

I. Review

- A. So far in our study of the gospel of John, we have worked our way through the first eighteen verses, which are focused on explaining that Jesus, though appearing to be a normal human being, is at the very same time God – which means Jesus is the God of Abraham, the God of creation, and the God who has no beginning and no end.
1. And though we often think that Jesus' primary role in coming to earth was to redeem us from the penalty of our sin, John's first explanation of Jesus' role is that He came to earth to give us a visible example and verbal explanation of what God is like, and to do this in ways we can understand. Then John tells us of Jesus' redemptive work.
 2. Near the end of his gospel, John, himself, confirms these are his two reasons for writing, for we read in John 20:30-31 . . . Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.
 3. Following John's presentation about who Jesus is (vs 1-18), he proceeds to present stories from the lives of John the Baptist, and those Jesus helps, that give us real-world examples of who Jesus is. For example,
 - a. In vs 19-28, we have the story of John the Baptists' testimony about who he is and who Jesus is, in response to being questioned by the religious authorities.
 - b. In vs 29-34 – which is marked in John's gospel as the next day – John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and explains how he knew who Jesus was.
 - c. In vs 35-39 – which again is marked as a next day, thus making it the third day – we have the story of John the Baptist pointing out Jesus to some of his disciples, who then follow Jesus home.
 - d. In vs 40–42, Andrew – one of John's disciples who followed Jesus home, upon being convinced that Jesus was the Christ, found his brother Peter, told him who this Jesus person was, and brought him to meet Jesus.

- e. And in vs 43-51 – which again is marked as a next day, thus making it the fourth day – we have the story of Jesus finding Philip, who went and found Nathanael and told Nathanael that he had met Jesus – who was the one Moses and the Prophets wrote about. So Nathanael came to see Jesus, and Jesus confirmed His deity by telling Nathanael He already knew him and had already seen him from afar.
- 4. These verifying stories are all found in the first chapter of John. However, John continues his stories in chapter 2, which begins with Jesus' first recorded miracle – changing the water into wine. And John concludes these stories in chapter 11 – with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. And though we can learn many lessons from these stories, their primary purpose is to show us with real life examples what the first eighteen verses of John's gospel tells us in words, which is, Jesus is God in human flesh.

B. Prayer

II. A real life story about John the Baptist which shows Jesus is God

- A. John 1:19-23 . . . This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" [20] And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." [21] They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." [22] Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" [23] He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." (This story continues through vs 28, but we will not get that far today)
- B. John begins this story by identifying that it was John the Baptist who told it. And then he gets to his purpose for telling the story with the "who are you" question, and identifying who asked it. John 1:19 . . . This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"
- C. John the Baptist tells who he isn't – vs 20-21: John 1:20 . . . And [John] confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."
 - 1. It is probable John knew they were wondering if he was the Christ, especially given the continued Roman occupation of Israel and the growing hope and expectation of the Messiah to free them.

2. Luke confirms this hope and expectation of the Messiah in Luke 3:15, "... the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ."
 3. And so, without being directly asked if he was the Messiah, John answered their question of "Who are you?" with "I am not the Christ."
- D. John 1:21a . . . They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." There are several reasons why the religious leaders thought John the Baptist might be Elijah.
1. Like Elijah of old, John was preaching a strong message of God's judgment and the people's need for repentance.
 2. And it was believed by many first century Jews that Elijah, who did not die but was taken alive to heaven, would return – in person – just before the Messiah came on the scene. This belief was primarily based on God's words as recorded in Malachi 4:5-6 . . . "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. [6] He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."
 3. But John the Baptist said he was not Elijah. And if we left it at that, you would accept his answer. However, both Matthew and Mark record Jesus as saying that John the Baptist was Elijah. For example, Matthew put it this way:
 - a. Matthew 11:11-15 . . . Truly I (Jesus) say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. [13] For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John (John the Baptist marked the end of the prophecies about the coming Messiah/ Christ.) [14] And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. [15] He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
 - b. Matthew 17:10-13 . . . [Jesus'] disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" [11] And [Jesus] answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; [12] but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." [13] Then the

disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

4. So how do we reconcile John the Baptist's denial that he is Elijah with Christ's claim that he is Elijah?
 - a. I believe Luke solves this seeming contradiction in his story of the angel's visit to John's father, Zacharias, about John's birth.
 - (1) During their conversation the angel said, "It is he (John the Baptist) who will go as a forerunner before [Jesus] 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).
 - (2) In other words, John the Baptist was not Elijah returned in person – but the preparer of the way for Christ who operated with the same spirit and power that Elijah had when he served God many years before.
 - b. Now it is possible, you are still skeptical about this seeming contradiction between John saying he isn't Elijah and Jesus saying he is. So let me give you one more portion of scripture that may help remove your doubts that both could be right.
 - (1) Both Matthew 17:1-13 and Mark 9:1-13, tell the same story of Jesus taking Peter, James, and John up to what has come to be called, the Mount of Transfiguration. While up there, Jesus was transfigured, and Elijah and Moses appeared and talked with Jesus. Naturally, Peter, James, and John saw it all.
 - (2) On their way back down the mountain, Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had seen, until after Jesus rose from the dead. This started a discussion about what it meant to rise from the dead.
 - (3) During this discussion they asked Jesus why the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Jesus answered by telling them that Elijah does come first in order to restore the truth about righteousness in Israel.
 - (4) Then Jesus said, "But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him." When Jesus said that Elijah had already come, who was He speaking of? John the Baptist. When did Jesus say this? On the way down the mountain after Peter, James, and John had just seen Elijah and Moses in person.

