

—{1}. **John 1:19-28. The Baptist and The Christ (The King Is Coming!)**

A. Introduction

1. Halfway through Autumn

- a. the great part of the leaves have fallen (except for willows!)
- b. Canadian Thanksgiving over
- c. All Saints Day has arrived today
- d. the stores have put up their decorations for the “Winter Holiday” and sales – a.k.a. Christmas
- e. there has been scurrying around our home to send parcels overseas
- f. so as Christmas approaches, we anticipate good family times

2. A time of expectation

- a. for our Scripture reading we had Isaiah 40:1-11
- b. its original and first application was that while Judah was to be exiled into Babylon, God would raise up His deliverer Cyrus to free them
- c. in NT times people anticipated a further fulfilment of those words
- d. Messiah would come and deliver the Jews from out of Roman bondage

3. Then came John, called the Baptist (more properly, “one who baptises”)

- a. his birth and mission announced to Zacharias the priest, his father
- b. mission: “16 “And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 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 1:16-17)
- c. John came baptising along the Jordan River valley (Summer 26AD)
- d. John has already referred to the witness of the Baptist (1:6-8, 15)
- e. John the Baptist had baptised Jesus (Dec 26AD / Jan 27AD – William Hendricksen^{—{2}.)}
- f. Jesus was tempted 40 days in the wilderness
- g. now it is about March 27AD; John has been preaching for 8 or 9 months, and is on the northern section of the Jordan, near Galilee
- h. word has gone out about him; many come to hear him: “Now while the people were in a state of expectation and

all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ," (Luke 3:15)

B. The Delegation

1. The Interrogation

- a. "This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" (John 1:19)
 - (A) not just Israelites, but often particular meaning in Gospel of John
 - (1) Judeans as opposed to Galileans (John was from Galilee)
 - (2) the religious establishment in Jerusalem, consisting of priests, Levites, elders and scribes; some Pharisees, some Sadducees – forming the bulk of opposition to Jesus
 - (B) Priests and Levites
 - (1) theological and ritual authorities, respectively –
 - (2) having religious and legal authority – "So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them and they will declare to you the verdict in the case." (Deuteronomy 17:9) – literally: "and you shall come unto the priests the Levites and unto the Judge ...", hence: "And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment." (do., NKJV)
 - (C) Who are you?
 - (1) now what is your name? ... birth? ... family?
 - (2) but what is your office? ... i.e., are you the Christ?
 - (3) Christ: Messiah (anointed) – priests, kings; also prophets
- b. "And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (John 1:20)
 - (A) sounds strange to our ears; a Jewish mode of expression
 - (B) (Paul spoke the same way in Romans 9:1, 1 Timothy 2:7)
 - (C) it means a formal and considered denial of the implication in their question that the Baptist was claiming to be the Christ
 - (D) but it was also at the same time a confession of the reality of the Christ who was to follow himself (Jesus whom he had baptised)
- c. "They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he *said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." (John 1:21)
 - (A) each time the Baptist's answers are more abrupt
 - (1) his mission is not to speak about himself

(2) neither is that the mission of Christians as Christ's witnesses

(B) **Are you Elijah?**

(1) prophecy of Malachi 4:6 – "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."

(2) Elijah taken alive into heaven: Jews anticipated he would return in similar fashion in end times accompanying Messiah

(3) Gabriel to Zacharias – 'in the spirit and power of Elijah'

(4) Jesus referred to the Baptist as Elijah (e.g., Matthew 17:10ff)

(5) but in the sense that the question was asked the answer is "I am not." – I am not a return of the historical Elijah

(6) even though his appearance (Matthew 3:4) was similar to that of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), he made no pretense to being Elijah

(C) **Are you the Prophet?**

(1) "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him." Moses' promise in Deuteronomy 18:15

(2) prolonged expectation of a very special prophet, therefore, "Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face," (Deuteronomy 34:10)

(3) so some Jews expected such a prophet to accompany the Messiah, or to be the Messiah:

(4) one to be a new Moses to lead them out of slavery to Rome

(5) "13 ¶ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:13-14)

(6) again the answer comes: "No"

d. to this point all the questions have been demanding 'yes' or 'no', all about John himself; but now comes ...

