

"John's Missional Destiny" - Luke 1:11-25
Wednesday 11/28/18 – Jeff Lyle

When the fulness of time came about on earth, God determined to set in motion His eternal plan to rescue the human race from the consequences of sin and the clutch of the devil. The Father would send His only Son to come and deliver all of those who would turn to Him. Before Jesus appeared, however, God graciously sent an alarm throughout Israel in the form of John the Baptizer, the forerunner to the Messiah. Jesus declared that John was the greatest prophet ever born. His ministry went up like a signal flare and then faded into the shadows with the same quickness that it began. What can we learn from the ministry of John? His life is not merely one of history. Just as the Father sent the forerunner before the first coming of Jesus, we must expect to see this type of ministry repeated as the Second Coming of Jesus approaches. God is raising up forerunners in this generation with callings similar to what He assigned to John. What exactly should we be looking for as the time approaches?

I. There Was A Move from Heaven (11-14)

"11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth..."

There had been about four-hundred years of prophetic silence between the last Old Testament prophet Malachi and the time of Luke chapter one. The last thing that Malachi wrote down was a promise from God to send His messenger who would come to Israel in the spirit and power of Elijah. The people of Israel were not ignorant of this promise, but 400 years of silence from heaven had likely dulled their expectation of this promise to be fulfilled in their lifetime. God NEVER forgets His promises. As Heaven's wisdom had reached the pre-determined date on earth's calendar, God dispatched the angel Gabriel to begin to proclaim that Messiah's time was approaching. Gabriel's first stop was in the temple to encounter an elderly, faithful priest named Zechariah who had been praying for a long time that God might give him and his wife a son. In a highly supernatural scene, Gabriel bursts into Zechariah's presence with the astounding news that his prayers were about to be answered and his wife would conceive a baby boy whom they would name John. This move from Heaven ushered in a thirty-

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three-year timeline that would climax with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, would become the joyful, glad parents of the forerunner to Israel's Messiah.

II. There Was A Mission for the Forerunner (15-17)

A. A mission of consecration (15) - "...for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."

After declaring that his name would be John, the next characteristic spoken over this child's life was that he would be significant in the eyes of the Lord. John's destiny was to "be great before the Lord". Immediately, Zechariah would know that there was something more that was attached to John than the fact that he would be born to very old parents. When Gabriel declared emphatically that John would be forbidden from drinking wine and strong drink during his entire lifetime, Zechariah would have known that this level of consecration unto the Lord was intense. Gabriel then added that the baby would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the time of his gestation within Elizabeth's womb. What an amazing description of this baby! Interestingly, the family of John the Baptist is the only family specifically noted in Scripture where every member was filled with the Holy Spirit. Zechariah was Spirit-filled (Luke 1:67) and Elizabeth was also (Luke 1:41).

B. A mission of persuasion (16) - "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God..."

John's mission was almost exclusively one of proclamation. Later, when he begins his public ministry, he is portrayed as a dogmatic, unapologetic preacher of repentance. John is Heaven's alarm going off in Israel, seeking to awaken the slumbering people of God. He would challenge the status quo of his day by calling people to examine their hearts and then repent as the coming of Messiah drew near. Many people responded to John's intense message of repentance. In our modern day, much preaching has gone soft. More like manipulative salesmanship than holy thunder, modern preaching seems to always seek the path of least resistance. John would have none of that. Dark, cold times call for radiant, heated messages that serve to provoke a response in those who hear. John's anointed words persuaded many to come alive and prepare for the coming of the Lord.

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C. A mission of transformation (17) - "...he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

In fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy four-hundred years earlier, John is marked as the forerunner to the Messiah. Zechariah would have known immediately that what Gabriel was speaking over his forthcoming son was rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. As Elijah had a bold, declarative spirit and influential power, so would John. So, impacting would John's preaching be that generational restoration would occur between fathers and their children. Those who had become either willfully disobedient to the Lord or ignorantly disobedient would repent and embrace the wisdom that is associated with those who have been justified by faith. The summary statement about John's mission is that he would be the one whom God used to prepare the people for the ministry of the Messiah which would follow him. What an incredible honor to be chosen and sent forth as a forerunner to the coming of Jesus! We should expect to see very similar callings and sendings prior to the Second coming of Jesus. Men and women will be stirred and dispatched to call the sleeping Church to repentance. Dead religion will be exposed. Heartfelt commitments will be required of all. John was not only a forerunner to Jesus, He is the prototype for what we expect to see the Lord release prior to the return of Christ to earth.

