

THE LORD'S INTERSTATE

John 1:6-8, 19-28 Text vs. 23 *"John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"*

As we begin today, you need a little background on this lesson. Jesus had chosen from among His followers twelve men to be His apostles. What's an apostle? An apostle is an official representative who has authority. So, being an apostle of Jesus Christ was being sent with Jesus' authority to spread the Good News of salvation. Jesus told them to begin in Jerusalem. Sometimes they were referred to as *"The Twelve."*

John was one of the original twelve apostles. His brother James also became an apostle of Jesus. They were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called them to follow Him making John one of the first chosen by Jesus. John was quiet. Unassuming. He served in the early church in Jerusalem many years before moving to Ephesus in what is now Turkey where he established many churches in that region. During a time of persecution under the Roman emperor Domitian he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos off the coast of Turkey from where he wrote the book of Revelation. John's Gospel is different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It's an eyewitness account of what he is writing about. He continually emphasizes Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, sent by the Father to take away the sins of the world. He used many symbolic titles for Jesus, such as the Lamb of God, resurrection, and the vine. Throughout his Gospel John, uses the phrase *"I am,"* to identify Jesus with Jehovah God, the Great *"I AM"* or eternal God.

Although John doesn't mention himself by name in his gospel, he refers to himself four times as *"the disciple Jesus loved."* John wrote the Gospel of John, 1st John, 2nd John, 3rd John, and the book of Revelation in the late first century. Now, John began his Gospel by saying, *"in the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."* That's a powerful statement! It's about the divinity of Jesus. It says Jesus was the *Word* of God. That Jesus was *with* God from the very beginning of time. And it says that *through* Jesus all things were made. Without Him, nothing was made that had been made." (John 1:1-3) Then John testified *"there was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through Him all might believe. He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light."* (John 1:6-8)

He goes on to say that John the Baptist was questioned by the religious authorities who were very suspicious of him. They were a fact-finding commission of Jewish leaders, priests and Levites opposed to Jesus sent from Jerusalem to ask John who John was. You know what a fact-finding commission is? It's a group of people appointed to investigate a particular issue, or event, and report back their findings. We have lots of fact-finding commissions today investigating Hunter Biden, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump, just to name a few.

The questioning of John was to be expected. His father was Zechariah, a Jewish prophet and priest born in Babylon during the Jewish Exile. He went to Jerusalem after the exile to prophesy about God's plans for the future of Jerusalem, Israel, the Messiah, and the Temple. Zechariah encouraged his fellow Jews to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and wrote the Book of Zechariah. Now, in the eyes of all the authorities, sons of priests were automatically priests by their family connection. That made John a priest. However, John was not a priest like any other priest. He was most unusual. He lived in the desert. He preached radically different from the other priests. Matthew 3:1-12 shows he was a *nonconformist*. *"⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair. And he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by John in the Jordan River."*

And the authorities had to find out why he was doing all that! So, they asked Him if was the Messiah? John easily confessed, *"I am not the Messiah."* *"Then who are you?"* they asked. *"Are you Elijah?"* He said, *"I am not."* They asked him, *"Are you the Prophet?"* Now that phrase *"the Prophet"* refers to a prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15 which says, *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet, like me, from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him."* The Jewish people were waiting for this prophet. Some thought he might be John the Baptist. But John denied that he was the Prophet. He answered, *"No."*

That prophecy was about the *coming of a prophet* who would be like Moses who was sent by God to guide the Israelites to the Promised Land. Part of the prophets' vision would focus on a king who would follow God's will. A new David. One who would shepherd the people to return to the straight and narrow path. Many believed this prophet was Jesus Christ. Born in Bethlehem. And who was a descendant of King David through both his mother, Mary, and his adoptive father Joseph.

That verse in Deuteronomy points out the importance of listening to this prophet. And following his teachings. It's a reminder, God has a plan for His people. He will send a Guide to help them stay on the right path. Finally, those questioning John the Baptist said, *"Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"* John said, *"I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"* (John 1:19-23) That phrase *"Make straight the way"* or *"leveling the way"* is a biblical reference from the book of Isaiah about leveling the way in the desert *for kings* to travel upon. He was saying that he, John, was sent by God to *prepare The Way* for Jesus.

