

## The Mind of Christ - Lesson 95

February 26, 2021

Welcome to another edition of The Mind of Christ. If you are following, we are in A. T. Robertson's chronological sequence of the life of Christ in his "A Harmony of the Gospels". I am using the New American Standard Version of the Bible, we are in section 57 and this is entitled "**The Message from the Baptist and the Eulogy of Jesus**". This is a very interesting section. It will take us probably two weeks to get through it, so I'm going to jump into it today.

There are actually two passages, but I'm only going to read one today because they're kind of lengthy. Let me read one of the passages on this topic. It is found in **Matthew 11:2-19**. It begins in verse 2. You may notice occasionally such as in this section, A. T. Roberson leaves out verse 1 and jumps into verse 2. In trying to sequence chronologically the life of Christ, some of the accounts of the life of Christ are not all "strictly" in chronological order. Luke seems to do a better job of that than Matthew and Mark and John, who's in his own world, when it comes to laying out some of the events in the life of Christ and the discourses of the life of Christ. So, we're going to pick up in verse 2 and I will read down to verse 19: We won't get to all of this today.

### **Matthew 11:2-19**

<sup>2</sup> Now while in prison, John heard about the works of Christ, and he sent word by his disciples, <sup>3</sup> and said to Him, "Are You the Coming {*Expected*} One, or are we to look for someone else?" <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> those who are blind receive sight and those who limp walk, those with leprosy are cleansed and those who are deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed he who keeps from *stumbling over* Me."

<sup>7</sup> As these disciples of John were going away, Jesus began speaking to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup> But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! <sup>9</sup> But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written: 'Behold, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

<sup>11</sup> Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup> And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been treated violently, and violent men take it by force. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. <sup>15</sup> The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.

<sup>16</sup> "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call out to the other children, <sup>17</sup> and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a song of mourning, and you did not mourn.' <sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating *and* drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a heavy drinker, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' And yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

Now again, the other section is in **Luke 7:18-35** and I encourage you to read that. I'll be referring to some of the differences and similarities in the two accounts. The two accounts are very similar so when I was studying this I printed them out so I could compare them. There seems to be three major differences in these accounts and I'll just give you the texts right now. The differences are found in **Matthew 11:12-15**, **Luke 7:20-21** and **Luke 7:29-30**. We'll return to these as we get to those sections and I'll point them out to you.

Robertson is clearly taking Luke's lead as to the chronology of this, leaving out **Matt. 11:1. Matthew 11:2** it says that *John heard about* the works of Christ. In **Luke 7:18** it says it was John's *disciples who reported to him* about these things. One of the first things to understand is '*who*' is *doubting* in this case ... is it John or is it his disciples? *I believe it was his disciples*. I don't believe John was confused or had any doubts whatsoever about Jesus being the "*expectant*" One.

Remember, his disciples, on the occasion we talked about last time, on the occasion of the raising of the dead boy in Nain, and the response of the crowd was 'a great prophet has arisen among us'. This conclusion of the crowd was based, perhaps in part, on the similarity of Jesus' miracle to that of Elijah's, only a few miles apart. I think you'll see where Elijah figures into this account in a few moments. Surely they knew that many were proclaiming John himself as a great prophet; perhaps even '**The**' great prophet; perhaps even Elijah reincarnated. This may have produced some confusion in the minds of John's disciples. Remember, John had disciples of course, before Jesus did. It (disciples) just means people who followed him and listened to him and were taught by him.

So John goes straight to the big question. *Are You the Expectant One?* Well, this exact phrase can be used in very common ways; simply of one who is coming and going. The word is 'erchomi' (ερχομαι) but 'ho erchomenos' is literally "the coming one", the future one, he who shall come, the Messiah. So John is asking, "Are you the Messiah". In our text it's used in that way.

