

The Forerunner Ministry: Friends of the Bridegroom

INTRODUCTION

Turn to Isaiah 40. Well, tonight I'm going to continue where I left off last week, talking on the forerunner ministry, because one of the primary callings of IHOP–KC—not our only calling, but one of our primary callings—is to minister in the forerunner spirit to prepare people for the unique dynamics of the generation of the Lord's return.

I believe we are in a season where we need to strengthen our sense of spiritual identity and focus so that we know what we're about. We are forerunners; we know what forerunners do; we know why God is raising them up.

And we settle the issue that that is a significant mandate here in the IHOP–KC world, in the IHOP–KC family. One of the most important and definitive scriptures in the Bible on the forerunner spirit and ministry is Isaiah 40. This is one of the big ones.

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 40:3, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” Now pay attention in Isaiah 40:5: “For the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh”—it's talking about all the nations of the earth—“will see it together.”

In other words, Isaiah 40 is the main forerunner passage.

THE FINAL GENERATION WILL BE THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

I mean, there are quite a few of them, but this would be the central one. This passage is actually talking about the generation of the second coming of Jesus.

God is going to raise up men and women that cry out in the wilderness. They prepare the people to respond rightly to the Lord in the unique dynamics of the generation in which the Lord returns. They build a highway for God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS BUT A TOKEN

We know the passage in John 1 where John the Baptist said this passage related to him, but we have to understand it clearly. John didn't say that he fulfilled Isaiah 40 completely. Actually, John was only a down payment; only a partial fulfillment of Isaiah 40. Isaiah 40 actually describes the forerunner ministry in the generation the Lord returns, not the generation that the Lord appeared the first time; however, the Holy Spirit allowed John to find himself as a down payment and a partial fulfillment of a much bigger fulfillment in the generation the Lord returns.

So when you read Isaiah 40, don't write it off as John, but rather we look at John as a model, as a token, as a down payment of that which will be happening on a global level in the generation the Lord returns.

We need Isaiah 40 for this hour, and to form our thinking, and to be inspired and directed by what the Holy Spirit spoke to Isaiah.

THE NECESSITY OF FORERUNNERS IN THIS LATE HOUR

Now, how do forerunners prepare the way of the Lord? Because forerunners are messengers. They are preparing the way of the Lord; they are making a highway for the Lord. They prepare the way of the Lord by preparing the people to respond rightly to the Lord.

That is how they prepare the way of the Lord. They prepare the way of the Lord by preparing people to respond rightly.

How do they prepare the people to respond rightly? By making known what God is going to do in that generation, and by making known how we are supposed to respond to what He is going to do.

GLORY AND JUDGMENT

The Lord is going to do two primary things in the generation He returns: He is going to release the greatest revival, an unprecedented revival, a revival that is going to go far beyond the book of Acts. And He is going to release the greatest period of judgment ever known in history.

So there will be an unprecedented revival, never seen before, power like has never been seen, and judgment.

Now we have to prepare people to respond correctly to the Lord in these two large categories of God's activity by convincing them from the Word of God of these two huge realities.

The intensity of the positive, the revival, and the intensity of the negative, the judgments, are going to happen.

MERCY TO THE MULTITUDES

Now God raises up forerunners as a ministry of mercy to the multitudes. Many of you have a forerunner calling, and you must understand that this, the very fact that God has called you, is a statement of His mercy to multitudes that many of you will affect, directly and indirectly.

The reason it's mercy to the multitudes is that God is going to cause forerunners to make clear sense of what's going to happen, and that intense things are going to happen, before they happen; the positive and the negative, and the reason is that when these intense activities begin to happen, people tend to lose perspective, and they tend to lose objectivity in the midst of the intensity of what's unfolding.

THE MANIFEST WISDOM AND LOVE OF GOD

Now the judgment and the revival, both of them reveal and express the love of God and the wisdom of God; however, when people are in the intensity of the negative, as well as the

intensity even of the positive, they lose sight of the wisdom and the love of God in it. And they get tempted to become offended at the Lord, but what the Lord does is that, before the intensity happens, He raises up men and women in many ways, through song and drama and writing and preaching, and in many other ways we will look at in a minute.

They declare the intense things that are going to happen so that, before the intensity, people can open their Bible, and if people can find it in their Bibles in the easy pace of pre-revival, pre-judgment, in terms of its global dimensions, then they can set their hearts. They can commit themselves to participate with the Lord in a positive way, before the intensity begins. They can say, “Yeah, that makes sense; that’s the love of God; that’s the wisdom of God; that’s in the Bible. Yes, I’m in; I’m going to do it; I’m with you, Lord.”

