

## **PREPARING THE WAY OF THE LORD**

### **- JOHN 1:19-34. - JANUARY 12 -**

**Golden Text: – "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."**

OUR Lord declared of his forerunner, "Verily, I say unto you, there hath not arisen a greater prophet than John the Baptist." The signification of the word prophet is "proclaimer" – not necessarily a proclaimer of future things, however. For instance, the Scriptures refer to the prophets and seers, the latter-named referring particularly to the seeing of visions and the foreseeing of coming events. Strictly speaking, a prophet is one who teaches or proclaims, though in many instances the two qualities are combined in one individual. This was so in the case of John the Baptist. He was not only a prophet declaring the important message to the people that they should repent, etc., but he foretold coming events – as, for instance, in this lesson he foretold that our Lord was the Lamb of God which should take away the sin of the world. He declared also that the Lord would baptize people with the holy Spirit and with fire. There was no greater prophet than John, because none of them was entrusted with a more important service of the Lord. Others had foretold the coming of Messiah, his birth of a virgin, his being led as a lamb to the slaughter, his crucifixion, his resurrection, etc., but to John was given the very honorable service of being the first direct announcer or herald of the Son of God, the man Christ Jesus.

While thinking of this honorable position occupied by John, let us remember the Master's word on the subject – "Nevertheless I say unto you, he that is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matt. 11:11.) What a thought there is here

respecting the honor that God has conferred upon the apostles and upon all who since their time have believed on the Lord through their word and come into vital relationship [R4113 : page 9] with him through faith and consecration. In proportion as we realize this honor of being ambassadors for God, let us be faithful in the use of the opportunities and privileges afforded us. It was for John's honor to be the herald of the Lord in the flesh; it is our distinction to be permitted to proclaim the *parousia* of the Son of man and his glorious reign, about to be inaugurated for the blessing of all the families of the earth. Let us be faithful even unto imprisonment, even unto death, even unto beheading, should such be the providence of God.

John's proclamation was, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent" – reform, get ready for it. He foretold that our Lord would treat the people of Israel as a reaper, that he would winnow the wheat and cast the chaff into the fire. The same thought he expressed again, saying, "He will baptize [some of you] with the holy Spirit and [others of you] with fire." These prophecies were accurately fulfilled. Our Lord did a reaping work in that nation, as he said to his disciples, "I send you forth to reap that whereon you bestowed no labor." For three years and a half the Lord reaped and gathered the first-fruits of that nation as his disciples, and upon these at Pentecost he poured out the holy Spirit. Subsequently the apostles gathered others before the time for the burning of the chaff, the "baptism of fire" which occurred in the closing of their national history, which culminated in A.D. 70 with the utter destruction of the city, the temple, and their entire polity. Similarly we who are living in the harvest time of this age, and who are declaring the presence, *parousia*, of the Son of man, are aware that a reaping work is now being accomplished in Christendom, nominal Spiritual Israel, and that all the wheat will be gathered into the garner, beyond the veil, and that speedily there will come upon the world, especially upon the tare class, a time of trouble such

as never was since there was a nation – the divine preparation for the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom in power and great glory for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

### **"WE BE ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN"**

John's announcement that sin would bar any from a share in the Kingdom, and hence that all should repent and seek divine reconciliation and turn over a new leaf, came as a shock to some who had been passing as God's holy people – the Pharisees and the worldly-wise Sadducees, higher critics, unbelievers. While some of these hearkened and confessed their sins and reformed, others disputed, claiming that John's teachings were extreme and unreasonable. Their argument was that God had promised the Kingdom to the seed of Abraham. There is no other nation of Abraham's seed and none other as holy or as worthy as we, and the promise of the Kingdom belongs to all Jews irrespective of their sanctity. So those who really embraced John's testimony were chiefly of the poor, confessedly sinful. We have the Lord's word for it that if the nation at large had heeded, had accepted John's message, they would have believed in Jesus. Hence we may well suppose that of the 500 brethren who became our Lord's disciples before his crucifixion, and who were privileged to see him after his resurrection, many of them were of those who had heard and heeded John's message. We may suppose also that considerable numbers of those who believed on the day of Pentecost and afterward were of those who heard John and were baptized by him for remission of sins and reformation of life. Thus do divine arrangements and agencies cooperate for the blessing of the honest-hearted, whatever may be their station in life, high or low, rich or poor.