III. There Was A Miracle in a Family (18-24)

A. Zechariah lost his voice (18-20) - "And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."

This move from Heaven was too important for it to be tainted with human doubt. Though Zechariah had been praying for a long time for a son, when the angel came to declare that his prayers had been answered, Zechariah did not believe Gabriel. Consequently, Zechariah was made into a sign and wonder as his voice was taken from him. There is no getting around it: God took Zechariah's voice

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away because he spoke doubt. For the next nine months, the father of the forerunner would not utter a word.

B. The people received a sign (21-23) - "And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. 23 And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home."

We need to recognize the massive impact of what is occurring here. Remember that God had been silent to Israel for four centuries. Now, on some random day, the priest Zechariah stumbles out of the temple area where he had been offering incense having lost his ability to speak. So dramatic was the scene that the people knew quickly that something supernatural had occurred. God was releasing vision. God was reaching out to His people. God was moving. The people would have found themselves somewhere between utter shock and overflowing joy. God was not done with Israel.

C. Elizabeth received a child (24-25) - "After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

While the conception of Jesus in Mary's virgin womb was supernatural, Zechariah and Elizabeth conceived John through normal human reproductive means. When it was clear to Elizabeth that she was pregnant, her response was to begin to hide herself away. She likely did not wish to have any human drama connected to what she knew by then was a God-ordained prophet in her womb. In Elizabeth's day, for a woman to not be able to conceive was a reproach. She expresses deep gratitude for the Lord having removed her reproach. She wanted the pregnancy to be sacred between her and her Lord, so she kept herself hidden for several months, likely pondering the grace and goodness of God upon her life. Elizabeth's example motivates us to never give up on seeking God for what our heart desires, even when it is delayed far past the time we might have hoped for. Whereas Zechariah responded in doubt, Elizabeth responded in delight.

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IV. There Was a Mantle for John (76-80)

A. John's prophetic destiny (76-77) - "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins..."

After John's birth, Zechariah received back his voice. Filled with Spirit, Zechariah prophesied over John. He had been given nine months to purify his trust in what the Lord was doing. As he spoke over John's destiny, he rightly identified him as the prophet of God. Later, after John's death, Jesus would confirm that John was the greatest prophet ever born to a woman. That is a dramatic title considering all of the amazing prophets in Israel's history! Zechariah had also discerned the forerunner attribute of John's prophetic destiny, preparing the way of Messiah. Also, with pinpoint accuracy, Zechariah prophesied that John would declare the means of Israel's salvation and the availability of forgiveness from all their sins. It is likely that, due to his age, Zechariah was not alive approximately thirty years later when John burst onto the landscape of Israel in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. Yet, the old first-time father saw it clearly by faith on that day when he held John in his arms as a baby boy.

B. John's preparatory calling (78-79) - "...because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Zechariah was able to see the mercy of God to Israel in what was occurring. He knew that his own son was the sign that the Messiah was soon to come. Mary had been living with Zechariah and Elizabeth for a few months, so Zechariah likely understood by now that the Messiah was just a few months behind the forerunner. It is beautiful that Zechariah uses such words of hope - mercy, sunrise, light, guidance and peace. These were precious days for Zechariah as the move of heaven was appearing on earth. We, like Zechariah, need to be full of the Holy Spirit to recognize what God is doing on earth in our generation. As we move closer to the final events before the second coming of Jesus, is our discernment seeing doom and gloom or radiant hope?

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C. John's intimacy and hiddenness (80) - "And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel."

All of John's childhood, adolescence and young adulthood is summed up in this verse. It seems that a separation from the world was the primary characteristic of John before he emerged as the baptizer. He grew physically and spiritually in ways that were aligned with his mission from God. At some point, John withdraws into the Judean wilderness where he lived as an ascetic, eating locusts and dressing in a camel hair garment with a leather belt (Mark 1:6). Interestingly, even his appearance would have connected his ministry to that of Elijah. In 2 Kings 1:8, Elijah is described wearing the same articles of clothing. The mission of a forerunner will require a high level of separation from the world, an abstaining from anything that might cloud judgement and intimate isolation unto the Lord. These were the things that described John the Baptizer's ministry. All of it culminated with the high privilege of pointing out to Israel that Jesus was their Messiah.