It's used in **Matthew 21:9** during the triumphal entry of **Jesus** into Jerusalem: "**Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord**". He is the "*coming one*" into Jerusalem. But even here, the multitudes said He was "the prophet" in verse 11. *And the crowds were saying, "This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."* In **John 6:14** it says, *Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."* (This was the feeding of the 5,000 people). In **John 11:27** Martha says to Jesus, *"Yes, Lord; I have come to believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, and He who comes into the world."* Notice that either the prophet or the Messiah is said to be "the one who comes" into the world, so he is the *expectant one*, the one who is *coming*. In **Luke 19:38** it says, "**Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord; even the King of Israel.**"

Now John is in prison during this time! **Matthew 14** gives the account of John's arrest and his circumstances. Josephus says he was imprisoned at Machaerus. Machaerus is located in Jordan today (Josephus in his War of the Jews tells us that location). It is a fortress rebuilt by Herod the Great. Originally it was Hasmonean located in the Moab region of Jordan. The Romans occupied it until 66 A. D. and the Jewish rebels took over until about 72 A. D.

after the destruction of Jerusalem. It's like a second Masada. Masada was the place the Jews fled to in the desert after the destruction of Jerusalem and many of them died there. But there was a second place, and this is Machaerus where John was in prison that was also a fortress and some of the Jews went there as well. John was there because he opposed the marriage of Herodias, Herod Antipas' wife to his brother Philip.

John's disciples had to have traveled a considerable distance, but factor in the time between the miracle in Nain; (remember they were there at the miracle of Nain) and then they had to travel all the way back to Machaerus where John was in prison to report to him in Moab. Then he sent them back to Jesus, again, quite a distance so there is a lot going on here. This raises the question for me; where was Jesus when this exchange actually took place? Well, if we look at the next section that is coming up, it's *possible* that he may have returned back to the coast of the Sea of Galilee. He may have come back from Nain through the Valley of Doves, down into the region of the Sea of Galilee and was teaching there and that's where John's disciples found Him on this occasion.

Matthew says he sent word by his disciples, but Luke says that he sent two disciples. I wish I knew if they were two who eventually became disciples and apostles of Jesus ... possibly Thomas may have been in this group. And then their question is "do we look for someone else?" "Are You the Coming {*Expected*} One, or are we to look for someone else?" (This is just a side note: It's interesting that the King James Version of this text in **Matt. 11:2** says 'two disciples' though not in this text. In **Luke 7:19** it has "two" or duo. 'And after summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or are we to look for another?"' I'm just conjecturing here since Thomas is called Didymus, a twin, so could it have been Thomas and his brother?) In **John 11:16** some think that Matthew could have been included in this. ('Therefore Thomas, who was called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let's also go, so that we may die with Him!") But we're just speculating here as to who these disciples really are.

The question is literally "another expect". That's what the Greek actually says. 'Do we expect another?' Luke uses a similar phrase; I'm not going to go into the long phrases in the Greek. But, 'Do we expect another' or 'someone different'. Luke gives a little different spin on the question.

Well, our expectations are driving forces in our lives; unmet expectations drain our energy, and lead to despair. Hopes are dashed. We learn to exist, but not thrive, when our hopes are dashed. We feed off of realistic expectations and we get stability from them.

With all the activities surrounding John who now is in prison and with Jesus who likely will end up there if He keeps doing what *He's* doing, their hopes placed in John are being discouraged. Do they dare to expect anything different from Jesus? In other words, contextually here, it's understandable why these disciples would be having second thoughts because they're disciples of John and John is in prison; he's in grave danger and they are thinking, 'Well, maybe Jesus is in grave danger too and maybe He's not going to be the One we expect either' because they expected, of course, the Messiah to set up a kingdom on Earth.

The evidence is overwhelming that John knew, without a doubt, Who Jesus was. He literally heard God speak from Heaven, and he saw the Spirit in the form of a dove, a pre-arranged sign at Jesus' baptism come down upon Jesus. He announced Jesus as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. So why would John send these disciples to ask such questions?

The only logical explanation for the question, other than he was plagued with doubts now that he was facing death in a Herodian prison, is “was the question for the benefit of his disciples”? The disciples of John were very attached to him. Remember the discussion in **John 3:26** “And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing and all the people are coming to Him.”” They saw Jesus as competition at one point. John did set the record straight but perhaps doubts remained and they felt an injustice was being done to hold John in prison while Jesus roamed free to preach and to baptize! If John knew his time was short, he may have wanted to quell the doubts once and for all.

Luke tells us that as these two disciples approached Jesus, Jesus was curing people of diseases, afflictions, evil spirits and granting sight to many blind people. A thought occurred to me, which isn't quantifiable, but the many references to 'wholesale healings' of the crowds indicate large numbers of blind, diseased, demon-possessed people in Israel. What does this tell us about the health of the people of Israel? It seems like a lot of folks are coming to Jesus. What if Jesus came to Sarasota County, excluding people from other counties? How many would be there; how many would show up to be healed by Jesus? You know, maybe we underestimate how many sick people are really among us.