### **OUR LORD'S FORERUNNER**

In the East in olden times, and still, great personages in their travels are preceded by heralds or forerunners who clear the way.

Dr. Trumbull describes the streets of an oriental city, "well filled with half-naked cripples, blind beggars, vain women, and men in bright-colored garments, donkeys trotting through the crowded ways. Suddenly out of all this confusion a sharp, clear voice was heard, 'O ah! O ah!' – meaning, Take care – from a young Egyptian, gaily dressed, coming on the run, swinging a light staff in his hand and repeating his cries to the throng in the street to make way for those who are to follow. Close behind him came an open carriage drawn by a span of showy horses, containing an official of the government. During my stay in Cairo one of the commonest sights was the carriage of a pasha, preceded through the crowded streets by one or more forerunners, calling aloud for the clearing of the way."

John the Baptist was to be the forerunner of our Lord in the flesh – to clear the way, to make the announcement – that he might be properly received, etc. But John did not fulfil all of the prophecy relating to this clearing of the way and preparing for Messiah's Kingdom, which reads: –

"Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord,  
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be exalted,  
And every mountain shall be made low,  
And the crooked places shall be made straight,  
And the rough places plain." – Isa. 40:3,4.

## **THE ANTITYPICAL ELIJAH**

We remind our readers that in the second volume of DAWN-STUDIES, chapter VIII., we have set forth the evidences that as John in the flesh introduced Jesus in the flesh and thus fulfilled the work of forerunner, so the Church in the flesh during this Gospel Age has been the antitypical Elijah, whose business it is to announce the second coming of Christ,

the King of glory, and to call for the clearing of the way for his Millennial reign. As you all have this presentation we will not enter into a discussion of it here.

Let us note the foregoing prophecy: We perceive that John's ministry accomplished comparatively little of this; it lasted less than two years and reached a very small proportion of one generation, of one nation. But this is the very message that the antitypical John, the antitypical Elijah, the Church of Christ in the flesh, has been witnessing to the world. Its message as voiced by the Apostle is that the world is in a wilderness condition and needs the presence of the great King to bring order out of its confusion. Its message is that those who hear should walk circumspectly, should make a straight pathway in the desert, a highway for the coming King. More than this, it shows **[R4113 : page 10]** that the entire reign of Jesus and the Church during the Millennium will be to prepare the world for the presence of Jehovah, that the earth may again become his green footstool instead of being a desert, rejected and condemned by him because of sin.

Not only is the work of the Church in the flesh pointed out in this prophecy, but also the work of Christ and the Church in glory during the Millennial Age is foretold – "every valley shall be exalted," signifying that the humble shall be lifted up out of degradation, and those who have reached high positions of influence and affluence under the reign of sin shall be humbled under the reign of righteousness, and thus symbolically "every mountain shall be brought low." The great things which belong to the present time of sin and imperfection will all be straightened out, and the incongruous things will all be smoothed over; so that eventually the world of mankind, as a result of the work of the "Times of restitution of all things," shall again be in harmony with the divine will and the divine law of love, be ready

for a return of the divine presence, as represented by the prophets in the words, "He shall make the place of his feet glorious."

### "WHO ART THOU, THEN?"

This was the question asked of John the Baptist – "Art thou the Messiah?" No. "Art thou Elias?" No. "Art thou that prophet mentioned by Moses?" (Acts 3:21,23.) No. "Who art thou, then? Why do you come in this manner, speaking as with authority?" John's answer was, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight....I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose." (Luke 3:4,16.) Thus did John announce the greatness of Messiah and his own insignificance in comparison. Surely we who antitype him may feel very humble in respect to all of our privileges in connection with the announcement of the glorious Kingdom. Any other attitude would be unworthy of us as his representatives and ambassadors. The poet expresses this matter, saying:

"Rather be nothing, nothing –  
To him let their voices be raised;  
He is the fountain of blessing,  
Yes, worthy is he to be praised."