2. The Opportune Question

a. "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?" (John 1:22)

(A) these were merely delegates, spokesmen and investigators for the religious rulers back south in Jerusalem – they need an answer

(B) and again they want to find out about the Baptist

(C) but John uses it to turn the focus away from himself

- b. "He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." (John 1:23)
- (A) in a few words the Baptist sums up the message which we read earlier found in the opening verses of Isaiah 40
 - (B) while describing himself, he turns the attention away from himself
 - (C) in ancient times a herald would go ahead of the ruler, the king, in order to prepare the way; literally, to get the roads in shape
 - (D) the citizens were called upon to get out and prepare the way; to fill in the wash-outs; to remove the rubble from land-slides
 - (E) so that the King could come with nothing to hinder him
 - (F) this is what the Baptist was doing in a spiritual sense: "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4)
 - (G) so the Baptist points away from himself to the coming Lord; his message is, The King Is Coming!
- c. "24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (John 1:24-25)
- (A) verse 24 is slightly ambiguous; the various translations show this: but the point is that the Pharisees had a particular concern
 - (1) Zechariah 13:1, "In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity." (Zechariah 13:1)
 - (2) Exekiel 36:15, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols." (Ezekiel 36:25)
 - (3) they expected a general purification before the coming of the Messiah. Hence their question.
 - (4) if the Baptist didn't fit into their prophetic scheme as one of these personages, then what was he doing baptising people. That was the responsibility of the established religion?
 - (5) and baptism was to admit Gentile proselytes into Judaism; to baptise Jews was to treat them like Gentiles – what was this?
 - (B) now the question is really opened up and the Baptist can fulfill his mission and bear witness
- d. "26 John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27 It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (John 1:26-27)
- (A) the floodgates are open and they will be without excuse
 - (B) John's baptism is with water – a mere external – and the meaning is that there is One Coming whose baptism will be of a totally different nature and import – but that is for another day

- (C) and He is not only the One Coming but the Already Present One
 - (1) the Baptist has given the message: Prepare
 - (2) but they have not been listening over the past months
 - (3) so in them it is true what John has already said: "10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." (John 1:10-11)
- (D) the Baptist's mission is to witness to the Christ
 - (1) the Christ is so much greater than His herald
 - (2) the taking off of the master's shoes was the job of the lowest servant of the household – John is unworthy of even that
 - (3) the King, following the herald, is ever so superior to him
 - (4) so John, as it were, concludes the interview and interrogation by saying, "You are barking up the wrong tree; you are asking the wrong questions; I am nothing; open your eyes and look for the King who is already in your midst, and you have yet to see him!"
- e. "These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing." (John 1:28 NAS95)
 - (A) this Bethany – or, in some versions it is called by another name, Bethabara – is not that near Jerusalem, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, but as is pointed out, in Transjordan
 - (B) the name is given, showing how far the delegation had come, and that this is a plain, historical fact.

C. Conclusion

1. John an example of the witnessing Christian – always pointing away from oneself to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

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ASV American Standard Version of 1901
AV Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Bruce -- *The Gospel & Epistles of John*, by F. F. Bruce, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; 1983
BM - *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC - *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, MI:
John, by Merrill C. Tenney
EGT - *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton; 1903
John, by Marcus Dods
NICNT - *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*
The Gospel according to John, by Leon Morris
NTC - *New Testament Commentary*, by William Hendriksen; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI; 1954
RWP - *Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TEC -- *The Gospel according to John*, by George Allen Turner & Julius R. Mantey, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; ca 1965

2. William Hendriksen, NTC, p 93.