

The Forerunners.

In their day, the disciples found that people were offended when they witnessed of a man called Jesus the Christ - a man of their own generation. If their witness had been of David, Moses, Noah or any of the prophets, the people would not have been so offended. Why ? Because they would have been speaking of historical figures and what God, had done through them in the past. But when the disciples spoke of Jesus and his ministry, a man of their own generation, as the fulfilment of prophecy, they were greatly offended - especially the religious leaders.

Personally, I find that the same attitude and spirit prevails today. If I speak of Paul, Peter, James, John, or even more recently of Luther, Wesley, or Calvin - people take no offence. Even to bring to remembrance those who were known by their evil deeds, like Judas, Herod, Pontius Pilate, Pharaoh or even Satan himself - it still brings no offence; because to most people they are just historical figures having little or no influence in today's world. People accept, respect, and applaud them for what they were. But to speak of a contemporary in the same manner brings out the opposition in full strength - exactly as it was in the days when the disciples witnessed of Jesus. Rather than recognise, respect, and accept a "contemporary" figure whom God "singles out" for a specific fulfilment of prophecy in the present Age, most professing Christians (especially the religious leaders) will strongly oppose it.

The Bible speaks on this wise:
Hebrews 11:6.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Acts 13:48.

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

According to these Scriptures, I cannot, by intellectual persuasion convince anyone that there is a God. Neither can I persuade them that God has acted in this generation. Two conditions must be met: First, the individual must "*believe that God IS*" and that He is a "*rewarder*" of them that "*diligently seek Him*"; and secondly, they must according to the "*foreknowledge*" of God, be "*ordained unto eternal life*". Otherwise he/she will not accept my witness. Before they can come to God they must believe that there is a God, and secondly, before he can believe that God has done anything in his own generation, he must believe what God has done in other generations.

So if we can believe that there is a God and want to recognise and see (understand) what He has and is accomplishing in this generation, then we need to recognise His works, His pattern, and promises in past generations. For according to His Word, He "*changes not*" and will act the same today as He did in the past. The Bible tells us that "God is perfect in all His ways". In dealing with man, God does not change, update, or modernise His thoughts, patterns, or methods. He begins and ends with the same "tools" - His "Word" and "faith" (absolute trust) in that word.

Actually, it was a lack of absolute faith in God's word which caused the fall in the beginning. Eve allowed Satan to cause her to "doubt" one Word of God. Another example is that of Cain and Abel - The word was revealed to Abel (by faith - Spiritual Revelation in the heart); and acting on that which was revealed, he offered the "more acceptable excellent" sacrifice to the Lord. Cain bypassed the word - that which was revealed to Abel, and offered a sacrifice of his own choosing - he was rejected. We must remember that "*the Word will not profit us if it is not mixed with faith*" (absolute trust) (Hebrews 4:2).

Let's consider this example:

Hebrews 11:7,

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Notice that it was "*by faith*" that Noah did this. He believed that God was talking to him and he acted on his faith. But consider the people who lived in the days of Noah - what in the world did they think of this old man? Remember, Noah was only one man; he was neither a church or a denomination. His message was brand new - it had never been heard before. It spoke of things

that just couldn't happen - he prophesied that rain was going to fall from the heavens. Since the ground had always been watered by the dew (Genesis 2:6) the people had never experienced rain before. But Noah insisted that it would rain in such a deluge that the world would be flooded.

By his works he showed that he believed what he was preaching - he constructed an Ark for the salvation of those that would believe. Put yourself back in that day and hear their laughter and derision. Why, they had never heard of such foolishness! But in spite of their unbelief, that was God's way in Noah's time - whether they believed it or not. He sent one man with a message and those who listened to that man were saved - the rest perished. What if Noah had waited for someone else to preach it, the warning would have never been given, but he had faith that God had spoken to him and he responded accordingly. By faith Noah believed God and condemned the rest of the world, but saved his own household. Now, if you had lived in Noah's day, would you have thought him to be insane or a fanatic; or, would you have looked on Noah as a prophet of God, thereby saving yourself and your household?

