

John the Baptist

#0158

Study Given by W. D. Frazee

[Following medley of songs about Christ's coming]

He is coming brethren. He's coming soon. Yet a little while, and He that shall come *will* come and will not tarry. And surely the prayer of every heart is, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." Why doesn't He come? Why hasn't He come *already*? Is there a *reason*? Can we *know* anything about it? If we can, and there is something we can *do* about it, we *want* to. Don't we?

God is never taken by surprise. He plans all things *from* eternity *to* eternity. The future is all laid out before Him. In the plan of salvation which has been going on for nearly 6,000 years, God has various things coming in *sequence*. Certain things must happen before certain *other* things can happen. The death of Jesus on the cross was preliminary to and preparatory to His mediatorial work in the Holy Place in the sanctuary above. The pleading of His blood in the Holy Place was preparatory to the final work of blotting out sins in the Most Holy Place. And while that work is going on in Heaven, there is a special work of purification among the people of God here in this world that must go on. That work must be carried to completion. And when that work is finished, Jesus will come.

When the Savior came the first time, there was a messenger who heralded His advent; a messenger who prepared the way before Him. Isaiah and Malachi had prophesied of that preparatory work. In Isaiah 40, the work of John the Baptist was clearly brought to view. And Malachi had prophesied, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me."

These predictions were fulfilled in the life and work and ministry of John the Baptist. But what God sought to do for Israel through John the Baptist before the *first* advent of Jesus He seeks to do today on a much wider scale and in a much more thorough way before the *Second* Advent of Christ.

It is evident that those who were prepared to welcome Jesus at His first advent were not *perfect* men and women; they had much to learn and much to overcome. Those early disciples of Jesus who had been prepared through the ministry of John the Baptist still had much to learn and overcome. Nevertheless, they were the result of John the Baptist's work. And Christ found that, with the preparation that John had given them, He could carry them on to a more complete preparation that He designed to give them, the fruition of which we see in the work of the early church on the Day of Pentecost and onward.

But when Jesus comes, He is not coming to deal with halfway prepared people. He is not coming to take people who have gone halfway up the ladder and then carry them on from there. Not at all. When Jesus comes, He will find a people

fully prepared. Revelation is very clear on that. Those who accept the messages of chapter 14 are represented as golden grain, ripe for the harvest of God, and the testimony is that the harvest is *ripe* (Revelation 14:14–16). It is said of these who welcome Jesus at His coming that they are without fault (Revelation 14:4–5). They follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. In their mouth is found no guile. In other words, they represent Jesus in this world. As we read in 1 John 3:2, they are like Him. They have the Father's name written in their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

Friends, I want to be a part of that group. Don't you? I trust that the desire for that is burning in every heart here. We would do well to review and thoroughly study the work of John the Baptist, because the prophecies that were fulfilled in John the Baptist 1,900 years ago are now being fulfilled, and will *continue* to be fulfilled, in those whom God is using to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

You remember the circumstances surrounding the birth of John. He was a miracle child, a child born in the old age of Zacharias, the aged priest, and his aged wife, Elizabeth. The angel Gabriel, the highest angel in glory, was sent from Heaven to announce the birth of John. He appeared to Zacharias as he ministered in the temple. We hear Gabriel saying:

“Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall thee bear a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” Luke 1:13–17.

To make ready a people prepared for the Lord is the keynote.

“In preparing the way for Christ's first advent, he was a representative of those who are to prepare a people for our Lord's second coming” *The Desire of Ages*, page 101.

John was a representative, a type, of those who prepare a people for our Lord's second coming. Are you trying to get people ready for the coming of Jesus? If you are, you're represented by John. And the nearer you and I come to the *experience* of John, the better we will do the *work* of John. I read:

“In order to give such a message as John gave, we must have a spiritual experience like his. The same work must be wrought in us” *Gospel Workers*, page 55.

Before we can help to prepare *others* for the coming of Jesus, we *ourselves* must enter into that experience. Isn't that clear? Yes. So God is seeking to lead you and me into a clearer understanding of the experience of John the Baptist in order that

we may do today the work that he did nearly 2,000 years ago. Would you like to do that, friends? Would you like to enter into that experience and do that work? I tell you, it's a unique work. The life and work of John are very interesting to study. In fact, we are told in *Gospel Workers*, page 51, "Far more than we do, we need to study the lives of these men." (Enoch and John the Baptist.) I studied Enoch with you. Tonight, we are studying John the Baptist. We look into his ministry, and see how God prepared him to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The Bible gives us a great many interesting things about the life and work of John the Baptist. We have the four Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There are a number of things that each writer tells in the life of Christ and those with Him. There are a number of things each one tells that's not told by others. There are very few things that are told by all four. But all of them have things to tell us about John the Baptist. And it is important that we understand it. It bears directly upon our work and mission today. Much of the first chapter of Luke is devoted to the life of John, his miraculous birth, and the experiences connected with his birth and his training. I want you to notice what was given through the Spirit of Prophecy at the time of his birth:

"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace" Luke 1:76–79.