Now, before they were called *Christians*, followers of Jesus were referred to as “*The Way*.” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14). And no, John was not Messiah. He was a *witness* to the Light of Jesus, which was yet to come. So, John was sent to *prepare* the way for Jesus. He did that by preaching a message of repentance and baptism. He called people to turn away from their sins. Prepare their hearts for the coming of the Lord.

And this passage of scripture today should remind you of the importance of preparing *your* heart for the Lord. You must turn away from *your* sins. You must seek forgiveness. You must make straight the way for the Lord in your heart. Then you will be ready to receive Him when He comes.

Now, was John the Baptist talking about leveling land to build an interstate highway to “*prepare the way of the Lord*” (Luke 3:4) like they did for earthly kings when they traveled. No, he was talking about spiritual preparation. He was talking about transformation. Change that accompanies the “*salvation of God*.” (Luke 3:6) The proud will be humbled. The humbled will be lifted up. Criminals will have to give up their crooked ways. The rough will become gentle. That means Hell-bound sinners need God's salvation to be put on the same level with everyone before God, when “*all flesh*” (Luke 3:6) is equal. John was referring to what Isaiah had written for the Jews returning to the promised land from exile. (40:1-5) The first 39 chapters of Isaiah emphasize God's judgment. Then he shifts to the comfort that God will provide. It shows Jesus coming to save His people. “*Be comforted, be comforted, My people!*” says your God. “*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her warfare is ended, that her sin is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*” The voice of one shouting in the wilderness: “*Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be raised, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the crooked places be made straight, and the rough places smooth. Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*” That's being ready to receive Jesus when He comes. Making sure of your relationship with Jesus. Trusting Him *only* to save you. Not anyone else. Not anything else! And certainly not any good works you've done. Once you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, being ready to meet the Lord means living in a way that pleases Him. So, whenever He calls you home, knowing that could be any time you will hear Him say to you, “*Well done, good and faithful servant!*”

R. A. Torrey was a fundamentalist evangelist and leader. A fervent prayer warrior. A personal soul winner. And a powerful revivalist who founded and pastored churches in Minneapolis, Chicago, and Los Angeles. He also served as the first president of Moody Bible Institute. He put it this way: “*I am ready to meet God face to face tonight...for all my sins are covered by His atoning blood.*” Romans 10:9 says, “*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*” And in John 5:24 Jesus says, “*Whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life.*”

Scripture teaches with unmistakable clarity, that all believers in Jesus must give an account of their lives to their Lord (Romans 14:10-12). Even if Jesus doesn't return when you think He will, you still will meet Him at your death. Whether in twenty years. Twenty months. Twenty minutes. Or twenty seconds. God encourages you *not* to be surprised about the time of your coming appointment when you stand before Him at the Judgment Throne. If you are ready to meet Jesus, you will long for His return. If you're not ready, you will dread it! And if you don't feel ready to meet Him, now is the time to get ready to meet Him.

Think deeply about this passage of Scripture. It should remind you of the importance of being a witness for Jesus. Just as John the Baptist did, so you too, must testify about the coming of the Lord. You must prepare the way for Him to come into your heart. You must be willing to confess your sins. Turn away from them. Be ready to receive Him when He comes down that highway of holiness that leads to God. In the book of Isaiah, that highway of holiness that leads to God is “*A highway that shall be there. And it shall be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it.*” (Isa. 35:8) That Highway is the path of righteousness which leads to eternal life with God. It's straight. It's narrow. It requires discipline. It takes self-control to stay on it. And it requires faith in God.

The Bible says, the path to God is through Jesus Christ who said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” (John 14:6) And the path to God is not an easy one. But it's a rewarding one! And it requires you to put aside your own desires and to follow God's will for the rest of your life. Then you will have “*crossed over from death to life*” and be on the highway of holiness that leads to God! AMEN