Maybe you find it difficult to place yourself in Noah's day. If so let us come to the time of Abraham. Abraham was not raised in the righteousness of God - in fact, his family had been heathens. But one day God spoke to him, telling him to leave the land of his fathers and journey to a new land. The Bible tells us that when Abraham left, he journeyed "*not knowing whither he went,*" but he believed that God had spoken to him and boldly told his family, "I am leaving here and going there and whatever land I look upon or put my foot upon, God is going to give it to us." You see Abraham didn't just believe in God, he believed God. There's quite a difference between believing in God and "believing ALL" that God says in His word.

Do you, like Abraham, believe God? In the book of Numbers the Lord rebuked the children of Israel for their unbelief saying, "*...How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs that I have shewed among them?*" Numbers 14:11. Now if you had been a member of Abraham's family, would you have believed your relative with a strange revelation from God? Would you have followed him, or might you have said, "Wait a minute, we love you Abraham, but we never heard anyone talk like this before. How do we know God spoke to you?" Maybe you would have discounted his message, saying, "Nothing doing, Abraham; the priest is not teaching this, and you have no vindication. After all, what proof do we have that you even heard from God?" And, Abraham, indeed had no physical proof, for his proof is

the intangible material of faith, locked within his heart. And for Abraham, his faith had enough "substance" and "evidence" (Hebrews 11:1) to cause him to believe it and act on it.

We know that later, as Abraham journeyed through the land, his nephew Lot, left Abraham's tents and went down to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, the way of the world. Here it was that Lot, a righteous man, was sitting in the gates of the city, when two messengers arrived from the tents of Abraham, and he recognised the two as Angel Messengers of God. These were not beings with fluttery wings, but Messengers sent from God, bringing a word from the Lord. He also listened with careful attention to their fearful message, "Get out of Sodom and Gomorrah! Leave this city! Do not look back, for God is going to destroy it with fire." Could you have taken such a message seriously? Picture yourself; could you have actually recognised these two as messengers of God and followed them out of the city without looking back, even at the terrible destruction which followed? (You may be among those who are given a chance to make that decision today, for there is a modern Sodom and Gomorrah which have been warned in a similar manner - by a vindicated Prophet of God - and that warning is found in the pages of this book.)

Let us turn to the New Testament to learn of another man with a strange message and how he was accepted. St John records in chapter 1:19-21 the following interesting discourse between John the Baptist and certain priestly men:

19 And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

20 And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.

21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

These priests and Levites saw that everything about John was different - his message of repentance, his clothing of camel skin, even his diet of locusts and wild honey. They observed that he did not come down to the Temple to preach, yet his ministry was outstandingly effective. Puzzled by this strange man of the wilderness, they sought an answer; hence the question "are you Elias?" The last great prophet these people knew of was Malachi, whose message had rung out some four hundred years before. These religious Jews were well acquainted with Malachi 4:5, and they thought that John was the fulfilment of this portion of that prophecy... "*Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming*

of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."

But when asked if he were that prophet, he clearly stated "No". Then they they thought that John might be the fulfilment of Deuteronomy 18 where Moses had had said that there would be a prophet sent to them "like unto" Moses himself. The mystery deepened as John gave a flat denial to this question. Well, John denied being the prophet to "*restore all things*"; now he denies being the "prophet like unto Moses". Who indeed was he? Not fully understanding the scriptures the religious leaders asked him if he were "the anointed one - the Messiah?". To this question he answered "yes" and "no", "yes" he was anointed of God and "no", he was not "the anointed one". Finally, in their spiritual blindness, the priests and Levites asked him "Who art thou?" Without hesitation John the Baptist (in St John 1:23) identified himself in the Scriptures, pointing them to a prophecy they had overlooked in Isaiah 40:3, saying "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.*" Was John testifying of himself? No. John was testifying of the Scriptures and the Scriptures testified of him. He was the perfect fulfilment of that Scripture.

Now Isaiah had said (Isaiah 40:3) that one would come crying as a voice in the wilderness. John the Baptist was that "voice." Also, Malachi 3:1 states,

"Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, who ye seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Again, John the Baptist was that messenger who was sent to forerun, before the Lord would suddenly come to His Temple. John, by the Scriptures knew who he was and what his ministry would do? But would we have known who he was?

