



We are in an "hour" where the consensus among many within the Body of Christ is that we are very near to Jesus' second coming. How that occurs is open to many different interpretations and thoughts, all of which I am not going to approach in this essay. Which ever way you may interpret or think about the second coming of Jesus, we can all agree that we in the Body of Christ must be in the "mindset" of "preparing the way" for His soon return. Those that have this "unction" in "preparing the way" also refer to it as a "forerunner spirit."

What is the "forerunner spirit" and what does this mean or imply? Well, obviously, an example we have of this kind of "forerunner spirit" is found in the New Testament in the form of a man that we refer to as, John the Baptist. Jesus declares in Matthew 11:10 that it is he, John the Baptist, who was the one foretold of in the scriptures by the prophets. Jesus is referring to Malachi 3:1 where it declares, *"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me..."* (Please, refer to the following scriptures for further reference: Matthew 11:7-15; Matthew 17:11-13; Mark 9:11-13)

The "forerunner" for the first coming of the Messiah (Jesus) was John the Baptist. The scriptures also state that "Elijah" will come before Messiah's appearance. This is found in Malachi 4:5,6 where it states, *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse"* Before, John was even conceived, the angel prophesied to his father, Zacharias, *"And he shall go before him in the **spirit and power of Elias**, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

Obviously, Jesus and the angel were not talking about a "reincarnation" of the prophet Elijah. Rather they were referring to the "spirit of Elijah." So, what does the "one coming in the spirit and power of Elijah" mean? It is referring to one who will come in the character, personality, anointing and message of the prophet Elijah. John Wesley refers to this as meaning, "Having the same integrity, courage, austerity, and fervor, and the same power attending his word" as Elijah. (John Wesley's Notes - Luke 1:17) John the Baptist walked in this same "anointing" that Elijah walked in.

Elijah is considered by the Jewish people as one of the greatest of the prophets. He was considered by the Jews as one who was almost as great as Moses. This would make his appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Moses and Jesus, make sense. At the time of Elijah's coming on the scene, Israel had reached its lowest point of apostasy. All the prophets were basically defenders and "oracles" (mouthpieces) for Yahweh and for the Laws of Moses. In Elijah's day Israel was in a desperate, deplorable state. Idolatry, iniquity and sin were prevalent in every aspect of the nation's society and culture. They were in desperate need of changing their ways.

With great conviction and with fiery rebukes, challenges and even contests with the "prophets of Baal," Elijah boldly declared what Israel needed to hear and do. He essentially stood alone saying to the people of Israel, God's chosen ones, "Repent!" This same unyielding, boldness and anointing of tireless declaration for the people to "repent," was prophesied to come again for the preparation that would "usher in" Messiah's entrance into the world.

This thought was central to the Jewish mindset about the coming kingdom and Messiah. That is what makes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees towards both John and Jesus so baffling. The Pharisees in their inception, some 150 years earlier on the heels of the Maccabean revolt, were essentially established for the purpose of getting the nation of Israel back to its roots of loving God through obedience to His Law and looking for Messiah. However, two or three generations later, we see that this ideal was not correctly passed down. They got caught up in what we refer to as the "Pharisaical" mindset of legalism found throughout the New Testament.

That brings us back to John the Baptist. We find John and his ministry of "baptizing" and "baptism" mentioned in all four Gospel accounts. So what was John's "baptism?" Contrary to some of our thinking this was not just a "mikveh." In Jewish culture, a "mikveh" is basically a ritual bath that Orthodox Jews are required to do to cleanse and purify themselves. It also commemorates and expresses that a change or transition has occurred within the person. This aspect of the idea of a "mikveh" was valid and was a part of John's Baptism. However, there was another aspect of John's baptism that the Jews also understood. When they were totally immersed in this baptism they were also expressing that within their heart they are recognizing that they were "just as sinful as a Gentile." Now that was a big deal. Without going into detail, we all know how the Jews felt back then, and even today, about Gentiles. That was as bad as you can get other than being a dreaded "Samaritan," which is to be explained at another time.