How similar is this announcement to the one made by John. There Jesus was present in the flesh, offering himself to fleshly Israel. Now he is present a spirit being and equally unrecognized. There he was eventually recognized by all the Israelites indeed; here we expect that his presence, *parousia*, will be recognized by all Spiritual Israelites indeed before the "harvest" closes. It is not advisable to cast this pearl of precious truth before the world nor before the unconsecrated. The facts of the Lord's presence, that the harvest work is now in progress, that the wheat will **[R4114 : page 10]** soon all be garnered and that the fire of

trouble upon the tares will soon be kindled are only for those who are "Israelites indeed," hungering and thirsting for righteousness. But these truths are indeed meat in due season for all the wise virgins.

### **"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD"**

While our Lord's strength and majesty are symbolically referred to when he is styled the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," thus picturing his mighty power as the Millennial King, the picture of a lamb is certainly very appropriate to him in connection with his earthly ministry and sacrifice for our sins. His submission to the Father's will in every particular and ultimately even unto death, even the death of the cross, was very lamb-like. Furthermore, he was God's Lamb in the sense that his offering for our sins was the divine arrangement, the Father's plan. The Scriptural declaration is that God gave his only begotten Son to be man's Redeemer, that he sent his Son into the world – the Son delighting to do the Father's will. All these thoughts beautifully blend together in this expression, "The Lamb of God." Moreover, it brings to our minds the thought of the necessity for a sacrifice for our sins. In no other way could a lamb take away or bear the sin of the world. How glad we are that by the Lord's grace we not only have eyes of understanding to see him as our great Teacher, Shepherd, but also eyes to see and minds to understand that he was indeed the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice on our behalf is to cancel our sins, their penalty, etc. Only those who can recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Sin-Bearer, can have the justification by faith proffered to believers in this Gospel Age. Let us never lose sight of this feature of the Truth, Whoever loses his robe of righteousness through faith in the blood, loses all so far as the Scriptures reveal.

## TAKING AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD

How wonderful are the statements of the divine Word! – how exact! John, as a Jew, would not be expected to understand all that his words declared, for the Jews were especially expecting Messiah to take away the sins of the Jews, and that then they, as God's Royal Priesthood, would correct the world in righteousness. But John's declaration goes farther than this, and includes all the Gentiles as well. The wisdom from on high which guided this prophetic utterance is beyond that which the majority of the Lord's people today can appreciate. The general thought today seems to be that the sin of the world is never to be taken away – that the world will sink down into eternal torment under the weight of sin – the Adamic condemnation, supplemented by personal transgressions. Christendom, Churchianity, today knows nothing about a Savior that, as the Lamb of God, shall take away the sin of the world. Alas! alas! poor, blind Christendom! It has read these words and other similar declarations of the Scriptures without getting from them the real blessing which they contain. We remember in this connection the Apostle's statement that "the man Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all," and we remember his further statement that Jesus' sacrifice was "a propitiation for our sins [the Church's sins], and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 2:2.) Truly, as the Lord declared, As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my plans than your plans. How glad we are that we find God to be neither **[R4114 : page 11]** little, mean nor revengeful, but a great God whose wondrous plan so far transcends the thought of man. As we look with the eyes of our understanding we realize a measure of the fulfilment of the Apostle's prayer, which, no doubt, included us, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,...that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and



depth and height; and to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge." – Eph. 3:14,18,19.

