

Visions and Revelations

Message 8: John the Baptist

Note: This is a lightly edited transcript meant to aid saints in personal and small group fellowship and pursuing.

Dear brothers, I'm very happy we have another Lord's Day and we can share something more. I have heard different reports: many saints have been very helped by these messages and for that I am very appreciative. But you have to realize that these messages are not messages. They are for enlightening, for giving life, and most of all, for building up healthy saints. Additionally, we have a healthy church life, so no message ends up just being a message. Every message should begin a week long pursuing together. The brothers will prepare material for you just like the Chinese speaking saints do for my messages in Chinese. I heard they prepared a lot of material for you saints to get into every day.

My hope is that in July, by the Lord's mercy, the virus will be over, and we can come together properly at that time. Every saint can come to the meeting. You will be different, you will no longer be a churchgoer, but you will know how to labor with the Lord. You will know how to spend time with the Lord in your daily life. You will know how to be with Christ. You will know how to be a pursuing one with the brothers together. Then, you will become a blessing to the church. Do you have a picture as I do? I have a picture. This virus seemingly is a frustration, but the Lord allowed it to save us from our oldness, to save us from a church life focused on the Lord's Day meetings, gospel meetings, or home meetings, and to bring us into something new. Instead of focusing on these meetings, every day we can try to gain Christ, to win Christ, and to have a little more of Christ. Every day we can spend time with Christ and in turn also with the brothers. Then, when we come together again by the Lord's mercy, I hope there will be stronger meetings, a stronger testimony, and a stronger outflow of life, through the preaching of the gospel, and also the dispensing life to one another. I hope that the whole church life will be somewhat different.

So brothers, I hope that you and I can treasure these 30 minutes together. Every Lord's Day is a 30-40 minute message, that can stir up our appetites so that we desire to have more, to enjoy more, to partake of Christ more, and to be with the brothers more. These messages can become a kind of food to nourish all the saints. In turn, the whole church life can become healthy.

Now we come to this week, the eighth message: John the Baptist. We covered Joseph, Zechariah, Mary, the shepherds, the wise men, and the star. Now we come to the eighth message, another person. Who is he? John the Baptist. When I talk about John the Baptist, everybody knows him. Everybody knows there's a famous figure and his name is John the

Baptist. What did he do? He baptized Jesus. However, very few realize his lifelong learning, lifelong serving, and lifelong effort all started in a very glorious way. The peak was when he baptized Jesus. Eventually though, the latter part of his life was failure. Eventually he faded away, which was right, because even he himself said “He (Jesus) shall increase and I shall decrease.”

So what was his process? If we look at John’s life, he came into being by the blessing of God through the speaking of Gabriel. Praise the Lord for that. The angel Gabriel said that John the Baptist would have the Spirit and the power of Elijah. Brothers, consider that. There were so many prophets in the Old Testament, but here the angel marked out one, Elijah. Of course Elijah is very impressive. Elijah, Elisha, these are very impressive prophets, but what was the difference with Elijah? Elijah’s life is geared with a fight, a fight for Lord’s interest, a fight for the Lord’s testimony, a fight for the profit of the Israelites, so that they can be one with God. He fought using all kinds of miracles. He told the heavens to close for a period of time and ravens came to feed him. Then he was fed by a widow whose son eventually died, and Elijah resurrected the son. Then he competed with and challenged the prophets of Baal, making a distinction between their gods and his God. Eventually, he did many marvelous things. This is a person God desires and loves. God would say, I love having a prophet who doesn’t just prophesy about what’s going to happen, or say “oh you people...,” or “the Lord bless you.” No. He wants a person who says I’m fighting. I’m not just a speaking person; my existence is for God’s testimony. My living, my operation, and my labor is all for God’s testimony. This is marvelous. John was this kind of person.

When John was in his late 20’s, he realized more and more what he had, so he said I’m going to fulfill my ministry. What is my ministry? I will be the forerunner of Jesus. I want to pave the way for Jesus. I want to pave the way for the Son of God and for the new age to come in. So what did he do? He didn’t go to Jerusalem. He didn’t follow his father to be a priest. He gave up everything of Judaism. Instead, he went to the wilderness and became a voice there. Many times we want to be an honored or respected person. Very few people say I just want to be a voice. What was his voice? “Repent, for the kingdom of God is near!” That’s a big voice.

