

FROM JOHN THE PROPHET TO JESUS THE MESSIAH - TODAY

WWW.RECONCILIATIONOUTREACH.NET PAUL & NUALA O'HIGGINS

The first followers of Jesus were part of an unprecedented move of repentance that broke out in Israel in the days of John the Baptist just before Jesus began His ministry. Thousands of people responded to his preaching and travelled for days to the wilderness to be baptized by him. In their pursuit of revival they were drawn by the Spirit to John. Later they were led by the same Holy Spirit from John to Jesus, when John indicated that Jesus was the Messiah and they were to follow Him. "*He must increase I must decrease*" This was not just a change from one prophet to another but a change from one vision of the Kingdom of God to another.

Two Breaks Between Jesus and John

Jesus' disciples were originally followers of John the Baptist and then, with John's direction and Jesus' invitation they broke with John and became followers of Jesus.

A second break took place, sometime later, after John was put in prison by Herod and subsequently beheaded. The gospels are often terse, like a text message. They do not fully describe what was going on. Imagine the situation. The greatest prophet Israel had seen since Moses was put to death by a corrupt political leader and system. No doubt many in Israel were ready for a political rebellion against Rome and its illegal Herodian kings. However, Jesus did nothing to oppose the Herodian dynasty or to resist the Roman occupation and for John there was no miracle intervention from heaven. Before his death John even began to have doubts about Jesus. He was perplexed and sent some of his followers to inquire of Jesus, "*Are you the Messiah or do we look for another?*" Jesus' coming on the scene had neither helped John nor improved the political situation.

Two Different Visions Of The Kingdom of God

Both John and Jesus preached what seemed an identical message: "*Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand!*" However there was a major difference in their understanding of what the Kingdom of God is. John, like any Jewish person with a familiarity with the scriptures assumed that the arrival of the Messiah would result in a huge improvement of the political scene. They expected the Messiah, whose mission is to take the throne of David, and to rule Israel and the nations, to oust corrupt leaders and replace corrupt systems with His perfect rule. Isn't this what the prophets foretold? He expected that following the repentance of the people of Israel the Messiah would seize control of the political order.

With the coming of Jesus, however there was no improvement of the political scene. The political situation in Israel actually became worse. The patriots, like John, who sought to see Israel restored to its early glory days, when it was not ruled over by foreign empires, were desperately disappointed with Jesus. They had been encouraged by John to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and expected Him to reverse the political corruption and imperial rule that had overshadowed Israel. They were ready to fight with Him, like David's warriors of 1,000 years earlier, or the warriors who fought with the Maccabees against the Greeks less than 200 years earlier.

But what did Jesus do? He withdrew from the pressure and the voices of those outraged by the murder of John and from the whirling opinions flooding through the Jewish community. He went to a solitary place away from the echo chamber of the patriot voices and even the prophetic voices that expected that Jesus as the Messiah would free Israel from its enemies. This was the second break with John. In Matthew Chapter 14 you can read the story of how he "*withdrew to a solitary place by Himself*". Twice this chapter shows how He got alone to a solitary place. At this time it was crucial that Jesus hear from His Father and be led by the Spirit and not by religious or political opinions. Jesus could not be led by people's expectations, opinions or even the prophetic voices - He must hear from His Father and be led by the Spirit.

As He withdrew, God the Father released, the most astonishing miracles of Jesus' ministry. It was at that time that Jesus fed five thousand people in the wilderness with five loaves and two fish, walked on water and huge crowds gathered around Him and were healed just by touching the hem of His garment. It was at this time also that He began to tell His disciples about His appointment with death at the hands of the political and religious systems in Jerusalem. His message was not welcome to His disciples. Instead of He overthrowing the political and religious systems, they would reject Him, beat Him and kill Him! This was not exactly what they were hoping for from Him. But Jesus went further - His followers would have to be willing to suffer the same kind of abuse from the world system that He was about to go through. He prepared them to deny their self-interest for the sake of His Kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy.