Luke says at that very time the disciples of John showed up as Jesus was healing; so these disciples saw what Jesus intended them to see. They did not have to 'collect' stories from past healings; they were eyewitnesses. They had a testimony. Jesus did provide signs for their faith when he refused to do so for others. Well, what's the difference? These disciples were struggling to believe; not to disbelieve! And those who were struggling to disbelieve, many times Jesus would not give them a sign because they were really looking for a way to discredit Him. But these were looking for a way to credit Jesus as being the Messiah.

What Jesus replied to these disciples was to do two things. In His reply:

1. The first thing He does is He gives them empirical evidence tied to authoritative Scripture. Now, that's an important point ... if we're going to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, then we need to have not only empirical evidence (and I don't mean 'our' empirical evidence of 'our' healings); I mean the empirical evidence of Jesus' healings ***along with authoritative Scripture.***

2. Then the second thing He does is He acknowledges through His blessing that He understands one's need to get it right. So, He doesn't seem to be upset with them at all for asking the question. He understands that they need to know for sure that He is the ***expectant One.***

Jesus gives six categories of people who have been helped by Him. There are the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the dead and the poor. This would be quite a test for a modern day faith healer. Can you do all six? Each situation has its individual blessing.

There is sight, there is walking, there is cleansing, there's hearing, there's life and there is the gospel that is being to the poor. Think of the individual blessings associated with each one. Think of how your life would be affected if you lost any one of these. You might learn to live with the first four. In other words, you might learn to live without your sight, without being able to walk, without being clean, without being able to hear. You might learn to live in some manner that way, but of course, number 5) – loss of life – that's pretty serious; you have to have life; but number 6 is the most serious. How could we live without the gospel, because the gospel is what is preached to the poor? That's the blessing to the poor.

Robertson ties these to **Isaiah 29:18-19** and also **Isaiah 35:5-6** and **Isaiah 61:1**. Robertson says that Jesus is making reference back to Isaiah; these three references in Isaiah. **Isaiah 29:18-19** mentions the deaf, the blind, the afflicted and the needy tied to **the Holy One of Israel**. “On that day those who are deaf will hear words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of those who are blind will see. <sup>19</sup> The afflicted also will increase their joy in the Lord, and the needy of mankind will rejoice in **the Holy One of Israel**.” He mentions the blind, the dead and the dumb in a *clearly Messianic prophecy*.

In **Isaiah 61:1** is the text Jesus read in the Synagogue in Nazareth, “the poor will have good news preached to them”. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord anointed me to bring good news to the humble; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to captives and freedom to prisoners; <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...” The kinds of things Jesus was doing were clearly Messianic indications because they reflected one with the heart and the power of God. God is concerned with the afflicted and distressed of the world.

By tying the eyewitness evidence to the Messianic prophecies, Jesus provides solid evidence for these disciples who were looking for *reasons to believe*. By observing John in prison, these men were learning ‘the cost of discipleship’ which is high. One way to ‘count the cost’ is to review the reasons why we believe. *It costs too much to deny the evidence!* As Peter says in **John 6:68**, “To whom shall we go?” This is when faith solidifies. *There is no other choice*. Jesus is the only option because He is the real deal. He is the true One, the Holy One of Israel.

The blessing Jesus gives is a theme mentioned elsewhere. “*And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me*.” **The blessing**. We have a lot to say about *the blessing* here.

This is the word, “*offense*”. The word in the Greek is ‘skandalon’ (σκανδαλον) which is where we get our word “scandal” from. It means scandal, to put a stumbling block or impediment in the way upon which another may trip or fall, to offend, to cause someone to distrust, or to desert. It is used 13 times in the book of Matthew. There is a very important principle here how the idea of a stumbling block is used in Scripture.

We’re going to take a little in-depth here and spend most of the rest of our time on this particular subject. We’re going to look at all the places in Matthew where *scandal* or *stumbling block* is mentioned.

In **Matthew 5:29-30** Jesus says, “*Now if your right eye is causing you to sin, tear it out and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*”<sup>30</sup> And if your right hand is causing you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

In **Matthew 13:21** “...and when afflictions or persecutions occur because of the word, immediately he (*falls away or is offended*).” So if a person hears the word of God and they begin to have affliction or persecution because of it they could be ‘*offended*’ and they could fall away on an account of the Word of God.

