

I. Introduction

A. John the Baptist

1. Jesus (Luke 7:20), *I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.*
2. John lived in a small community, disciples a small group of young men, and had never left the wilderness. His ministry assignment did not bring any great reward or personal benefits. It led him to prison and an early death. His prophecies were not fulfilled in his lifetime, and the nation did not ultimately repent. He lived his entire life to prepare the way for Jesus, but he apparently only met Jesus one time, and Jesus did not invite John to become a disciple. When John's assignment was finished, he ended up in jail and was then executed when Herod made a rash promise at a drunken party. I don't know what the Lord revealed to John, but it is likely John's assignment did not end the way he expected.
3. *Over the next three weeks as we prepare for Easter, I believe that God has something very specific and intentional for you and for me. Through the testimony and witness of John, we have an opportunity to reclaim our identity in Christ and be challenged start living in a way that can only be lived through the power of the Holy Spirit. No matter how great or gifted you are, you and I must become disillusioned with what we can produce and get a vision for what God alone can produce.

B. John's journey

1. Temple - Wilderness - Cross
2. John's journey is a template for our journey.
3. *The call of discipleship is to follow Jesus from security and power into dependence and weakness so that the Kingdom of God can flow through you in the power of the Spirit.
4. *God chose John to prepare a nation, but John lived in a small place, disconnected from national leaders, and only publicly ministered for a few months (scholars range from 6-18 months). Most of John's life appeared "barren" but in Jesus' estimate was one of the most fruitful in history.

II. Temple

A. Priestly lineage (Luke 1:5-25)

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth: Priest in the Temple; lineage of Aaron, barren; both described as righteous
2. Zechariah's vision and announcement (vs 8-23)
 - a. Offer incense once in a lifetime or never
 - b. John specifically dedicated to God, see Hannah and Samuel, empowered by the Spirit; Eli's sons wicked (Temple system)
 - c. Sign of God? Silenced priest?
3. *The message of Malachi summarized John's life and message:
 - a. The priesthood had become compromised and politicized.

- b. Priests were to be God's messengers, but the priesthood had failed and did not instruct the people in the knowledge of God.
 - c. God was going to send a priest who would be His messenger to prepare the way for the Lord to come to His temple and purify the priesthood.
 - d. There would be a people who treasured the Lord, feared His name, and became His treasured possession.
 - e. God was going to expand the priesthood beyond the city of Jerusalem out into the nations.
4. *John was the messenger of Malachi 3:1 and a prototype of a priestly people who would fear the Lord, serve as His messengers, and become His treasured possession.
 5. *John pointed to a new priesthood ministering to God in the wilderness of the nations outside the land and preparing the way for them to come to God while Jerusalem was not yet saved and her priesthood not yet purified.
- B. Birthright (vs 57-66)
1. Name not after dad, significant change
 2. Named, then Zechariah spoke, God's new work
 3. Through John, God was establishing a global people of God through the church, the priesthood of believers. Jesus is not returning for a church satisfied with her success in this age. He is returning for a church dissatisfied with His absence, a church filled with longing for Jesus to receive the final reward of His suffering.
 4. *There was a profound difference in the influence other priests had gained by political maneuvering and the authority John had from Heaven. To this day, many continue to seek influence, power, and control through political and humanistic means, but authority from Heaven is a completely different thing. The Spirit's power flows most powerfully through those who have laid their lives down.
- C. Assignment (vs 67-80)
1. Zechariah's prophecy: a priest prophesying ...
 2. V 80: a priest without a Temple
 - a. John did not live in the most influential city in his region. He was born to be a priest, but he did not have the privilege of being part of the vast Temple operation in Jerusalem. Ironically, being cut off from Jerusalem made John as a priest accomplish the greatest impact in his generation.
 - b. John had to choose to obey or disobey (Eli's sons). If he had stayed in Jerusalem, he could have been part of the temple system and a faithful priest. Perhaps he would have become an influential rabbi. He could have pursued activity and influence, but he chose to live in the wilderness where he became the priest he was born to be and the messenger God wanted him to be.
 3. Assignment: to prepare the way
 - a. How? Biggest stage? The Temple
 - 1) John could have drawn massive crowds in the cities of Israel, but massive crowds do not mean surrender and transformation.

- 2) You cannot confront our generation if your life is consumed by the same passions, hopes, dreams, solutions, and fears as everyone else in our generation. In short, it means you begin to order your life as though the Bible is true.
- b. This is the challenge, the trading in of what is perceived as power and influence for the dependence and weakness that allows the Spirit of God to move and work freely through ...

III. A new priesthood and a new Temple

A. Old Temple and priesthood

1. The priesthood had political influence but, like the Temple, was empty.
2. The system became very “religious”, full of activity.
 - a. *The enemy is not nearly as threatened by religious activity as we might imagine. He does not mind if we engage in activity and even acquire information as long as we do not become a living demonstration of the Word of God.
 - b. We live in a context of highly educated talkers with very few demonstrators.
3. The birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus means that the place of authority and power is no longer in a centralized Temple or held by a particular lineage. The place of authority and power is now living inside of every follower of Jesus.