What beautiful words. Do you think God has anyone getting ready as He had John the Baptist getting ready? Well, if He doesn't, how is the work that was done by John the Baptist going to be done today? I believe that, all over this world, for the last hundred years and more, God has been seeking to develop messengers like John the Baptist. That is the purpose of this threefold message. The nearer we get to the blueprint, the more we succeed; the *farther* we get from it, the longer we delay the coming of our Lord.

As parents, can you think of any greater destiny for your child than that he might do a work like John the Baptist? Young people, can you think of any greater goal that can be set before you? Can you think of any greater objective toward which you might bend your efforts than to do today and be today what John did and what John was back before the first coming of our Lord? Oh, I pray that we may sense the glory of it and the sacrifice of it, for the two belong together. It was so in the life of Jesus; it was so in the life of John. After these words of prophecy, we have a most interesting comment on the next 30 years.

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel" Luke 1:80.

This tells three things: he grew, he developed physically, he waxed strong in spirit, he had a good mind and good spiritual experience, and he was in the deserts until the day of his showing to Israel. Would you be willing to be in retirement for 30

years with no particular notice, no particular attention? Would you be willing to be out of circulation for 30 years in order to have a part in a work like this? John was. Why was he in the deserts? I will tell you why.

Recently I came across this most interesting statement:

“An angel came from heaven to instruct Zacharias and Elisabeth as to how they should train and educate their child so as to work in harmony with God in preparing a messenger to announce the coming of Christ. John was the son of their old age. He was a child of miracle, and the parents might have reasoned that John had a special work to do for the Lord, and that the Lord would take care of him. But the parents did not thus reason” *Child Guidance*, pages 22–23.

Oh, listen. Thousands of parents are reasoning just like this today. John's parents might have done it, but they didn't.

“They moved to a retired place in the country where their son would not be exposed to the temptations of city life, or induced to depart from the counsel and instruction which they as parents would give him” *Ibid*.

We could spend an hour just on those three sentences. It is so important. Those parents didn't say, God has had this child born by a miracle, and we are carrying on our work here. Zacharias is a priest, and I have my work to look after. I have my duties to do. God will take care of John. God had him born by a miracle. We will do our best, but God will take care of him.

"No." They said, "We will do better than that; we will move; we will get out of the environment in which we are. We will move out into the country where he will be completely separated from this environment. This lesson of separation is the first thing we want to get clear. It's not going to be any ordinary program that's going to prepare the John the Baptists of this hour. "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord" is an unusual work, especially in this day of iniquity. Separation was the choice of the parents.

I want you to notice John's attitude as he grew up. He finally came to the age when he began to realize something of what was going on. I suppose there were relatives who came to visit. His father was a priest. He was not unknown in Israel. They doubtless had visitors. I can imagine people talking back then the same way they would talk today. Somebody would tickle him under the chin and say, Well John, you're a fine-looking little boy. What grade are you in? What are you going to be when you grow up?

Those seem to be the two favorite subjects for making conversation with little children. I suppose those questions came up quite often. And I want you to know that John had his own choice to make as he developed through youth and early manhood.

“In the natural order of things, the son of Zacharias would have been educated for the priesthood. But the training of the rabbinical schools would have unfitted him for his work. God did not send him to the teachers of theology to learn how to interpret the Scriptures. He called him to the desert, that he might learn of nature and nature's God. It was a lonely region where he found his home, in the midst of barren hills, wild ravines, and rocky caves. But it was his choice to forgo the enjoyments and luxuries of life for the stern discipline of the wilderness” *The Desire of Ages*, page 101.

At the very time that others were seeking a *soft* life, he deliberately chose a *hard* life. If there is anything in all these experiences that finds its parallel today, this is it. This is truly a soft age, particularly here in America. You know the president of the USA has become aroused over the fact that so comparatively few of the men who are brought up for examination through the draft, or who enlist, measure up to even the comparatively low standards of the army. Many have to be rejected. And the U. S. government is becoming alarmed over it. It is being pointed out by authorities that the great difficulty is that American young people today have things too soft.