This voice was accompanied by his living. He ate locust and wild honey. He wore camel’s skin and declared “Repent!” Who was he? He was a voice of one crying in the wilderness. You know brothers, you have to learn to appreciate this. He says I want everything from God alone. I want everything God desires. You know why I eat locust, or why I eat wild honey? Because they are clean. I don’t do wild things. I don’t partake of anything that’s unclean. I only partake of things that are clean. Yet, I am not in the form of a priest, of a Pharisee, of a Sadducee, or of a scribe. No! I live such a simple life because I am only interested in God’s testimony and God’s desire.

More than that, what did John put on? Camel's clothes. Camels are not clean, they're unclean animals. This means that if you look at John's inside he is very clean, but if you look at his living, he is right in the midst of sinners. He wasn't clean to a point where he was untouchable, where he might say I'm a God-man, I'm a spiritual man, don't touch me. No, he's a rather relaxed person. How was his life? His life was very godly, to a point where he refrained himself from beef and lamb. He only ate locust and wild honey. John could say, I am so clean inside, I am so one with God inside, yet where am I? I am with all men, especially with the Jews. So I am a voice calling out to the Jews, the Judaizers who are in the Jewish religion, telling them repent, change your mind! Turn from what you are in. Turn from the religious deeds, the religious words, the religious talk, the religious behavior, the religious living, the religious everything that you do. Those are things related to God, yet without God. Let me tell you, come out of it! You must have God himself! You must have God, so repent!

What does repent mean? A change, a turn of your mind. Come out from your Jewish religion, from your Jewish practices, from the law of commandments, and from the rituals. Come out of it all and come to the wilderness. Seemingly there is nothing here but for you to be baptized. What does that mean? Baptism is a termination of yourself. Being baptized means you changed your mind so your old thought, old mind, old way of thinking, old expectations, and old ambitions are all over; everything is over. I changed my mind and I dropped them. How do I testify that I dropped them? I go down to the water, I get baptized, I buried my old man, I terminated myself, so when I come out of the water, I am a new creation. I can be a new creation. That's what Paul says happens with us Christians. Today many Christians think baptism is a ritual for you to join in to be a member of a certain church. Many times, I ask a Christian, are you a Christian? No. Are you a believer of Jesus? Yes. Then why you are not a Christian? I have not decided where should I be baptized, or which congregation I should join. Brothers, you have to realize even that is old. You should come out of it. You should say I am just a terrible person, I am a sinful person. I believe in Jesus. The blood of Jesus cleanses me from all of my sins. I am saved, hallelujah I am saved! Isn't that good enough? The Lord says yes. Then why do we need baptism? It is a testimony that I am saved, I have Christ, and I have everything of Christ. All of my old things are gone so now I testify, I went into the water, I buried them, and when I come out of the water, now I have the newness of life.

So if you read the outline, point C - i, talks about baptism. Baptism indicates termination and burial. When Christians are baptized, they testify "I have Christ. To me, the world is terminated and my old man is buried." Then, being raised from the water indicates germination. What a marvelous baptism; we experience both termination and germination. When I come out of the water, there is germination, so I should walk in newness of life. This was John's ministry. It was very simple. I see something of God. I'm going to pave the way. How do I pave the way? I will bring people out of the Jewish religion so that they can turn to Christ. I am in the wilderness, but I am very clean. Look, I only eat locust and wild honey. I am so clean. More than that, I am in the

midst of fallen men, even fallen Israelites. This is why I have camel's clothes, to tell you, you are unclean. You need to be clean. You need to repent.

You know brother, this is really marvelous. At this time, when everything is so marvelous, you know what happened, Jesus came to him. Jesus' word was very simple, now can you baptize me? They know each other because they are cousins. Growing up, they should have seen each other and known each other, so Jesus came to him to be baptized. John should have been very clear because the first time they met, both were still in their mothers' wombs. In Elizabeth's womb, John began jumping and leaping, because he saw Jesus' mother Mary coming. So after John was born and grew up, he knew the stories. He knew Jesus very well. He knew his mission was to introduce Jesus. So Jesus came and told him, please baptize me. And John's word was, no, no, no, that's too much. Now I should come to you. That is an interesting statement. Let me ask you, how many statements can you make? You might say, Lord Jesus oh that is too much, you are too high, and I am too low. I am not qualified. Another thing you might say is Lord Jesus, no, no, no, don't say that, you are the savior, I am only your voice, your pioneer, so now how about you baptize me? John said something very interesting. His statement was, I should have come to you, but how come you came to me? This is 50% right. What is right? John should come to Jesus. What is wrong? But you come to me. Jesus' answer is even more sweet. He said, suffer me for now at the moment. I know you should come to me. Yes, you should come to me. Yes, I am your savior, but for the time being, remember I am a man. As a man, I need to be baptized, even though I am holy and I am sinless. Even as such a holy, and sinless man, I need to be baptized. So Jesus came out from the water and began a new life. Praise the Lord for this.