In **Matthew 13:57** in His own country people were *offended* at Him; they gave Him no honor even though Jesus *came to His own*, they were offended; they stumbled over Him because they were overly familiar with Him.

In **Matthew 15:12** the Pharisees were *offended* to hear Jesus say, ‘it is what comes out of a man’s mouth that defiles a man’... because they were saying ‘it’s what you put into your mouth ... unwashed hands, will defile you’. And Jesus was saying was no...what really defiles you is what comes out your mouth and they were *offended* by that because He, in fact, contradicted them.

And then, in **Matthew 17:27** Jesus did not want to *offend* those seeking tribute money by not paying it, and remember Jesus said ‘Let’s go pay out taxes because I don’t want to *offend* those who are collecting taxes or tribute money’.

Then in **Matthew 18:6** Jesus is particularly harsh about causing a little one who believes in Him to *stumble*. Jesus did not want us to cause a little child or a weak person to stumble. In verses **Matthew 18:8-9** is another reference to hands and feet and eyes causing one to stumble. “And if your hand or your foot is causing you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you; it is better for you to enter life maimed or without a foot, than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire.”<sup>9</sup> And if your eye is causing you to sin, tear it out and throw it away from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fiery hell.”

Also in **Matthew 24:10** Jesus predicts “many will *fall away* (or *stumble*), because of Him. Then in **Matthew 26:31** Jesus even knows His own disciples will temporarily *fall away* or *stumble* on the night He was arrested. Jesus even knew that there are temporary *stumbling blocks* for people. In **Matthew 26:33** Peter boasts that He will “*never fall away!*” Of course, he did.

We’ll go to other places where the word “stumble” is used.

In **John 6:61** Jesus spoke about the extreme dedication needed by His disciples. They said His words were difficult to listen to, and they grumbled at His words. Jesus asked them this question: “*Does this cause you to stumble?*”

Some may stumble over temptations; some over Jesus, Himself when it is understood what He is calling us to.

In **John 16:1** Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you that you may be kept from stumbling.” So Jesus often speaks words to us; words of warning, words that tell us what could and would happen to us if we follow Him just so that we will be prepared and not stumble. He has just told them in **John 15** that the world will hate them because of their relationship with Him and then they will be tested and they will be tempted to desert, to pull back, or to get discouraged.

Going over to Paul’s writing where this word is used, in **1 Corinthians 8:13** Paul has the discussion of stumbling regarding food. He said, “**Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to sin**” or (*stumble*). ***This stresses the aspect of conscience in stumbling***; so now we have a third aspect of *stumbling*. In this particular context, He’s saying that some people, because of their conscience cannot eat meat that is sacrificed to idols. Therefore, Paul says, if **my** eating of meat sacrificed to an idol causes them to stumble, then **I won’t eat meat** because I want to guard their conscience.

In **2 Corinthians 11:29** Paul mentions being led into sin. In the context, Paul is discussing things that show his weakness; persecutions, hardships, concerns, and temptations. He was not exempt from the tug of sin. In other words, he was saying that there is the possibility that I could *stumble* if I’m not very careful.

The related word here, of course, is ‘skandalon’ from which we get “scandal”. We see people who have fallen into the traps set for them. Jesus says in **Matthew 13:41-2**, “**The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all *stumbling blocks*, and those who commit lawlessness, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” At some point, occasions for stumbling and those who are involved in setting the snares will be separated out of the Kingdom of God.

Could this be how the Kingdom will be made safe from sin? No more temptations; not only Satan but any means by which sin could enter our lives will be gone. But since Jesus says sin also arises out of our own sinful desires, how will Jesus deal with the sin that naturally arises out of our hearts instead of that prompted from the outside by things or by lawless people? I don’t know the answer to that question; but I believe that when we come into the Kingdom of Heaven, there will be no more sin.

In **Matthew 16:23** Jesus calls Peter a *stumbling block* because he had his mind set on man’s interests instead of God’s. So, it seems that the way to avoid being a *stumbling block* is to totally set our minds on God’s interests and not our own. I want to reiterate; this is how we can know how to avoid the *stumbling blocks* in life; it’s to totally set our minds on God’s interests.