- c. Therefore, it makes the most sense to understand that John the Baptist was not Elijah returned in the flesh, but rather as Luke said, John the Baptist had the spirit and power of Elijah.
- E. John 1:21b . . . [The priests and Levites from Jerusalem than ask,] "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."
1. Asking John if he is the Prophet is a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15-19, where Moses tells Israel that the day is coming when God will send them a prophet like Moses, and they had better listen to this Prophet when He arrives.
 2. Peter, in his second sermon as recorded in Acts 3:17-22, identifies the promised prophet of Moses' prophecy as Jesus Christ.
 3. Steven, just before being stoned to death, gave his persecutors a history lesson, and in that lesson, he too, identified the promised prophet as Jesus Christ (Acts 7:37).
 4. My point here is that it was a reasonable question for the religious leaders to ask John the Baptist. However, John knew he was not the promised prophet, and so he answered, "No."
- F. John explains who he is – vs 22-23: John 1:22-23 . . . Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" [23] [John] said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."
1. John the Baptist's answer includes this gospel's first direct reference to a prophecy from the OT. And I am pointing this out for two reasons.
 - a. First, to remind you that the Jews and Christians at that time only had the OT for their Bible, and the primary version of the OT which they used was the Septuagint – which was the Greek version of the OT. But like us, they used their Bible to learn about God, to seek to understand what God had done and was doing, and to know how to live a life pleasing to God.
 - b. Second, I am pointing out this first reference to an OT prophecy to remind you that the gospel writers drew on the OT scriptures to show that the scriptures supported their claims that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ of God. And as I previously told you, this is verified by the fact that Matthew pointed out 124 OT prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus' lifetime, Mark references 70, Luke points out 109, and John uses 27, with John the Baptist's reference to Isaiah being the first.

- G. Now I know this is taking us outside this first chapter of John, but because of the significant truth conveyed by John's use of this prophecy in Isaiah, I want us to look at it.
1. But first some history. John the Baptist came on the scene in Israel while Israel was under the judgment of God for their sinfulness. The tangible proof of God's judgment was the fact that they were under the oppression of Roman occupation. And this oppressive occupation was one of the main reasons many Israelites were looking for the Messiah, or any sign that He was coming soon – such as Elijah or the prophesied prophet showing up.
 2. Therefore, when the power of John the Baptist's ministry became evident, many in Israel were hopeful he was either the Messiah come to free them from Roman rule, or the expected Elijah or promised prophet who would usher in the Messiah.
 3. And so when John was asked if he was any of these three people, he said he wasn't. But when pressed to tell who he was, he answered according to the OT prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-4 – which is directed toward God's people who were experiencing oppression and hardships as a direct result of coming under God's judgment for their sin.
 4. And though John referenced only part of the prophecy, it begins in vs 1-2 with these words: "Comfort, O comfort My people. [2] Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins."
 - a. The Jews of John's day wanted this prophecy to be about the Messiah coming, driving out the Romans, and re-establishing Israel as a sovereign nation.
 - b. But that is not what this prophecy addressed. This prophecy does not speak of political and national freedom, but of God's spiritual freedom that frees us from enslavement to sin and its destructive consequences, and frees us from unbelief and the troubles it brings, and frees us from unfounded and irrational fears, and frees us from emotional and mental turmoil, and from pride, selfishness, greed, bitterness, ungodly anger, addiction, sexual immorality, and the self-serving use of power over others.
 - c. You see, this is the freedom that comforts in the worst of circumstances, and enables us to live in freedom regardless of the circumstances. And this is the freedom for which John prepared the way and Jesus made the way.

5. But John did not quote this part of the prophecy, he quoted the part that says, "... a voice calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. [4] Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley'" (Isaiah 40:3-4).
 - a. So what is so significant about this part of the prophecy? The way to true and lasting freedom from the worst oppression imaginable is through God's provision of Jesus Christ and a life of godliness.
 - b. You see, the path to freedom that God lays out for us is not the path of armies and battles, but the path of faith in Jesus and the personal pursuit of a godly life.
 - c. But Isaiah's prophecy does not end with the part John's quoted. It continues on to say, "then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 40:5).

III. Conclusion

- A. Therefore, if we follow this prophecy from beginning to end, what we see is that true comfort and forgiveness of sins comes from God through Jesus Christ, as we come to our senses, confess our sin, repent of our sin, and proceed to live a godly, righteous life.
 1. But something else happens, and this something else is clearly stated in Isaiah 40:5, "then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together."
 2. In other words, the working together of God's judgment for sinning willfully and repeatedly, His forgiveness of sins committed, His comfort in times of discipline, judgment, and hard times, and our response to what God is doing by zealously pursuing godliness, makes visible the glory of the Lord for all the world to see.
- B. Do you want relief from earthly trials, or true freedom and the comfort of God in the midst of earthly trials? Do you see God's glory in His dealings with you? Do you reveal God's glory in your responses to Him? May our lives bring glory to Him!