So, John suffered Jesus and baptized Him. After He was baptized, something was seen, first by Jesus, then by John, and finally by a lot of other people. What did they all see? They saw heaven opened and the Spirit come down to Him as a dove. The Holy Spirit came down. The Holy Spirit is only mentioned in the New Testament, not in the Old Testament. When the Holy Spirit is mentioned, it is always related to some divine action. For example, the Holy Spirit came to Mary, so she begat Jesus. The mention of the Holy Spirit is so closely related to such divine actions that, eventually, when the operating of the Holy Spirit is mentioned, it is simply called "the Spirit". "The Spirit" leads the Lord to the wilderness—that is the Holy Spirit. So when the Holy Spirit comes to Him, it means a lot. It means God is with Him, God is happy with Him, and God is satisfied with Him. God even abides in Him. The Holy Spirit comes to Jesus and abides with Him.

Now God says to Jesus, "Oh, my Son, now are you ready to serve? Are you ready to preach the gospel? Are you ready to fulfill your ministry so that the whole human race can be saved?" How marvelous is this? When Jesus was baptized, He saw heaven opened. John testifies he also saw it, but the word "behold" means many more people should have seen it as well. There is a voice, heard by everybody, which declares "This is my beloved Son. In Him I am well pleased. I am

happy with this. Hey, all of you, look! You want to be baptized; you are in the wilderness, you do a lot of things, but please, come to my Son. In My Son, I am well pleased.” What a glorious declaration God has made concerning Christ. What does it mean? It means: love the Lord, but have the Lord; pursue the Lord, but have the Lord; serve the Lord, but have the Lord; do things for the Lord, but have the Lord; become a servant of the Lord, but have the Lord; do everything with the Lord, for the Lord, but you must have the Lord, because only having Christ is what pleases God. God would say, “I want you to have Jesus Christ. Not things of Jesus Christ, not truths of Jesus Christ, not messages concerning Jesus Christ, not works developing Jesus Christ testimony. No, you can do all of these things—you need to do them, you have to do—but when you do it, please do it with Jesus Christ.” It is only with Jesus Christ that God says, “I am well pleased.” What a marvelous thing.

Do you realize what’s happened? It’s a very happy scene: Jesus was baptized, God was announced—John even heard it—and Jesus also told John, “Now, you baptize me first, as this is according to the righteousness. After that, please, I will baptize you. You said it yourself: you should have come to Me. I never denied it. I never told you ‘No, you don’t need to come to me.’ Now I baptize you since you baptized Me.” I believe that was the happiest moment, Jesus was baptized, hallelujah, and the people heard, “This is my beloved Son,” but for some reason, afterwards, John began to talk with his companions, his coworkers, and ask, “Now what should we do? We should all go follow Jesus.” Many will say, “No, no, no! We finally have come out of the Jewish religion, come out of Jerusalem. We finally got settled, finally have a happy life in the wilderness, and now you tell me to follow Jesus? To go back? No, no, no! We can’t do this.” You know, eventually these people’s voices kidnapped John the Baptist. He can’t follow the Lord anymore. I think some would even say to him, “John, you want to be baptized?” and John would reply, “Yes, I would like to be baptized by Jesus.” Then people would say, “If you are baptized by Jesus, then you owe us. We followed you all of these years. What happened to you? Now you are going to follow Jesus, but who will be our leader?” You know, many times in the church life the fleshly ones, the soulish ones, the young ones, have a lot of opinions: “Why is the meeting so long?” “Why do you preach?” “Why is that testimony good (or not so good)?” “Why should the church life be like this?” You know, a lot of these voices eventually kidnap many elders. Many servants of God cannot go on—cannot properly lead—because of all the voices. So, dear saints, let me tell you: please don’t be a voice causing problems. John is clear. John is the leader. If he is the leader and he says, “I’m going to be baptized by Jesus as I desired,” then they all should say, “Let us all go.” John also should have said, “I don’t force you to come. If you don’t want to do that, please go your way. But I’m going.”

It is a sad thing, after all this, that the disciples say to John, “No, no, no, no, no, no, no”. After all the “No’s”, John realizes he can’t leave. But he’s such a good brother; he even made a few testimonies. First, he brings two of his favorite disciples, John and Andrew, two who would later be among the twelve apostles. He brings these two on a walk to bring them to Jesus. When he

sees Jesus coming then he shouts to these two, “Behold, the Lamb of God! Don’t follow me, go follow Jesus.” John is such a good, pure brother.