B. New Temple and priesthood

1. We are part of a “Kingdom of priests,” which means God is our inheritance and we have no other inheritance in this age. When we make success our desire and destiny, we become susceptible to idolatry and often use other people and opportunities to obtain the success we want.
2. He wanted a passionate, covenantal love. A wife, not transactional services that resembled prostitution. Because the priests were functioning like the pagan priests—like a prostitute rather than a wife—God wanted someone to be bold enough to shut the system down. And this crisis is repeated when people seek blessing and an eternity in Heaven in return for attending church services, donating some money, avoiding bad habits, and doing a few other religious acts, but have no real interest in the person of God (intimacy).
3. *God chose a priest in the wilderness to prepare Israel for Jesus first coming, and He is looking for priestly people to prepare the nations for Jesus’ second coming.
But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. (Malachi 3:2)
I baptize you with water for repentance, but He Who is coming after me is mightier than I, Whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear his threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:11-12)

C. What will I do?

1. I believe God has spoken in these recent days.
 - a. God is calling His Church to Himself.
 - b. In some respects, the Church looks like the Temple at the time of John.

- c. The difference is that God is not doing a new work, He is calling us back to His only work.
 - d. *We so often skip death and jump right to resurrection. We love resurrection. We hate death (or dying to self).
 - e. We are a Kingdom of priests.
2. Two things
 - a. Intimacy with Jesus
 - b. Faithfulness (obedience)
 3. Am I willing to prepare the way for Jesus' return?



PREPARE THE WAY: TEMPLE

LUKE 1:5-25, 57-66, 80

MARCH 27, 2022 | PASTOR MATT WHITEFORD



FOLLOW UP FROM LAST WEEK'S LIVE IT OUT QUESTIONS

If your group met last week, was there anything you committed to doing after reflecting on Scripture during your group? Did you follow through with that commitment, what steps did you take (or not take), and is there any way we can help?

GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER (USE JUST ONE OR ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS TO CONNECT AS YOU START YOUR CONVERSATION)

1 What's one unexpected way God has worked in your life lately? How do you react if you don't sense God working?

QUICK REVIEW (OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE WHAT MOST STOOD OUT FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

Looking back at your notes from this week's message, was there anything you heard that caught your attention, encouraged, challenged, or confused you?

DIG DEEPER (OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURE OR COMPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURES FROM SUNDAY'S MESSAGE)

1 Someone read **LUKE 1:5-25** in their Bible.

What characteristics of Zechariah and Elizabeth made them good candidates for a special assignment from God?

Why do you think God waited so long to answer Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayers?

Why did Zechariah doubt the angel's word that he would have a son (v. 18)? What difference did he think a sign would make?

How can you relate to Zechariah's reaction? During what situations have you asked God for a sign or wished he would send one your way?

When Zechariah raised a question, the angel rebuked him for lack of faith but then reassured him concerning God's work. The angel announced he was Gabriel so John might recognize the mighty messenger before him. A faithful ambassador, Gabriel delivered the good news exactly as it had been given to him. The angel assured the priest he could believe the promise. But Zechariah asked for a sign because he did not believe the words of God's messenger. Thus, he would be silent and unable to speak until the promise was fulfilled. God's plans would not be performed on Zechariah's timetable but would be fulfilled in their proper time.

2 Someone read **LUKE 1:57-66, 80** in their Bible.

What was significant about Zechariah and Elizabeth naming their son John?

God silenced Zechariah after he questioned God. How did Zechariah respond when he got his voice back (v. 64)? Does it surprise you that the first thing he did was praise God? How do you think you would have reacted?

Zechariah's ability to speak returned with his obedient naming of John (vs. 63-64). But before Zechariah got his voice back, Elizabeth had shown the same obedience. No doubt Elizabeth's obedience and joy encouraged Zechariah. Months of pent-up silence brought forth a burst of praise. Zechariah praised God for providing redemption in Jesus. He also prophesied that his son John would play a pivotal role in God's plan of redemption.

Why was it meaningful that John lived in the wilderness (v. 80) instead of in Jerusalem where the Temple was?

How does Luke's Gospel demonstrate how special John the Baptist was in the verses that we read?

LIVE IT OUT (DISCUSS HOW YOU CAN LIVE OUT THE TRUTHS YOU JUST OBSERVED IN SCRIPTURE)

- 1** How might the church today look like the Temple of John's & Jesus' day?
- 2** What does it mean for you to be God's priest in this world?
- 3** If what we looked at tonight in God's Word is true, what needs to change in your life right now?

CLOSING PRAYER

If you have not already done so, take some time to share needs and praises to your group so that you can pray for one another, both during your group and throughout the week.

NEXT WEEK: Prepare the Way pt. 2

Take some time before Sunday to pray that God would use next Sunday's message and worship service on to transform the minds and lives of those who participate in it. Remember to take good notes during the message so you are ready to add to the discussion your home group will have!

