urgency of the hour God is calling and setting apart forerunners who, like John the Baptist before the first coming, will proclaim the reality of the return of Jesus.

II. WHAT IS THE FORERUNNER MINISTRY? JOHN THE BAPTIST AS THE PREEMINENT MODEL

9 *What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.*
10 *This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.” (Matthew 11:9-10)*

- A. According to Jesus the forerunner ministry is a prophetic ministry as well as an *extension* of the prophetic ministry (“...**a prophet? Yes.**”). Jesus called John the Baptist a “prophet” and “more than a prophet.” Amos declared that God “does nothing unless” He first reveals it to his prophets (Amos 3:7).
- B. The forerunner ministry is the ministry of preparation (“**to prepare**”). Forerunners emerge under the anointing of the Spirit “before” the transitional events unfold. They announce what is on the horizon. They see what others do not see. They emphasize things that most will not emphasize. They prepare themselves so as to prepare others.
- C. The forerunner ministry is centered around a message (“**my messenger**”). John the Baptist was declared to be a “messenger.” The word of the Lord (Luke 3:1-5) burned within him. And he declared it publicly. The impact of his message touched the whole nation and every social demographic (see Luke 3). And it ultimately cost him his life (see Matthew 14).
- D. The forerunner ministry is associated with the coming of the Lord (“**before you**”). John was “sent by God” (John 1:6-8) before the coming of Jesus. And many in the same spirit of John will be sent before the return of Jesus. The unique activities of God, men, and the powers and principalities of the air in transitional generations, especially with regards to the first and second coming of Jesus, requires the establishment of the forerunner ministry.
- E. The forerunner ministry is pastoral. It is a shepherding ministry. In as much as John was a prophet and a messenger, he was also a pastor in that he led the people in the way they were to walk. He rebuked the rebellious and religious (calling them “vipers”) and encouraged the weak and fragile (pointing them to Jesus the “Lamb of God” and “Bridegroom”). He “fed the people with knowledge and understanding as promised in Jeremiah 3:15.

- F. The forerunner ministry is essential. It is of critical importance. Forerunners declare the transition ahead of time and then shepherd people through them when they unfold. The generation that witnesses the return of Jesus will experience the greatest crisis and glory the earth has ever known. The crisis will be mind-numbing. And the glory will be breathtaking. To be ignorant and unprepared for that hour will be costly. Many will “fall away” from the faith denying the One they once professed. We cannot exaggerate the redemptive value of the forerunner ministry.

III. JOHN'S UNDERSTANDING OF HIS MINISTRY MANDATE AS A FORERUNNER

19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” 22 So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” (John 1:19-23)

- A. John's ministry

“What do you say about yourself?” He said ‘I am the voice of one crying out...’

1. “I am the voice...”
2. Isaiah 40:3-5

3 A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:3-5)

3. John 1:6-8

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

B. John's preparation

"...in the wilderness..."

1. Luke 1:80

C. John's manifestation

"...in the wilderness..."

1. Luke 1:80 (NKJV)

2. Luke 3:1-5

D. John's message

"Make straight the way of the Lord."