There was a certain amount of that back in John's day, and John deliberately put his choice along with the choice of his parents. He was glad to be out in the wilderness where things were hard. He didn't want that soft life. He didn't want soft food that would never develop good, hard teeth. He didn't want to be a hot-house plant. It was his choice to forego the enjoyments and luxuries of life for the stern discipline of the wilderness. Here his surroundings were favorable to habits of simplicity and self-denial.

How many people today, old or young, do you find who are deliberately seeking such surroundings? Most people today who are experiencing even a degree of hardship, it's because they are *forced* to by circumstances. God grant that in somebody's heart tonight there shall be awakened such a longing ambition to do the work of John the Baptist to make ready a people prepared for the Lord instead of trying to seek out everything easy and soft and luxurious and rich and elegant. God grant that they will be looking for an experience such as John got in an environment such as he had. What do you say, men and women? Oh, that God would put that response in our hearts.

Yes, John was out in the deserts until the day of his showing unto Israel. I will pause on that for a little while. I may as well be practical. While there are those who see no light in this thing at *all*, there are others who see *some* light dimly, *some* value, in it. But their minds run something like this: “Yes, I think a program like that for a year or two would be a good thing for my girl or my boy. Maybe for me. I think a year or two of that would probably be a good thing, but never the slightest thought of years and years of it. Oh, no. My boy has got to *amount* to something. My girl has got to *be* somebody. They would never get to be anything on a program of *that* kind. A year or two would do them good—harden up their muscles a bit. But then

they had better get back into the program and get to the place where they can *be* somebody.”

In the natural order of things, the son of Zacharias would have been educated to the priesthood. He would have *been* somebody in the natural order of things. But his parents had a revelation from Heaven through the Spirit of Prophecy. And because of that, they saw something else for their boy than the natural order of things. And John, as he came to years, chose it for himself. But somebody who is acquainted with the Bible says, “But John *was* great.” But did you notice what the angel said? The wording of the Bible is most interesting:

“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord...” Luke 1:15.

One might catch the inference from the angel of the Lord that John might not be considered great in the sight of *men*. He was great in *whose* eyes? The eyes of the *Lord*. Do you know what made John the Baptist great? Here is the answer:

“What was it that made John great? He closed his mind to the mass of tradition taught by the teachers of the Jewish nation, opening it to the wisdom ‘which cometh down from above’” *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, page 447.

Ah. The very thing that made John despised by men made him great in the sight of the Lord. First, his parents chose for him, and he deliberately accepted that choice. He deliberately chose to get away from that environment where his mind would be influenced by the opinions, traditions, fashions, and customs of the people of that day.

“Here his surroundings were favorable to habits of simplicity and self-denial. Uninterrupted by the clamor of the world, he could here study the lessons of nature, of revelation, and of Providence” *The Desire of Ages*, page 101.

In the Word and works and ways of God, John found his education. Studying what God had *said*, studying what God had *made*, studying the ways God *worked* with him day by day.

“The words of the angel to Zacharias had been often repeated to John by his God-fearing parents. From childhood his mission had been kept before him, and he had accepted the holy trust” *Ibid*.

When the relatives and friends came around and asked John what he was going to be, he said that God had something He wants him to do to tell the people about the Messiah who is coming. There were a hundred things he *might* have done, but there was *one* thing he was *born* for. There are a hundred things *you* might do, but there is *one* thing you were *born* for. If there is somebody here tonight who is born to do such a work as John the Baptist did, don't miss it. Don't sell out. Don't cheat God or yourself.

I am not thinking of the question of whether you are saved or lost. That's a momentous thing. But there are going to be a number of people in Heaven who will be saved as by a fire. The thief on the cross is going to be there, but he will never begin to know all the joy and blessing that will fill the heart of John the Baptist. Yes, the thief will be perfectly happy. But while the little teacup and the barrel can both be full, there is more in the barrel. The thief on the cross will be in the kingdom with Jesus. I know it, for Jesus told him so, and his heart will be full and overflowing. But it is going to be a *tiny* heart. He came to Jesus at the eleventh hour. In the end, he gave Jesus all he had. What did he have? Not much. He will be there, but I hope none of you will emulate his example.

If you are on your deathbed and have not given yourself to God, remember the thief on the cross and do it. God loves you and wants you, even if all you have left is five minutes; He loves you and wants to save you. But that will never make ready a people prepared for translation day. It will not. There is an entirely different program—deeper, broader, higher. It is a program that calls for an experience such as John the Baptist had in order to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And that calls for the supreme dedication not of five minutes, but of your life—all the resources, all the facilities, all the talents physically, mentally, and spiritually, completely dedicated, fully surrendered to Jesus Christ, and focused on doing the work for which you were born.