Second, the people ask him, “Are you the Christ?” “No,” he replies, “I’m not the Christ.” Then, when Jesus began to preach the gospel and to baptize people, then more people went to Jesus for baptism than went to John. So people speak with John, “Oh, listen, listen: many people go to Jesus now.” John’s word to them is, “He shall increase, I shall decrease.” Isn’t that a sweet statement? But if he could have said, “He shall germinate, I shall terminate,” then I think everything would be better. It’s not “decrease” and “increase,” but it is you should be totally gone, disappear; only Christ still remains. His statement is so spiritual, but it is not after God. God says, “I don’t want you to decrease. I want you to follow me”. Many times I hear the brothers say, “Oh, I will decrease”. With me, there’s just a kind of funny feeling. No, the Lord doesn’t want you to *decrease*, the Lord wants you to *disappear*. Then your whole person is geared only to Christ and to Christ alone.

John is such a good brother, he was such a success, but he got involved with politics. I don’t know how it happened, but he began to talk with Herod. Maybe many people came to him, telling him Herod did something not right, so he got stirred up, went to Herod, and told him “No. This is wrong, you should not marry your brother’s wife.” Then what happened? Herod just put him in prison. He was in prison with a lot of feelings. I think this may be the last thing which the Lord does in order to tell him, “You want to do work? No, the work will be gone. I put you in prison so you can’t do a thing. Now, can you turn to me—to Jesus?”

Now John was in the prison waiting. This part is hard to understand--waiting for what? He was waiting for Jesus to come to save him. But nothing came. Eventually, he sends his own disciples to see Jesus, and they ask, “Are you the coming one?” This is a striking question. He knew Jesus even from his mother’s womb; he was delivered and Jesus was delivered; they grow up knowing each other, all their life knowing what’s going to happen, and yet here he asks, “Are you the one who is coming? Are you the one, or are we waiting for another one who’s coming? If you *are* the one, why don’t you rescue me? Do something! Save my situation!” He didn’t realize his situation was a frustration. I tell you this, brothers: many times we don’t understand. We do things for the Lord, we do things for flesh, we do things in a way that we even feel the Lord blesses us. Eventually our doing is a frustration to the Lord for building up the Lord’s testimony.

After all this, John was killed. You feel sad for that, right? When the daughter says, “I need the head of John”, Herod though he feels reluctant kills John because of his promise to the daughter. What a glorious pioneer for the Lord. What a faithful servant for the Lord. All these years, yet it ends up so sad. But Let me ask you, what else can be done? He will have to go. He is supposed to be a pioneer of Jesus, but now he’s a competitor of Jesus. Jesus baptizes, he baptizes. Jesus

preaches, he preaches. You are his pioneer to help the real thing, but eventually you become his frustrations. But let's not develop this too much.

After John was killed, or maybe even before, the Lord Jesus makes very good comments of him. He says, "You know, you go out for what? To see those with beautiful garments? Let me tell you this man, John, he's greater than all the prophets in the Old Testament. Why? They all predict about me, foreseeing about me, saying something about me. John saw me. John paved the way for me. He's the concluding prophet of the Old Testament. He is greater than all these prophets in the Old Testament because he saw me physically." I don't know what psychology Jesus had, but it is possible he could be very sad: "I don't want it to be like this. I wish he could be one of my top disciples." He could have been number one, if he followed Jesus, if he baptized Jesus and then said, "Now Jesus, it's your turn. Baptize me. Everything of mine is over, terminated. I have a new beginning." Wouldn't he have been one of the most useful disciples of the Lord? But the Lord does say he's greater than all the prophets.

To you, the Lord would ask, "Do you know, you are the smallest in the kingdom? You are really small. Who are you, Mr. Nobody? Do you know the Bible? No, not much. Do you know the truth? No, not much. Do you bear fruit? No, not much. Are you really desperate after Christ? No, not much." But the Lord says, "But you are much greater than John. John saw me, yet you have me! You have me in your heart, you have me in your spirit. I'm one with you, and you can be one with me. You are in the reality of the Kingdom of the Lord."

Lord have mercy, and may we learn a lot from this. May we say, "Lord, I want to have the reality of baptism. I want to have the reality of running after you. I want to have the reality of being your servant, your pioneer fighting for your interest. And, Lord, protect me from any other considerations such that my focus, my consideration, my life is only for the beloved Son—God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ. If God is pleased with Him, I can only be well pleased *in* him." May the Lord have mercy.