Back to **Matthew 18:7**, Jesus pronounces a “woe” to the world because of its *stumbling blocks*, for it is inevitable for *stumbling blocks* to come, but “woe” to the man through whom a *stumbling block* comes.

In **Romans 9:33** Paul speaks of the Jews who pursued a righteousness by **law** and not by **faith**. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, and then Paul quotes **Isaiah 28:16** and combines that with **Isaiah 8:14**. He says, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and the one who believes in Him will not be put to shame.”

When one is pursuing or walking rapidly and in the dark, salvation by works; the very way of salvation in their path; Jesus is easily missed and before one knows it, they stumble over Him.

Let me explain that a little bit. If a person is pursuing salvation; they’re walking rapidly towards salvation; they want to know what to do to be saved, yet they have in their mind that they can **be saved by their own good works**, that is the thing that they’re going to **stumble** over. That becomes the ‘skandalon’ in their lives. It is a **scandal** to think that you can be saved by your good works. However, they do not see it that way. They see Jesus as the **stumbling block** because Jesus is the One who said “you can only be saved by Me.” So, Jesus becomes a stumbling block to people who think they can save themselves. That’s what **Romans 9:33** and following is talking about.

In **Romans 11:9**, Paul quotes David in **Psalms 69:22**. “May their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them.” The same issue is discussed. What are they seeking to obtain and by what means? **Israel changed grace by faith, into a human made centered approach to God. They stumbled, which gave occasion for the Gentiles to come in, and this in turn will be used to draw Jews back to Jesus.**

**When you turn the grace of God into law, into being saved by your own goodness, then you have stumbled, and you have stumbled over the very Person who can save you ... over Jesus!**

In **Romans 14:13** the idea of putting an occasion of stumbling in someone’s path over matters of conscience arises again, and in verses 16-17 Paul warns to stay away from those who cause hindrances contrary to what has been taught. So, we need to stay away from people who would cause us to **stumble** or put the things in our path that would cause us to **stumble**.

In **1 Corinthians 1:23**, Paul uses the idea of **stumbling block** to describe the preaching of ‘Jesus crucified’. For some, the idea of a crucified Messiah is too awful to think about. In **Galatians 5:11** Paul says if he could just preach circumcision as a way to connect with God, he could abolish the **stumbling block** of the cross! For instance, if he could tell the Jews that ‘you can be saved by your circumcision’, then the cross would no longer be a **stumbling block**. But when he says ‘you must be saved by the cross’, for many people, they **stumble** over that.

**1 Peter 2:8** uses the Isaiah quote to show that stumbling occurs when people are disobedient to the Word. It says, “and to this doom they were also appointed”.

**1 John 2:10** teaches us that the ‘way to avoid becoming a stumbling block is to love our brothers’.

Then, in **Revelation 2:14** Jesus uses Balaam as an example of one who caused others to *stumble*. If you go back and read that story in **Numbers 22** you will see that Balaam wanted to prophecy against the Israelites but he wasn't able to; God wouldn't let him prophecy lies. But what he ended up doing was he found another way to cause Israel to *stumble*. The way he did it was he put some Jewish men in connection with the women of Moab who were very beautiful and they enticed these men. They sinned with them and that's how he caused Israel to *stumble*.

Regarding *stumbling*, *there are at least three ways emphasized in Scripture that stumbling* can take place. **First** is *Stumbling because of Jesus, or the Gospel*. Some people are going to stumble in their lives; they're going to trip over Jesus and the Gospel because they just either cannot accept Him as the Messiah or they just simply think that they can save themselves by their own goodness. The **second** way *stumbling* is used is *stumbling because of the temptations to sin*. Sometimes sin is put in our way like with Balaam where he put an enticement to send before the people and people *stumble* over that. Then the **third** way is *stumbling because of a violation of personal conscience*. This may be over something that is not 'literally wrong' but if you believe it is, and you do it against your own conscience, then you stumble. So, those are the three ways.

In our text in **Luke 7:23**, "[And blessed is anyone who does not take offense at Me](#)", Jesus pronounces a blessing on the one who avoids *stumbling* over the *stumbling stone*. *Some stumble never to rise again*, like Judas. *Others tripped and regained their balance to walk again with Jesus*, like Peter.