If I understand it, God has some people who have been born in these last days with just one mission committed to them—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. What a pity so many who were born for that are doing all sorts of common, ordinary things. I don't mean wicked things like gambling or stealing or robbing banks. No. I mean perfectly *good* things—perfectly *proper* things for the people of this world—but not for John the Baptist. Think of all the things people were doing back there. Can you imagine John the Baptist starting in to do any one of those hundred other things people were doing? No. He couldn't *think* of doing that. He had been born for a certain work. "From childhood his mission had been kept before him, and he had accepted the holy trust."

I feel sorry when I think of the broad-mindedness of parents and children today who know this message and know that Jesus is about to come, yet engage in, and prepare their children to engage in, any one of 10,000 ordinary things. Believe me, the work for Shem, Ham, and Japheth was to get busy with hammer and saw, and to help father Noah build the Ark. Right? And the work of John the Baptist was not to engage in those ordinary things that were filling the minds of people back there. He was to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Oh, that God may give us that burden at this time.

We were reading that what made John the Baptist great was that he closed his mind to the kind of education that was current at that time. That was one big reason he was out there away from all that. But the other reason was just as important. In fact, it was *more* important. As he closed his mind in one direction, he opened it in another. Being out there in the country, he *didn't* get the influence of that *ordinary* education; he *did* get right in the middle of *God's* schoolroom. He was surrounded by the influences that would help him.

“To him the solitude of the desert was a welcome escape... He distrusted his own power to withstand temptation, and shrank from constant contact with sin, lest he should lose the sense of its exceeding sinfulness”
Ibid.

He did not boast of the fact that he could read anything and it would not affect him, that he could listen to anything and it would not hurt him, that he could eat anything and it would not injure him. He was careful, not because he had a weak body or mind, but because he had good sense and had listened to the Spirit of Prophecy. And the Spirit of Prophecy brought down by the angel from Heaven had directed in his life, diet, and his whole program.

Has the angel Gabriel come down from Heaven in these latter days and given us instruction on how to produce some people today like John the Baptist? Do you believe that? What shall we *do* with it? Oh, let's do like Zacharias and Elisabeth. Let's take it and use it. What do you say? And young people, let's do what John did. Let us accept the mission for which we were born. Let us take the instruction that God has given us through the angel Gabriel, and let us study it as for our lives, and follow it with all our souls. Let the world go on with its Sputniks; that's not *our* job. I tell you, I have no ambition such as that for any child of mine. There is just one thing I want for myself and my dear ones. It is to help make ready a people prepared for the Lord. A spaceship to the moon? Would you go tonight if you could get on one? I wouldn't. What's over there? There is nobody there on the moon to get ready for Heaven.

The most wonderful thing in the ages is to get on that trip with Jesus to the mansions of God. On that glorious trip through Orion, you won't need a spaceship or a spacesuit, or an oxygen tank. It is not hazy. It is real. It is these *other* things that are uncertain. Oh, that God may draw in the wanderings of our minds from 10,000 things that are bidding for attention today. The only way that many of us will be able to escape the clamor of all these other interests will be to do something with these machines that bring the world into our homes and attack the ear and eye a hundred times a day with a worldly pull, a worldly influence. We will need to do something with every avenue that leads the soul away from the experience and work of John the Baptist.

John did keep in touch with things. He didn't just stay out there for 30 years with his mind a blank as to what was going on. There's a balance in what we are studying. It's proper for us to keep in touch in a reasonable way with current events and watch the unfolding of prophecy. We should be very thankful for *The Review and Herald* to help us with that. When you read *The Review and Herald*, you are kept in touch with the unfolding of the prophecies. You see the movements of the Sunday law, the resurgence of the papacy, the growth of the labor unions, and many other signs fulfilling before our eyes.

Yes, it's proper for us to keep in touch, to a certain degree, with what is going on in the world. But I want you to notice something about John. He was ever an interested observer of what was passing in the world. “From his quiet retreat he

watched the unfolding of events.” Ah friends, it is quite different watching it from a quiet retreat than it is watching it down there in the arena, churning around in it. And John distrusted his own power to withstand temptation and shrank from constant contact with sin lest he should lose the sense of its exceeding sinfulness.

When we studied about Enoch, what did we find that Enoch did? He went down and preached. But he would not stay too long in those cities of the plain where the descendants of Cain lived. Why? He was afraid that he would lose his spiritual experience. A man who walked with God was afraid he would lose his spiritual experience? He was if he stayed too long.

