



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. 22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? 23 He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. (John 1:19-23)

John was a prophet of all prophets – the one set aside and called in the predestined knowledge of God to herald the coming of the Son of God and to prepare our hearts to receive Him. Like every true preacher of truth, the world did no roll out a red carpet to receive him. He did not fit the mold of those Jewish rabbi's, leaders, Scribes, and Pharisees that lived their lives in moderate, or even opulent, comfort at the expense of the Temple treasury. He wore no fancy vestments, but rather a coat of camel hair. *And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.* (Matt 3:4) He had no expense account with which to purchase food or luxuries. He had not Temple at Jerusalem as his forum, but the Wilderness of Jordan Banks.

God had foretold through the prophets the coming of this greatest of all prophets. A veiled reference was made to John by Moses: *The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken* (Deut 18:15) And the prophet Isaiah proclaimed his coming 700 years prior to his birth: 3 *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. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever* (Isaiah 40:3-8)

I began today's devotion with a reference to John the Baptist for the purpose of demonstrating that nothing has changed remarkably since the time of John insofar as preaching is concerned. John was called to minister even before his conception in the

womb of his mother, Elizabeth. I believe every minister of God is called by the foreordination and predestined will of God. The call is of such overwhelming power that the minister can never escape answering that call. He may run from hill, mountain and dale, but the Hound of Heaven will follow hard on until the object of his pursuit capitulates to the Heavenly Call.

The life of a minister whose heart is set on satisfying that sacred call from God cannot set his heart upon the riches of this world, or on its other carnal offerings. His heart must burn with passion to preach the Word of God without compromise or error. Social mores, political considerations, or manmade laws cannot impede the preaching of such a man. Even if threatened with prison or death, he must persevere in his call and suffer whatever consequences by which his Lord is glorified.

When the called minister takes up his cross daily to follow Christ, he does not stop at the paddock of Pontius Pilate, or in the court of the Sanhedrin. Nor will he balk at carrying his heavy cross along that same *Via Dolorosa* upon which our Lord, drained and hurting, carried His rude cross. Even so, when Golgotha's ugly shadow looms ominous in his path, shall he drop the cross and flee to hiding? No, he will carry that cross all the way to the Mount, and there will he lay it down as his bed of dying. We sometime misinterpret what our Lord counseled when He commanded, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.* (Luke 9:23-26)

That counsel above is found almost verbatim in the first three Gospels, and in principle throughout the New Testament. But this counsel is not limited to the man called of God to preach the Gospel, but rather to every man, woman and child so called by the Holy Ghost to come to that Mercy Seat of God where salvation is made available in the Redemption of the Son of God. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward.* (Matt 16:24-27)

In the ministry of God there are days of disappointment and loneliness. The minister of God, above all others, realizes that he is, like the prophet John the Baptist, the Voice of one Crying in the Wilderness. This is particularly true in our day in which most of our children are raised without ever hearing the Word of the Lord even once. Society has conditioned itself to instant gratification in all things. Study of the Word is too tiresome and time consuming for most, and they will not hear strong truth which inevitably conflicts with their licentious desires of the modern day. Truth itself is denied, not only concerning the higher calling of God, but even factual principles of history, geography, and true science.

An old friend of mine who serves as Chaplain to the local post of the VFW recently wrote a letter of invitation in the post periodical for any who knew not the Lord to contact him and he would come to them and reveal from Scripture the beauty of Christ to them and the imperative for their knowing. He was disappointed when there was not a single response. He has a heart driven by a Scriptural desire to proclaim the Word and share it; however, he should not be disappointed. He is also a *Voice Crying in the Wilderness* after the example of John the Baptist. In fact, all ministers of God are voices of one crying in

the wilderness unless they are corrupted by politics, immoral social values, or greed. The world will never flock to hearing the Word of God preached. If they hear and believe, they realize they will need to change their lifestyles which they covet. It is not the responsibility of the minister to deliver souls to God. It is his responsibility to sow the seeds of that Word, and allow the Holy Ghost to nourish and germinate the seed in the hearts of the hearers. Size of a church is not the measure of the worth of God's ministers.

I have a small church in southern Alabama. Most of my members are either elementary or high school children. Some are college graduates who have been raised up in our little church. Naturally, among children, there is no means of raising money to provide for facilities, so my wife and I have taken it as a calling of God to provide facilities and expenses of operation. It has been a joy, but, at times, I get despondent and disappointed that we must make do with far less resources than larger churches. When I am so unjustifiably sorrowful, my wife tells me, *Well, at least we have not lost an arm or a leg.* This counsel brings me back to solid ground. We have not, as Paul proclaims, . . . *. resisted unto blood, striving against sin.* (Heb 12:4)

A true minister, called of God, will not hesitate to take up the sword and shield in following hard upon that calling. He will not inquire about benefits, wages, or provisions for housing if his heart is fervently set upon serving the Lord. He will know that God will provide all things essential for his living if he is committed to serving Him in the ministry. I am reminded of the courageous Dr. David Livingston who sat in a gathering at which the missionary, Robert Moffat, was speaking of his missionary experiences in the dark continent of Africa. Livingston had already answered God's call to devote his medical services to the ministry of God and His people. His hope had been to serve in China, but God had closed the door to that opportunity; so he decided to go to Africa. He charted that continent in areas where civilized man had never ventured. He loved Africa and her people. The people themselves adored him, and many were saved through his teaching and services.

In advanced age, David Livingston was found dead in his hut, kneeling by his bedside as was his custom for morning prayer.

The natives carried his body all the way across the vast continent of Africa so that his body could be returned to Scotland; but there was a part of Livingston that did not accompany his body – that was the Heart of Livingston which the African people buried in his beloved Africa. Livingston died in Chitambo village on 1 May, 1873. His followers removed his heart and buried it at the foot of the Mupundu tree before carrying his body all the way back to Dar es Salaam, from where his body was shipped back to England and buried in Westminster Abbey.

It was Livingston's love for the people that compelled him to decades of deprivation and loving service to his fellow brethren and sisters of Africa. That love compels all who are called of God – love toward God, and love toward His people created in His image.