## **HIS WORK IS BEFORE HIM**

John the Baptist spoke of the Lamb as being present, but of the cancellation of the sin of the world as being a future work. And this work is still incomplete. Our Lord did die as the Lamb, his sacrifice was indeed fully meritorious and satisfactory to the Father, as evidenced by his resurrection from the dead and exaltation to glory and power. But in harmony with the divine plan, the taking away of the sins of the world is divided into two parts: (1) The taking away of the sins of those whose hearts long for reconciliation with God and forgiveness, and to be in harmony with that which is right and true and just and good. These, called believers, have their sins taken away reckonedly; or rather, as the Apostle and the Prophet express it, their sins are "covered" from God's sight by the robe of Christ's righteousness – to be entirely blotted out or taken away when, by the Lord's grace, they shall have finished their course and as faithful ones been counted worthy to enter into life eternal. In that new body then to be granted there will be no blemish, no sin to cover, all will have been blotted out. Then will begin the reign of Christ and his glorified Church, his Bride, the blessing of the world – the Millennial reign, the Kingdom of the heavens, the rule of righteousness. (2) But before that reign shall begin, the Lamb of God – who redeemed the world more than eighteen centuries ago – will present the merit of his sacrifice and the sacrifice also of the Church, his Body members [made worthy, acceptable through his merit], to the Father as the second offering of the great Day of Atonement sacrifice – for all the people. – Lev. 16.

As the Lord's presentation of his sacrifice when he ascended up on high was accepted of the Father and the blessing came upon the Church, the household of faith, so surely will the

second presentation in the end of this age when offered by the great High Priest be acceptable to the Father for the sins of the whole world – all the people. Divine forgiveness for all, the obliquity of Adamic guilt and weakness, will then be made applicable to every creature, and only for such portions of transgressions as have been in the nature of wilful wrong doing will receive "chastisements," "stripes." (Luke 12:47,48.) All the influences of that Millennial Kingdom will be exercised for the blessing, uplifting and assistance of all who will then be brought to a knowledge of the Lord and his gracious plans. Even stripes, chastisements, judgments are amongst the assistances for the world and their correction in righteousness. So, then, by the end of the Millennial Age, the blessing of God – through the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world – shall have accomplished such wonderful, gracious blessings for mankind that all shall have reached the full perfection of restitution to human nature except the incorrigible, who will be "utterly destroyed from amongst the people." – Acts 3:23.

### **JOHN'S FAITHFUL WITNESS**

We see in John's message an utter absence of selfishness, that stumbling stone which has kept so many of the Lord's people from themselves progressing and from being used of the Lord as a blessing to others and witnesses to the truth. John's confession was that Jesus was far greater than himself, and should be preferred before him because he was before him. He was not only before him in the sense of having had a preexistence with the Father, but he was before him in the sense of always having had a higher station and being perfect, while John himself was compassed with imperfections of the flesh like other men.

The declaration, "I knew him not," should not be understood to mean that he was not acquainted with Jesus, for the record shows that they were full cousins. Rather the thought is that he

knew not that Jesus was the Messiah: he knew him as his cousin, he knew him as a wonderful boy and a wonderful man, he knew him well enough to at first protest that he was not one of the kind that should be baptized – he was not a sinner. But after Jesus had insisted that by his baptism he would be accomplishing the Father's will – "fulfilling all righteousness" – then John baptized him in water. There, he tells us, at that moment he received from God the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. He had already been informed that he was to announce Messiah and the Kingdom, and that he would know the Son of God by beholding the descent upon him of the holy Spirit as a dove, but he had not expected that this demonstration should take place in connection with any whom he baptized. He himself, then, was astonished when he beheld the descent of the Spirit upon the Lord, and he announced then to the people that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lamb of God. John did not announce that Jesus was the Father, but that he was the Son of God. This was our Lord's own declaration, the declaration of the apostles, and our testimony must be in harmony with this. We are not to ignore the Father nor the Son nor the relationship between the two, nor the oneness which exists between them, which our Lord explained in his prayer, when he prayed for the Church that they all might be one even as he and the Father are one – not one in person, but one in unity of heart and purpose.