Just as a fireman will go into a burning building to try to pull somebody out, he must not stay there too long. If he did, there would be *two* dead instead of *one*. The very rescue that he is attempting to effect is dependent on his getting in, getting his man, and getting out. Do the cities of today look like that to you? If they do not, my friends, then, of all people, you are in a most perilous condition. The cities of today are like Sodom and Gomorrah. They are like those centers of heathen influence before the flood. And if we have the spirit of Enoch and the spirit of John the Baptist, we shall venture into them only that we may seek to gather some souls for Christ in His kingdom, and pull them out like the angels pulled Lot and his family out of Sodom.

That’s the picture of this hour. More and more, that spirit must grip our hearts. Some of us will need quite a period of time in an environment such as John the Baptist had in order that we may develop a sense of true values and a sense of the danger of worldly influence—worldly education, worldly music, worldly literature, worldly everything—and a sense of communion with God through nature, through the Word, and through a personal experience in prayer. When the morning broke out there in the wilderness and John was awakened, there was nothing to disturb his communion with the Father in Heaven. He took the Old Testament scrolls and studied earnestly that which bore upon his own mission and the work of the Messiah. He became very familiar with all those prophecies. He committed to memory thousands of those verses.

How many verses have you committed to memory? I say it to challenge you. Young people, I suggest that you set for yourself the goal of committing to memory whole chapters and whole books of the Bible. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to know the entire book of Revelation? Could you do that? Oh, yes. You are like a person with a suitcase; something is going to be in it. You can have your choice. You can fill it with Revelation or with nonsense. You can fill it with the words of the living God, or with Shakespeare and those who travel with him. You can fill it with a message from Heaven, or you can fill it with the trivial things of common ordinary conversation, the chitchat, the gossip that is filling the minds of nine out of ten people today.

To do a work like John, we must have an experience like his. He filled his mind with the *Word* of God, the *works* of God, and the *ways* of God. As a result of that, when the time came for him to do it, he began his work in a very simple way. There was such power in his work that people came out where he was, and they heard his message. Jesus came and was baptized by him. Then He began to take some of John's disciples and train them for still further work. Because of John's experience with God, he recognized the Savior when He appeared. God was able to

reveal to him the Savior of the world. I pray that we may have such an experience with the Word of God and the works of God that we too shall recognize our Savior, that we shall enter into a fellowship with Him, and that those who come under our influence will be led to Christ as the disciples of John the Baptist were. Listen to him as he stands there with Jesus on the shore, and lifting up his hand says, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." God wants you to give a message like that. It will take more than repeating those words; it will take an experience such as John had. I pray God that He may lead us into that experience tonight.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee that looking down the ages Thou hast counted Thy workers, and that Thou hast had them born for such a time as this. We thank Thee that in Thy Providence our ears are hearing these things from the Bible, and our hearts are being impressed with the simplicity of the message by which Thou didst prepare Thy messenger of old, and by which Thou will prepare a people today.

We would, like John the Baptist, be earnest and humble and simple. We would, like John the Baptist, turn from the clamor and the distractions and diversions of the worldly environment, and center our souls on our Lord. We would, like him, find in Thy Word and Thy works a revelation of Thy character till mind and heart and soul are filled with the glorious vision.

Our Father, we realize that Satan will seek to justify many things, and excuse many things, and defend many things, and praise many things we do not need. We pray Thou will help us to give our greatest attention to the things of greatest importance. We pray Thou will help us to get ready and help others to get ready. Oh, that the coming of Jesus might be hastened. Oh, that the sin and sorrow of this world may no longer weigh upon Thy dear heart. Oh, that we may know the call of God in this crucial hour, and that our dedication may match Thy invitation, that our response may meet Thy call, that Thy Word saying, "Whom shall I send?" and "Who will go for us?" may find an answer in "Here am I, send me."

And may we be willing to endure the necessary discipline and make the necessary sacrifice, and to experience the hardships that drive us to prayer. May we be cut off from the world and its influence and shut in with Thee. Breathe upon us Thy Holy Spirit. Show us Thy wonderful love, my Savior. Beholding Thy sweet sacrificial life, Thy atoning death. Oh, may we be constrained to give all we have! Lord, what is it we have to give up? So little. Thou hast given all for us.

We thank Thee that we can give all to Thee. Here on our knees, may this thing be settled. Speak to every heart, young and old. Just now, in every heart, may the battle be fought and won. May the challenge be faced and met. May the call be heard and answered. Just now, may Thy invitation find a sweet response, a *complete* response, in every heart. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

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