When the people came from all over to be baptized by John, they heard his message to repent, being declared in the "spirit and power of Elijah," as well as in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. His words resonated deep within them causing them to recognize how bad a state they were in, both personally and as a nation. They made the bold decision, as well as a bold action, to be baptized. Those that were baptized knew what they were expressing. Anyone that saw them being baptized knew what they were saying - that they were as "sinful as a Gentile" and needed a change of heart. That is what makes Jesus' baptism by John so amazing. When Jesus came to be baptized, John balked and said it was he that should be baptized by Jesus. Jesus told John that He must be baptized by John to "fulfill all things." Jesus, in this baptism was not just identifying Himself with the sinful Jewish people but He was also identifying Himself with the sinfulness of the whole world. (Selah - let's pause and think on that for a moment.)

This baptism of John also points to what Jesus would teach in His "Sermon on the Mount." The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' first teaching to His first disciples. What was the first principle he expressed in His first teaching to His first disciples? - "*Blessed are the poor in spirit...*" In simplified words this means that I must recognize how spiritually bankrupt I am and that I need God. Recognizing my need for God and crying out to Him with a heart that cries, "Help me, please; Have mercy on me; please, God; I am nothing without you; I am a sinner and not just a sinner but the worst of the worst..." This is the first step to true salvation.

John's baptism was a "baptism of true repentance and a desire to be holy." It expressed a true desire for "Spiritual Cleansing," what we would call "Sanctification/Consecration," within the person being baptized. It points to the Bride of Christ which is to be without spot or blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27; Song of Solomon 4:7). It points to the time that would be coming when a person, would be looked upon by God, the Father, as washed and cleansed, spiritually, because of what Jesus has done by the shedding of His blood for our salvation.

John's baptism represented and expressed a heart that would be "fertile ground," prepared for when the true presence of God would come and manifest itself in the form of Jesus. (Please read Matthew 13:8,23 - the parable of the Sower.) The person's heart would be open in receiving Him as their Messiah, their King, their only hope of true salvation. It was truly, preparing the way for the presence of the Lord to come into their midst and into their heart. John's baptism of repentance was a preparing of the way for Messiah's first coming on this earth.

A heart of repentance prepares the way within a person's heart that recognizes their need for God and cries out to Him for their salvation, in and through Jesus. A continual heart of repentance within the believer prepares the way to experience the manifest, tangible presence of the Lord within our lives as well as in our corporate gatherings. A continual heart of repentance within the Body of Christ will prepare the way for the soon return of our Beloved One, Jesus.

In Matthew 3:7, 8, the Pharisees came to "check out" what was happening. John saw them and asks them, "...O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." Why did he say that to them? Why wasn't he glad to see them come? The reason was that he discerned that they were there for the wrong reason. They were not interested in this "repentance stuff." Their heart was not at the place where they recognized their need for God and that they were "spiritually bankrupt." They did not see the need for this baptism for them. Their hope of salvation was simply because they were Jewish - from the seed of Abraham. That is why John states in Matthew 3:9, "And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." He then proceeds to warn them, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root..."

This idea of "fruits of repentance" is expressed in other scriptures. Luke 3:8 expresses it in another way - "Bring forth therefore fruits **worthy** of repentance." Paul expresses it in Acts 26:20 - "But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and **do works meet** for repentance."

The idea behind the principle of "fruits of repentance" is that it expresses a true hatred towards sin because it is so opposite from God's character and its result brings "separation or distance" between the person and God. Your sin separates you from your God; not God from you. (Isaiah 59:2) It points again to the second principle that Jesus teaches on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. After He teaches the first principle (*Blessed are the poor in spirit...*) in His first teaching to His first disciples, the very next thing He states is "*blessed are they that mourn...*" (Matthew 5:4), meaning to grieve over sin - whether in your own life or its affects in other people's lives - saved or unsaved. It points to a true Godly sorrow.