Jesus did not seem to be offended by John's disciples asking the questions that they asked. He used the occasion for *reassurance for their faith* and an opportunity *to eulogize John the Baptist*. There is nothing in Jesus' words to compare with the estimate that Jesus had of His cousin John.

Now, I'm going to spend a little time in the eulogy that we see here. I have several pages and I want to go into in the eulogy of John. The eulogy was addressed to the multitudes as John's disciples were going away. These disciples were called, by Luke, "messengers". I want to define this a little bit more. Actually, the word is the **same** word from which we get "angel"... "one sent to announce or proclaim". It is used properly to refer to celestial beings or angels, but there's no reason to think that these were more than 'human-kind' or 'of messengers'. But they were messengers nevertheless. Jesus' first lines are the same in Matthew and Luke. He asked this question: "[What did you go out into the wilderness to see; a reed shaken by the wind?](#)" John did most of his work in the wilderness.

I learned in my "Holy Land" trip that locals make a distinction between **desert** and **wilderness**. Deserts are devoid of vegetation except at the occasional oasis. The wilderness though, seems fairly barren but it does support vegetation, and is an area where the Bedouins regularly travel to graze their sheep or their goats. I saw many of them when I was in the Holy Land. Much was made at Qumran, that John spent time there with the Essenes but never became a full-fledged member of the community. So, some believe that John spent time at the community at Qumran with the Essenes, a cult that existed before Jesus came and during Jesus' day.

The wilderness of East Jordan and Southern Judea is mountainous. Jesus spent time in the wilderness too; remember on the occasion of His temptation. The word here for wilderness or desert is *eramos* (ερημος). It means lone, desert, waste or uninhabited, abandoned, or desolate. It can even mean “unmarried” ... someone who is unmarried. The picture is painted; lonely challenging land, solitude; but the crowds did go there to see *something*. What did they go to see? All Judea, Jerusalem, and the surrounding areas were going out to John according to **Matthew 3:5**. “[At that time Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan](#)”. They were being baptized confessing their sins. These people were seekers. It had been a long time since they had seen a prophet.

John with his camel hair suit was different, but reminded them of stories of Elijah. Revival broke out! Something spiritual was stirring inside of these people, but with all movements, what starts with strong desire, often cools.

So, the question ... what did they go to see or what did they expect? Expectations are funny things. People tend to be idealistic. They want wonderful change – without sacrifice. They want “easy change”. They want things to conform to what *they* think things should be, and *when they heard about John, what did they expect?*

Jesus offers three possibilities ... maybe a reed shaken by the wind; or maybe a man dressed in soft clothing; or maybe a prophet. What is Jesus’ implication by asking this? *I believe* it is connected to people’s expectation of Him. By what standard do people judge a Messiah, or a forerunner of the Messiah?

The Jews had centuries to form their expectations. Most Old Testament Prophets seemed pretty tough. If the past is a prediction, why would they be surprised by John’s clothing or his diet or his message? Why would that surprise them? What surprised people about Jesus? *Remember context here*. John’s disciples need reassurance that Jesus is the **One expected**. If He is not, then was John really a prophet, because he testified to Jesus? This puts Jesus **and** John under the same scrutiny! So, if Jesus is not really the Messiah, then John is not really a prophet.

But Jesus turns the attention back on the crowd. He knew that the crowds were fickle and easily bored. They could say, ‘Well, that just wasn’t what I thought it would be’ ... so; a reed shaken in the wind? Reeds sway under the influence of the wind. They lack stability; they bend doing whatever pressures come upon them. Reeds are political; John was **not** political. He was not politically correct. *He stood for truth, for right, and for God’s agenda. That’s why he is in jail!* John did not care for personal popularity; he was not running for office.

I mentioned this to a couple last night ... powerful illustration. A shaken reed describes how we are blown about by every wind of doctrine and the cunning and craftiness of men and their deceitful scheming, according to **Ephesians 4:14**. The blowing influence of the Spirit in John 3 is *the breeze that should fill our sails and should bend our reeds*. There are many cultural winds that blow daily into our lives and co-opt the wind of the Spirit. *A reed shaken by the wind has no integrity*. What are we going out to see? Three times Jesus asked this question.