PRAISE/PRAYER REQUESTS (TRY TO HAVE ONE OR A FEW PEOPLE PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME)

Use this space or the back of this paper to write the requests and find a way to share those with the group so you can be praying for each other during the week.

TIPS ON GROUP PRAYER

PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME: Anyone in the group is free to introduce a prayer request or praise during the prayer time. Once a topic is introduced, the group focuses on that request alone. Once it's covered, the group moves on to the next request or praise.

PRAY MORE THAN ONCE: If your group is focusing on one topic at a time, each person is encouraged to pray several times during the prayer time for those topics they feel most led to pray about. No one should be required to pray.

KEEP PRAYERS SHORT AND SIMPLE: Group prayer goes better when members keep their prayers short and to the point. When someone prays for a long time, it's hard for the other members to stay focused and long prayers tend to intimidate those who are just learning to pray out loud in a group.

How to Use this Discussion Guide

This guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create a healthy environment for Gospel community, growing in friendship, and becoming like Jesus together. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, please review the guide before your group meets to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel the need to ask every question during your group discussion. This guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help your group grow in Gospel community. In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead. We are praying for you too!

Visit cpmodesto.org/groupleaders to download the sermon discussion guide every week. Not in a Home Group, but want to be in one? Visit cpmodesto.org/homegroups and use the Home Group Finder!

COMMENTARY

LUKE 1:2-25, 57-66, 80

5-7 Zechariah was of the line of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. Elizabeth, too, was a descendent of Aaron. Luke pointed out that they were upright in the sight of God and not just in outward appearance. Luke underscored Zechariah's and Elizabeth's dedication by declaring that this couple blamelessly followed both God's commandments and His regulations. This couple had committed themselves to faithfully follow God's will. Luke indicated that they had no children. Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness caused them great sorrow and perhaps even produced in them a sense of inferiority. The reference to Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness along with their advanced ages points to the human impossibility of the birth of a son and emphasizes the miraculous nature of God's intervention in their lives with the birth of John the Baptist.

11-13 Zechariah encountered an angel of the Lord in the holy place. The term translated "appeared" often denotes divine manifestation. Of course, the elderly priest was startled at the angel's sudden arrival. Zechariah also was gripped with fear. The angel, seeing Zechariah's discomfort, quickly told him not to be afraid. Then the angel revealed his reason for being there. The angel told Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and was about to be answered. Both the prayer for a child and the prayer for the Messiah would receive an answer in the same event, for their son would prepare the way for the Messiah. The angel instructed Zechariah to name that son John. John means "the LORD has been gracious." Probably this name underscored God's grace as it was being extended either to Zechariah in giving him a son or, more likely, to Israel in sending the Messiah.

14-17 Then the angel informed Zechariah of the effect of his son's ministry. John would be a joy and delight to his father and mother. Further, many others would rejoice because of his birth. The people of Israel longed for a prophetic voice for they had not heard one for centuries. John would be that voice. The Savior about whom John would witness would bring and still is bringing joy to people throughout the world. The angel then stated certain characteristics that would lie behind John's effective ministry. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

18-20 Zechariah asked for some assurance regarding the truth of the angel's message. He protested that he and his wife were too old to produce a child. This expression of unbelief strongly displeased the heavenly messenger. The angel insisted he, Gabriel, had come to the temple from the presence of God to tell Zechariah "this good news." Gabriel announced that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the day when the imparted prophecy had been fulfilled.

21-22 The people waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary were surprised because he did not emerge when expected. Since Gabriel had rendered him speechless (v. 20), Zechariah was unable to pronounce the traditional Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24-26) upon the crowd. They realized he had seen a vision, likely because they noted his facial expressions and the excited signs he made with his hands.

24-25 Elizabeth withdrew and kept herself in seclusion for five months after she miraculously conceived. Why did she do this? Some speculate that she feared miscarrying during the early months of pregnancy. More likely she recognized that her unusual pregnancy would draw unwelcome attention if it became widely known. Better to have a restful start to a pregnancy that came so late in life.

57-66 Zechariah, as the angel had said, had his son named John. Then, after months of silence, he spoke. This resulted in both a private response and a public reaction. The people were amazed and fear came upon all those who lived around them. These events became the talk of people throughout the hill country of Judea. The people who heard about these events took them to heart. They wondered, What then will this child become? They recognized the Lord's hand was with him. They could not imagine the full import of what was taking place before their eyes.

80 We have no materials for filling up this brief outline of the 30 years that followed in the Baptist's life. The usual Jewish education, the observance of the Nazarite vow, the death of his parents while he was comparatively young, an early retirement from the world to the deserts that surrounded the western shores of the Dead Sea, study and meditation given to the Law and the Prophets, the steadfast waiting for the consolation of Israel, possible intercourse with the Essenes who lived in that region, or with hermit-teachers, like Banus, the master of Josephus (Life, c. 1), whose form of life was after the same fashion as his own: this we may surmise as probable, but we cannot say more. Whatever may have been the surroundings of his life, he entered upon his work in a spirit which was intensely personal and original.