Repentance is not a one-time experience. It becomes part of our lifestyle as a Christian as expressed by the Apostle John in 1John1:8,9. Confession, acknowledgement and "owning up" to the sin we do is an aspect of the "fruit of repentance." This confession, acknowledgement and "owning up" to the sin should lead to an action of turning away from that sin and turning towards God. If there is not a turning away from the sin, then it is not a true repentance of the heart, but rather just within a person's mind. True repentance, or a true desire for repentance, comes from an attitude of the heart that yearns to simply "bless the heart of their King" through a lifestyle expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Luke 3:2-8, we get another insight into this "Forerunner Spirit." It is one that comes to declare what Isaiah speaks of in Isaiah 40:3-5, "*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*" This prophecy that Isaiah spoke was a prophecy of "spiritual alignment" that leads us back to God and His presence, "... a highway to God."

We must get out of the mentality that repentance is a "downer" or that it is bondage, or doom and gloom or even worse - religious. Oh my!!! I actually said the "r" word. Actually, Isaiah is telling us that a heart of repentance leads to great comfort and joy and should be thought of as such.

I will let the scriptures speak for themselves.

Isaiah 40:1,2(Amp) - "**Comfort, comfort My people, says your God. Speak tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry to her that her time of service and her warfare are ended, that [her punishment is accepted and] her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received [punishment] from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.**

Isaiah 40:5 - "**And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.**"

Matthew 5:4 - "**Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.**"

You become aligned with God. Every high thing, every low thing, every crooked way, every rough edge within your life will be made straight and bring you back to that path of destiny that the Lord created for you when you were formed and framed in His heart from the beginning of time. Our destiny always was meant to lead us right into His presence, both here on this earth as well as for eternity. Through Jesus and a heart of true repentance, your iniquity is pardoned. Your sin is forgiven. The way to the Lord's presence, as well as access to His presence, is made available through the Blood of Jesus.

In all discussions concerning the "forerunner spirit" and "preparing the way," we are exhorted and encouraged to enter into times of prayer and intercession; being watchmen on the walls; enter into times of intimacy and love through worshipping our First Love; being that Bride preparing herself for her beloved Bridegroom; and entering into warfare and being mighty warriors unto the Lord. These are all true and we should be exhorted and encouraged to enter into these aspects. However, we never seem to hear, as part of those exhortations and encouragements, a true call to repentance. That was John the Baptist's message in "preparing the way" for Jesus. Actually, when John was imprisoned, we see that Jesus took up this "mantle" and continued declaring this message of, "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*" - Matthew 4:17.

In concluding our discussion, I would like to submit that we should not be negligent in this aspect of "preparing the way" as that "forerunner spirit" in this hour. Repentance must be an integral ingredient along with the other ingredients mentioned previously in "preparing the way for the Lord." Whether it be individually (for salvation and then becoming part of our lifestyle); or collectively, as we gather together desiring the manifest, tangible presence of the Lord in the midst of our corporate gatherings; or globally, as the Bride of Christ, preparing to usher in the second coming of our beloved Bridegroom - there needs to be a true heart of repentance.

I believe it will serve as a "threefold purpose:"

- 1) The world needs to hear this message of repentance and see this not only boldly spoken of, but boldly lived out, within the Body of Christ as we prepare the way for the Second Coming of Jesus.
- 2) Also, for the Body of Christ to experience the fullness of His manifest presence today within our midst, both individually and in corporate gatherings. We must continually seek after Him and keep a pure heart, bringing forth "fruits of repentance," and worship with an attitude of heart that worships God, not just in music or song, but with our lifestyle and character.
- 3) When this happens it will put us on the "highway" that leads to the manifest presence of God (the Shekinah) within our lives and collectively within our region, our nation, and upon this earth.

The "Forerunner Spirit," that "Spirit of Elijah" is what the Body of Christ needs to boldly walk in as we prepare the way for the Second Coming of Jesus. "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven, (God's manifest presence) is at hand" and is now available to all who "prepares the way for His presence" by preparing their hearts.