**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**The Incarnation – Part VII**

***The Forerunners of Jesus –***

***Elijah and John the Baptist***

 **January 14th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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We continue our Incarnation sermon series with a look into the significance of the relationships between the Old Testament prophets Elijah, John the Baptist and Jesus.

"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it (Luke 16:16).

God’s prophets in the Old Testament prophesied the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus, starting 700 years before the Incarnation. Therefore,one of the major relationships and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy was, in fact, the birth and life of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1). From the parallel conception and birth of both Jesus and John the Baptist, God had an inseparable timing in human history chronicled in all four Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke provide a fuller chronological account of the life of Jesus and John the Baptist. (See attachment)

**Context of History and Theological Culture applied to Jesus and John the Baptist**

 So, we see that one of the main historical contexts is that of the Jewish anticipation of the Messiah. At least, some of the Jews who were more knowledgeable about the coming Messiah. And not just the anticipation of the Messiah, but the Jews also anticipated the Messiah’s forerunner that would announce His presence.

700 BC Isaiah 40:3-5 - Fulfilled in Matthew 3:3; John 1:23; Luke 3:4).

430 BC Malachi 3:1 - Fulfilled in Matthew 11:7,10

430 BC Malachi 4:5 - Fulfilled in Matthew 11:13,14

 **Gospels Complement Each Other**

 The Gospel accounts of Jesus and John the Baptist are similar. Detractors of the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus and John the Baptist will say that the Gospels contradict each other because they are not word-for-word or list the same names at every event. However, the Gospels do not contradict one another but complement each other by providing additional information the other may not supply. For instance, the list of women who found the tomb of Jesus empty are not the same in each Gospel. We see this today in the reporting of any event. Reporters interview different people who arrived at a different time, or their view was from a different angle. But the event they report still happened.

 The life of Jesus is accurately reported, and the leading atheists agree that even though there are numerous scribal and grammatical errors in transcribing the manuscripts . . . no foundational events in the life of Jesus or the Gospel teachings are compromised.

**Jewish Confusion**

Is Jesus. . . Elijah, Jeremiah, Son of Man, or Son of God? Is John the Baptist the Messiah? The Jews inquired as to who John the Baptist and Jesus were. Most people see the positive in Jesus or John the Baptist being identified as Elijah. However, remember that not only King Herod, but all the people in Jerusalem were worried when word of a child had been born who could be the long-anticipated Messiah (Matthew 2:3).

 Long-held Jewish belief anticipated that the Messiah could be Elijah returning. Encompassed within this Jewish belief are the prophetic words of the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Malichi. But these prophetic words also bring judgement. In all four Gospels, the prophet Isaiah is quoted. And the words of the prophet Malichi are quoted in all four Gospels, or there is a reference to Elijah who Malichi prophesied would come. Why is Elijah such an important person to the Jews who would be associated with the Messiah? It is important that we note that Elijah is associated with judgement.

**Malachi 4:5** "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

 From the Bible, we learn that the Hebrew prophet, Elijah, “Yahweh is my God,” was a prophet who lived and prophesied in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Active c. 874-852 BC). We read in 1 Kings 17–19 and 2 Kings 1–2 that Elijah influenced the Kings Ahab and Ahaziah. Like Moses, who confronted the enemies of God. . . Elijah is revered for his devotion to Yahweh and in confronting the enemies of God, specifically those who worshipped the pagan god Baal. Baal worship was used by Satan to distract and destroy people who God created in His image to have a relationship with Him.

 To confront God’s enemies. . . He calls and impowers people like Elijah to be His instrument. Therefore, under God’s power and direction, Elijah accomplished miracles like reviving the son of the widow from Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17ff). This was similar to Jesus bringing back to life the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7). And like Jesus defeating Satan in the wilderness, Elijah defeated the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, (1 Kings 18:19) during King Ahab’s reign. And like Elijah pronouncing judgement upon King Ahab and the people, Jesus pronounced judgement upon the Jewish leadership by prophesying that not one stone of the Temple would be left (Matthew 24:2).

The judgment God directed Elijah to proclaim was a punishment (drought) upon the people for their worship of Baal. Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, was promoting Baal worship. Elijah challenged Ahab and the pagan prophets to a contest on Mount Carmel to prove who is the true God of Israel. Sacrifices were placed on a Baal altar and one altar to Yahweh. Regardless how much the pagan prophets prayed to their Baal to light the sacrificial fire, it did not happen. They even cut themselves in devotion to Baal. However, the one and only real God responded to Elijah’s prayers and lit a fire on His altar proving that He was the true God. Elijah then ordered all the pagan prophets killed. Then rain came down thus ending the drought.

