

Meeting the messenger

In the first encounter reported by John, we meet John the Baptist. He is the first person to appear in John's Gospel. The disciple John was one of those who received the message and ministry of John the Baptist, and was baptised together with Andrew, in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

Preparation! 'Prepare the way' was the key message of John the Baptist. He was the messenger of the Lord Himself, and he prepared hearers to follow the Lamb. We too need to be prepared if we are to follow the Lamb; hence the importance of this first encounter.

John the Baptist was the only one to call Christ, 'the Lamb', and the disciple John is the only Gospel writer to record this. In the story recounted by John, we read, 'The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"'

The same thing happened the next day, and two disciples of John the Baptist were among those listening. We are to begin following the Lamb in the same way that the disciple John started. We begin when a messenger, like John the Baptist, calls to us to 'behold the Lamb'.

John the disciple wrote a lot about John the Baptist, and with good reason. John was highlighting the depth of what the Baptist understood. He was also showing us the attitude that is needed if we are to follow the Lamb. In fact, John the Baptist really demonstrated the nature of the Lamb in the way he prepared others. 'He must increase, but I must decrease.'

References:

John 1:29, 36 John 3:30
Matt 11:10 Mark 1:2
Luke 7:27

Further Study

John 1

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 7

The ministry of a messenger

John the Baptist preached a message of repentance, and multitudes of people came to hear him and were baptised for repentance. He declared that the kingdom of God was at hand, and he taught many to believe by his example. In particular, he taught them to receive the word. He taught them how to receive the testimony of a messenger; one who was 'sent'. In this way, he prepared the followers to receive Christ. This is what we are to learn from this first encounter.

Prior to John's ministry, in fact, ever since the ministry of the Old Testament prophets, the nation of Israel had been given over to blindness, to a 'spirit of deep sleep', just as Isaiah prophesied. Now, John the Baptist was to be like a lamp, one who would open the eyes of the people. This is the task of every messenger, and this is the very first impact of hearing a genuine messenger. The penalty of blindness cast upon us is reversed, and for a season we have the opportunity to see the Lamb of God. For a season! Sadly, we read that many hearers of that day walked in the light, but only for a season. And when the 'greater witness' came, namely the Lamb, the Messiah, they were not willing to come to Him.

We read that John the Baptist came to turn the hearts of fathers to the children, and to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of God. He challenged religious leaders to show the fruit of repentance, not just flee from the wrath of God.

References:

Isa 29:10 Luke 10:16
Matt 10:40 Mal 4:5-6
John 5:35-36, 40

Further Study

John 5

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 8

Prepare the way!

John the Baptist was preparing people to follow the Lamb. He had been called by God to cry out, 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight'. Hundreds of years before, prophets such as Isaiah and Malachi had foretold that a 'messenger' would come. This messenger would prepare the people to receive the Messiah. 'Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low', Isaiah said. The messenger they were speaking about was John the Baptist. The ministry of John the Baptist was to be like the building of a highway; valleys were to be exalted, and hills were to be levelled. In other words, John the Baptist would raise up faith and bring down pride. He would call for repentance.

It was also said that John would come in the spirit of Elijah. Elijah was another of the Old Testament prophets. He would 'turn the hearts of the fathers to the children' and 'the disobedient to the wisdom of the just'. From disobedience to wisdom! Remember, John the disciple, who was soon to follow Jesus, was first of all 'trained' by John the Baptist. He was prepared by John the Baptist and so, at the right time, he could turn and follow the Lamb.

The Baptist was teaching countless men and women that the first crisis of faith and commitment is not about receiving Christ, but about receiving the one whom He sends, who brings the message of Christ. If we can't receive the ones He sends to speak to us, we will not be able to receive Him.

References:

Matt 3:2-3 Mal 3:1
Isa 40:4 Luke 1:17
John 13:20 Luke 10:16

Further Study

Isa 40

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 9

Revealing the Lamb

Can we see just how important this first encounter is? Can we receive, hear from, and respond to those who are sent as messengers of the Lamb? Can we recognise their humble demeanour? If we receive the ones He sends, then we will receive Him. And when we receive Him, we also receive the Father who sent Him. This is how life proceeds from God.

John the Baptist was teaching this very thing in preparing the way for the Messiah. He was not the Light; he was pointing to the Light. He had come baptising for one purpose only: 'That He [Christ] should be revealed ... therefore I came baptising with water'. His attitude and commitment was to reveal someone else. He was not bearing witness to himself, but to the One who would follow. This is the example and impact of a genuine messenger. This is the kind of testimony that cannot be ignored.

Multitudes did come to repentance. There must have been thousands who were hearing his message and being baptised. We read that 'Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him'. John was not working miracles, and he was not showing any signs. He was just preaching the word. He was opening their eyes to the light. He was declaring an end to the penalty that God had laid upon the nation of Judah, through Isaiah, hundreds of years earlier. This penalty was that 'in seeing they would not see,' and that 'in hearing they would not hear'. The nation had been so disobedient that God removed their sight. The ongoing generations of fathers and children could not see the truth because of their disobedience.

References:

John 1:8, 31 Matt 3:5
John 10:41 Luke 1:79
Matt 13:14 Isa 6:9-10

Further Study

Col 3

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 10

Turning the fathers to the children

John the Baptist came to turn the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers. He was also to turn the disobedient back to the wisdom of God. There was about to be an awakening, a rediscovery of the covenant given to the fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It would be as if these fathers would once again recognise their offspring in the covenant. Men and women were to turn their hearts back to the fathers, and fathers were to turn their hearts to their children coming after them. Seeing, hearing, and turning, they were to learn the way of God Himself – giving to one another, and receiving from one another. This was the birthplace of fellowship. This was the preparation for the revelation of the Lamb.

John the Baptist was preparing people to believe the testimony of God that would be revealed by His coming messenger, Christ. This is exactly how the Baptist prepared the people. By hearing him, they were learning to receive the One who sent him. We must be prepared in the same manner: hearing, believing, receiving.

The ones who are sent to preach the gospel are revealing Christ. We must hear them, and we must believe their testimony. If we do not first receive the ones who are sent, we will not be able to follow the Lamb. Many did believe John the Baptist, the messenger who was sent to precede the Messiah. Many were prepared. Many pressed in with ‘violence’ to enter the kingdom. Others did not believe John’s word; his testimony about someone else. So when Jesus came, sent by the Father, testifying about the Father, they did not believe Him either.

References:

Matt 11:12 Mal 4:6
Phil 4:15 John 1:29
Mark 1:2

Further Study

Acts 13

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 11