Now, let's see how Jesus identified John the Baptist. In revealing himself as the Son of Man, he also placed John's ministry in the Word. Matthew 17:9-13 records the following conversation which Jesus had with the disciples concerning the Elijah ministry of Malachi's 4:5 prophecy, and the ministry of John the Baptist. In this portion of Scripture Jesus identifies a future Elijah type ministry to restore all things (This is discussed in chapter 2) and then he identifies John the Baptist as the Elijah of the First coming of Christ.

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from

the dead.

10 And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

12 But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist, then, was indeed a man with the spirit of Elias, forerunning the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But he was NOT "that Elijah" to restore all things. Yet the most religious people of the day, the Scribes and Pharisees, though they looked for a Messiah, didn't recognise him, or his forerunner. Jesus confirmed that they didn't testifying that it is possible for God's sending of a mighty man to go unnoticed by even the religious people of the world.

But if John was the forerunner, then it must have been necessary to recognise him as a forerunner, or God would have sent him in vain. Failure to recognise the "forerunner" leads to a failure to recognise WHO and WHAT he foreruns. Even in the theological seminaries, it is taught that John was the forerunner, but the reason for such a forerunner has been lost in their teachings. The conditions of the age required that a "forerunner" come to "prepare" the people to receive what God had promised.

Let us examine this point more minutely from the Bible. Paul, speaking to twelve followers of John's message in Ephesus, in Acts 19:3, asked under what baptism they had been baptised. "Unto John's baptism," was their reply. Paul preached Jesus to them and then they were baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ. They had "listened to" and "believed" the forerunner, therefore, they were ready to receive the revealed truth of Christ's having come in that age.

John the Baptist, standing on the banks of the Jordan, was asked (John 1:25), "*Why baptizeth thou then if thou be not the Christ, neither Elias, neither that prophet?*" John answered then easily, saying "*I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you whom ye knew not* (meaning he knew already that Christ was present). *He that is coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe latchet I am not worthy to unloose.*" Here John hints that Christ is present, but notice that John does not point him out, for the "sign" had not yet

been sent. John explains about the sign in John 1:29-34

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

No one else, not even John, knew the Messiah until God "sent the sign" that He had foretold John he would see. Of course when John saw it, he said, "This is the Son of God." If John himself didn't know it until he saw that witness, then God's word would have been broken if anyone else had recognised the Messiah before John did. Do you see the significance of that statement?

It was impossible for anyone to have recognised Jesus Christ's first coming until the sign had been sent and recognised by the forerunner.

If it were possible for anyone to recognise Jesus as the Son of God without John the baptist's message then God did a vain thing when He sent John.

John the Baptist lost some disciples after this. As recorded in John 1:35-36,

35 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;

36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!"

And the two disciples heard him speak and they quit following John and started following Jesus. What did the forerunner do? He introduced people to what? Baptism, repentance. But what was it for? To show them the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and even John's disciples began to follow Him.

Even those people who had lived with Jesus, who knew Him best, had no idea who He was, for according to Mark 6:1-3,

1 And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.

2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?

3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

The people that knew Jesus personally hadn't recognised Him as the Lamb of God. You see if Jesus had come down from heaven as a full grown man, dressed in royal robes, with perhaps 10,000 legions of Angels behind Him, and had done away with the Romans, and made the Pharisees the rulers, He would have been accepted as the Messiah. But, no, He came just as the prophets said He would come, born in Bethlehem, in a manger. Raised as a carpenter's son in Nazareth, he walked among the people on the streets and in the Temple, and as long as He was performing miracles and doing signs, such as feeding the multitude with fishes and bread, they accepted Him. But when He started speaking those things which to them was strange doctrine, declaring Himself as from the Father and saying, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father," the Scripture says "many followed Him no more."

No, Jesus Christ did not descend dressed in royal robes, for God's way was that He sent a forerunner; just as He had sent Noah with a strange message, just as He spoke to Abraham, just as He dealt with Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, so He sent John the Baptist. Is it possible that in our generation God might do something unusual ? If so, He would do it the same way that He has before. He would send a man with a message, and of course the world wouldn't listen. But those who hear by faith and from the word can test it with the word, as did the Bereans in Acts 17:11, to see whether it is God declaring Himself to this generation.

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