The break between Jesus and John came over their different understandings of the Kingdom of God. Jesus understood that His kingdom was to have no political impact at that time. His Kingdom would be established in the hearts of believers, connecting them to the love, care, life and healing of God the Father. His kingdom was first and primarily a spiritual kingdom, restoring the direct connection between man and God, and not primarily a political kingdom.

For Jesus, repentance would be followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit which would people into direct connect with the providences of God. Each one would know God for themselves. There would no longer be the need of a prophetic or priestly intermediate class, as direct fellowship with God the Father would be available to all through Yeshua's death. He saw that the world system would remain corrupt but His Kingdom would be enjoyed by people still living in a broken and fallen world order. They would suffer in this world as Jesus did. They would be persecuted and ill-treated, but through pleasant and unpleasant circumstances, God their Father and Jesus their Good Shepherd would be with them. His kingdom was not a matter of guaranteeing pleasant circumstances but connecting to love and life of God through Him and through His life being imparted to them. As Paul wrote later *"the kingdom of God is not food or drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."* (Romans 14)

For John on the other hand the repentance of the people would remove the curse of oppression over the nation and make it possible for God to bless the nation with political blessings through a change of the political regime. Jesus corrected John's and His own disciples' erroneous understanding that the coming of the Kingdom of God - His kingdom - would result in a better world order or in pleasant circumstances. He saw that the vision of the Davidic Kingdom where evil systems and the devil himself be removed from the world would NOT HAPPEN until the gospel of His inner, spiritual Kingdom was preached to every nation. Only then would He come and take the throne of David and fulfill the vision of David that John the Baptist expected to happen in his life time.

Today many patriotic American Christians look for a revival that will restore America to be a land of Christian values. They believe that the activity of Jesus' Spirit will not only bring repentance and regeneration to many, but will also result in a renewal of the political and economic systems. They have a similar revelation of the Kingdom to John the Baptist, and because of this mistakenly prophesy and preach a move of the Spirit that will result in a better world for all NOW.

The Holy Spirit Is Calling For A Reawakening of The Spiritual Kingdom of God

Today the Holy Spirit is calling us in 2021 out from a political vision of the Kingdom to the vision of the Kingdom of God presented by Jesus who said *"My Kingdom is not of this world!"* An exaggerated dominion and prosperity gospel mistakenly expects revival to fix the political world order and usher in a more prosperous society. While Jesus is inviting us to enjoy an INTERNAL spiritual kingdom now, they are - like John - looking for an EXTERNAL one. That was the mistake of John. Revival will not necessarily result in a better political order for America or an easier life for Jesus' followers. This is the old teaching of the followers of John. It is the teaching that Jesus separated Himself from when He withdrew.

When we - the Body of Christ- withdraw and distance ourselves from these teachings, we shall be in a better position to see a move of God's Spirit as Jesus did when He withdrew into the wilderness. This move of God Spirit may be accompanied by hostility from the world and a need to die to the interests of self. Jesus did not leave His disciples with any illusion about these things, as some Bible teachers in the church do today. He told them straight up about the cost of chasing revival. However, though there would be a cost, it would be gloriously worthwhile and His joy would be in them as never before.

The world will soon come under the dominion of the Messiah and His saints and the corruption will be removed from its systems - but not until the Lord returns to take the throne of David in Jerusalem. In the meantime, those who follow Him and are the revival chasers need to know how to enjoy a life of DIRECT (WITHOUT INTERMEDIARIES) COMMUNICATION WITH GOD THE FATHER and be filled by the Spirit with His love, life, peace and joy. They will ready and anointed to share Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of love and joy in the Father's care against the background of a world order likely to become increasingly hostile because of its atheistic and humanistic ways.

"The law & the prophets were UNTIL John the Baptist, since then the Kingdom of God is preached and everyone is pressing into it." - Luke 16.16

"In the past, God spoke through the prophets to our ancestors in many times and many ways. In these final days, though, he spoke to us through a Son." (Hebrews 1.1-2)