The second question was [a man dressed in soft clothing?](#) Behold, those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces. John was not a soft pampered man. No one waited on him! He was not accustomed to luxury. Like Moses who came up in the pleasures of Egypt to suffer with his people, John also lived a different life of sacrifice. His focus was not on personal comfort; he was about seeking *first* the Kingdom. John wore camel's hair clothing and was probably ridiculed, or at least thought strange for it. John was certainly being contrasted with those he had rebuked, Herod Antipas and his brother, Philip's wife, Herodias ... He was in prison and they lived in luxury. John's was a dark cell and theirs was a palace. For Jews who were "kingdom-minded" but thought the kingdom promised by Daniel would be about worldly things, it wasn't looking good here. John and Jesus were a disappointment. Many kept trying to make the square pegs fit into their round holes. At some point, they rejected these conclusions and they put their trust in the wrong leaders. John's food was locusts and wild honey; hardly the food fit for kings.

Then the third time Jesus asked the question, <sup>9</sup>["But what did you go out to see; a prophet?"](#) And then He says, ["Yes"](#) ... but what kind? The romanticized Elijah who calls down fire from Heaven to burn up the altars and to put false prophets to flight, and to bring down kings and queens like Ahab and Jezebel? That's what they were looking for! That's what Jesus says you should be looking for. The Herods' sold out to the Romans and they had to go; but here is John in prison.

The people wanted a prophet with *more political agenda*. They wanted one who carried a sword; a Moses confronting Pharaoh; or an Isaiah confronting Ahaz. Jesus says John was ["more than a prophet."](#) Could this be, because he not only did the work typically thought 'as a prophet' but also was a fulfillment of *the prophet* himself? And no other prophet had such awesome responsibility *to introduce the Son of God into the world*.

Jesus quotes **Malachi 3:1**. ["Behold, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You."](#) This is also quoted in **Mark 1:2** leaving out the last phrase, 'before you'. But adding in **Malachi 1:3** another quote from **Isaiah 40:3** ["The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord; make His paths straight."](#)

In **Isaiah 40:1-2** the scene is set. God seeks to bring ["Comfort to His people, to Jerusalem. He does so by 1\) speaking kindly to her, 2\) to call out that her warfare has ended, 3\) that her guilt \(or iniquity\) has been removed, and 4\) that she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."](#) Number four, "double for all her sins" does not seem to fit unless it was the consequence of Israel not heeding numbers one through three.

This is what happened because Jerusalem did not listen as Jesus tried to gather His people as a hen gathers her chicks, to bring peace, and the Prince of Peace, to each man, each family and to the nation; and to provide a way for this to be done without their sins. Because they didn't accept Jesus, their sins were paid back double when Jerusalem was destroyed in A. D. 70.

John cleared the path for Jesus to do these things. John was the forerunner. Since there were no chapters and verses in the Bible originally, look back at **Matthew 2:17** as in introduction to **Matthew 3:1...**

“Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: <sup>18</sup> “A voice was heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.”

He is addressing those who have *wearied God* with words. What words? Words that rationalize, and justify, trying to make evil seem good, and then trying to implicate God as One who delights in evil! This is detestable and wearying to God. So, go back and look at **Matthew 2:17** and see that as an introduction to **Matthew 3:1**.

This weary God is coming and someone will clear the way for Him. They say they are looking for this God, seeking Him. He is coming. Who can stand when he appears? He is a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap.\*

\* {The term "fuller's soap" can be found in the Old Testament of the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Jesus' arrival on Earth is described as being “like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.” Jesus, like the soap used by the launderers of antiquity to clean and whiten clothes, was coming to purify people and cleanse them of sin. <https://classroom.synonym.com/what-is-fullers-soap-12081767.html> }

He is coming to bring people to repentance. His servant John did the same.

The language following the quotation from **Malachi 3:1** is interesting ... “*The Lord whom you seek*”. Certainly the Jews had sought intently the times and the seasons of the coming of the Messiah. In <http://christianthinktank.com/> an extensive list of non-Christian sources from the time before Christ are listed. Messianic expectations of first century Judaism is an excellent resource for “original documents” on this subject.

From the days of Malachi, the intensity of Jewish expectations of the Messiah reached a fever pitch. The “Lord” here is “Adonai”; sovereign. He will suddenly come into His Temple. The suddenness of His appearing is obviously a paradox. People long for Him but when He showed up, it seems ‘sudden’. **Surely this will be the case when He comes again. Suddenness demands preparation.**

John provided this. When John started preaching, a new day had dawned in Israel. His coming was to His Temple. When Jesus walked into the Temple courts, He was home about His Father's business.