 Eventually, God took Elijah up to heaven described in 2 Kings 11. So, Elijah did not die a physical death. In a way, Elijah ascended to heaven like Jesus. However, Elijah was not resurrected from the dead after a crucifixion to pay the price of sin for the world.

 Once Elijah ascended to Heaven, the prophetic power of God was passed to Elisha. It is in this transition that we need to pay attention to the events. Note that the mantle (cloak) of Elijah was given to Elisha in addition to the *spirit of Elijah* (2 Kings 2:15). This is like John the Baptist being that transitional prophet to Jesus in that he was identified as having the “*spirit and power of Elijah”*.

**John 1:17** "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah,. . . **John 1:21** They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." . . . **23** He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD, as Isaiah the prophet said."

So, we see that John the Baptist was not the reincarnation of Elijah, but he received the same impowering spirit from God. This is why Jesus said that “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” to identify John the Baptist as Elijah (Matthew 11:13-15).

13 "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. 15 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

**The Incarnation’s Multiple Missions**

Last week, we delineated the primary mission from secondary missions of Jesus. God’s primary mission was to go to the Cross and pay the price for the sins of the world in being that one and only unique unblemished sacrifice. God’s *Cross mission* was to make eternal salvation possible for everyone from the beginning of creation. In addition, God as Jesus demonstrated His eternal mastery over sin and death by rising from the dead. . . leaving an empty tomb. The Apostle Paul proclaims to his student Timothy. . .

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. (1 Timothy 1:15)

 The Gospel of Matthew and John accurately records the statement of both John the Baptist and Jesus to be saving and judgmental **words**. But it needs to be accurately noted that these judgmental words were primarily directed at the Jewish religious leaders not the common person. And the judgment was to be fulfilled at a future date after the Incarnation time had passed.

**John 12:44-50**

 44 And Jesus cried out and said,

"He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me.

 45 "He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me.

 46 "I have come as Light into the world,

so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.

 47 "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them,

I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

 48 **"He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him;**

**the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.**

49 "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.

50 "I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore, the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

From these words, we observe that Jesus pronounced judgment upon those who rejected him but forecasted the fulfillment of judgement to the “last day”. People misquote the context of Jesus’ words all the time, in an attempt not to be held accountable for their moral rebellion and failings. However, Jesus is clear that there will be those that reject Him and His teachings but still identifies His “Words” that will hold them accountable at a future date for judgment. The term “last day” was a common belief in Judaism that all people that had died would be raised on the last day, and there would be a judgment over their life. We see this in Revelation 20:11ff at the Great White Throne Judgement. Here all people from the beginning of man’s creation are eternally judged.

**Revelation 20:11-15**

 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

 The most scathing judgments of John the Baptist are recorded in Matthew chapter 3 and by Jesus’ “words” in Matthew 23. Both are against the religious leaders. After Jesus pronounces seven indictments. . . He finalizes the time of the judgement being upon the generation to whom He is speaking. John the Baptist pronounces judgment upon Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 3:7-10.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

10 "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus pronounced judgement upon Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:32-39)

32 "Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

33 "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

36 "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

38 "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

39 "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say,

'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

Again, we see all these prophetic judgements originating from the Old Testament Scripture (Isaiah, Malichi) fulfilled in John the Baptist and Jesus. And it was when the Romans destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D that the generation to whom Jesus was speaking received their judgment. Then the “last day’ judgment is still to come.

It is understood in biblical scholarship that the term “Last Days” was used by New Testament writers. We read these words in Acts 2:17, 2 Timothy 3:1, Hebrews 1:2, James 5:3 and 2 Peter 3:3. All of these contexts can refer to the time of the Incarnation to the return of Christ. It is my opinion. . . why wait to live the life Jesus taught us to live.

**Matthew 5:6**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they shall be satisfied.

**Isaiah 55:1**

"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

And you who have no money come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk

Without money and without cost.

**Revelation 21:6**

Then He said to me, "It is done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega,

the beginning and the end.

I will give to the one who thirsts

from the spring of the water of life

without cost.

**AMEN**