On Mount Moriah where the ancestor Abraham and David once stood, was home. Jesus is also called the ‘Messenger of the Covenant’ in whom you delight. It was not the “covenant” but the “Messiah”, the Messenger that delighted the people. The first messenger was Moses who *delivered* the people and then gave them the Covenant. It was Abraham who was the original messenger of the covenant and now Jesus ushers in a new Covenant of Blood; eternal and irrevocable. Just as in the day of Moses on the mountain when God appeared shaking all things in awesome presence, who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears? Did Jesus' appearance seem much less dramatic than Moses' accompanied by ten plagues, a miraculous deliverance and a dramatic scene at Sinai?

Both had similar beginnings; being protected from death as a baby, early days in Egypt etc. But Jesus' mountain was Golgotha, the earthquake in the darkness. And when He returns, who can endure, and who can stand?

'Before your face' is an interesting phrase to use. If the face of God is what is being sought, then to send one before his face is understood. **Genesis 32:20** is the story of Jacob and Esau and Jacob sends gifts before him so that afterwards he can see Esau's face. The face can be set against us according to **Leviticus 26:17** and it can be a sign of compassion for God not to turn His face from us.

Another picture is a person on their face before a king as in **2 Samuel 18:28** or **2 Samuel 24:20**. Man has always been fascinated with seeing the face of God. In **Genesis 32:30**, Jacob named a place Pineal "because I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved".

To see God's face in some manner and live, is considered to be a blessing. In **Genesis 33:10** Jacob said as much to Esau. "Take my present from my hand then accept my gift from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably." We look at faces to see what people are thinking. We read faces for insight into their hearts.

In **Exodus 3:6** at the burning bush Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. Moses learned that it's dangerous to see God face to face, but he also knew the glory of God was in his face. So in **Exodus 33:18** he asked to see God's glory but in **Exodus 33:20** God tells him that he cannot see His face 'for no man can see Me and live'. After seeing the 'back' of the Lord, Moses' face was illuminated in **Exodus 34:29ff**. Compare that with **2 Corinthians 3**. Could there be a connection here to Jesus as God's incarnate now able to be seen face to face?

Could John be saying to the world, "Behold, look, see; You can now see God's face?" And John goes before the face to prepare the people to **see** the Messiah.

One thing I've asked from the Lord, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His Temple. "When you said, seek my face' my heart said to you, 'your face, O Lord, I will seek' **Psalms 27:8**.

Preparation has been the theme of God through the ages. Before the world's creation God has prepared to send His Son to redeem the world.

In **Isaiah 57:14ff**, God Himself prepares the way for His people. Build up, build up; prepare the way; remove every obstacle out of the way of my people. He does so by lifting up the lowly in spirit.

**Matthew 25:34** speaks of the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world.

In **Matthew 25:41** He speaks of the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

In **Luke 1:17** says, John is preparing a people for the Lord.

It was prophesied in **Luke 1:76**. John was a prophet of the Most High going before the Lord to prepare His way.

**1 Corinthians 2:9**, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the human heart, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.”

**2 Corinthians 5:5** speaks of God who prepared us for this very purpose in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He even gave us the Holy Spirit as the pledge of this very thing.

**Ephesians 2:10** says we were created for good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And in **Hebrews 11:16** God has prepared a City for those looking for something better.

John was another part of God’s “prep” work to connect us with his Son. He made it possible by careful planning.

Jesus knew the plan and how it would play out and He knew John had played his part perfectly. The preparation we make seems so insignificant compared to those God has made on our behalf, but our preparation is *part* of His plan.

God has set the example and those who have cooperated with Him have too. We must do our part in the plan. *It is up to us to prepare ourselves* and our service and be prepared when Jesus returns.

Well, we’re going to stop there. There is a whole lot more to go in this eulogy by Jesus of John the Baptist but that’s enough for today.

As you can see, this is an in-depth study. This is not milk, this is meat.

I encourage you, as you listen to this either pause, or go back to listen to it again and pause.

There is a transcript that will come out on this as well in a few days. If you want to get that manuscript and don’t know how, go to our website at: <https://www.centernalsarasota.org/> and there is a place you can E-mail us and we’ll make sure that you get on the list to be able to receive this information.

Thank you for joining us today. God bless you and have a wonderful day and I’ll see you next time.