Then some years pass. Then, when those events happen, they are already prepared. What happens is, they participate with the Lord instead of resisting the Lord’s work, and it brings great blessing to their lives, because multitudes of the nations won’t have any idea what’s happening, and when the good and the bad take place, they will draw back in the confusion and fear and they will lose perspective. They will lose objectivity. They will actually be offended at the Lord, instead of open to the Lord and participating with Him.

THE REVELATION HIGHWAY

We are building a highway for the Lord. It is an information highway. It really is; it is a revelation highway. It is a highway built on telling people the information of the unique things that are coming and the way that God wants us to respond. And when the people receive that information, that revelation, then they can agree with the Lord, and that is the highway the forerunners build, because God travels on the highway of the voluntary agreement with His people.

And when God wants to heal the sick, He doesn’t make you heal the sick; He effectively says, “Hey, I want to heal the sick, and if you believe My Word, I will use you.”

We will say, “Okay; I want to be a part of that.”

The Lord says, “I want to release My judgments through intercession and worship.” Or, “I want to stop them and draw them back,” because prayer releases judgment as well, and draws back and stops and minimizes the judgment of God. It does both.

The Lord says, “I want to use you; do you want to be a part of this?”

“Yes!”

Well, we have to be in agreement with Him before we can participate with Him. But we cannot be in agreement with Him if we are offended at Him, and if we are confused and filled with fear.

So God wants millions, hundreds of millions, to understand ahead of time. When they say yes, then their agreement is the highway that God travels on. That is the highway through which God releases His goodness, the agreement of His people.

THE PURPOSE AND AIM OF A FORERUNNER

Now what forerunners do is to make sense of what's going to happen in the future before the Holy Spirit releases it. They proclaim now what is going to be emphasized just around the corner. Now when I say, "Just around the corner," it may be ten or twenty years, but it's just a minute to the Lord.

We are emphasizing now—we are proclaiming now—what the Holy Spirit is going to be emphasizing and releasing in just a minute so that multitudes can hear it, find it in the Bible, agree with it, and resolve to obey God in it so that they aren't taken by surprise when it happens, and then they are prone. They are prepared to agree instead of resisting in fear and drawing back in confusion from the Holy Spirit's work. So forerunners will bring new paradigms, a new understanding to a generation of what God has said by the spirit of the Word He is going to do through that generation.

THE HOUR OF RUNNING WITH THE HORSES

Now the passage here in Jeremiah 12:5 is a well-known one: Jeremiah said, "If you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you, how will you contend with the horses?"

In other words, if you're running alongside another guy and you wear out, how are you going to run alongside a horse? If you can't enter in when the pace is slow, how are you going to enter in when the intensity of the situation of the end times builds?

In other words, now is the time to begin to enter in with understanding and clarity. If, in the land of peace, you get worn out before the intensity begins; if you are all burnt out and offended and worn out, what are you going to do when the floods hit?

This is the hour we are running with the footmen. It's a lot easier to run alongside a man than to run alongside a horse. A horse goes a lot faster, and can go a lot longer. It's a lot easier to comprehend these things in a time of peace, before the floods of persecution, the floods of judgment, and the floods of revival break forth.

THE GLORY AND THE PERIL OF REVIVAL

We think, "Well, revival will be great." Well, that's not totally true. It's true and not entirely true. Revival is going to be glorious, but it is going to mess a whole lot of things up. We're used to Jesus visiting us a little here or there. We're not used to the idea of Him moving in.

Because when Jesus visits, it's good to get blessed. A few people get slain in the Spirit, a few people get healed, a few get filled with the Spirit, and it's kind of cool. "Wow! A few people shook and moved, and wow, the Lord visited a little. Was that not neat? I can't wait until the next meeting." But when the Lord moves in, He moves all the furniture around and requires that

we live differently. And when the Lord moves in, I'm talking about His manifest power, then, like in Acts 5, liars get struck dead at the communion table when the Lord moves in.

So we think, "Well, revival is great." Well, right now, because we're not quite ready, it's better if the Lord visits occasionally instead of moves in fully.

So don't think revival is just the totally positive, and judgment is the negative, because revival will bring a lot of disruption. It really will upset things.

WHEN THE RAIN STARTS FALLING, IT'S TOO LATE

Now, the forerunner ministry doesn't make a lot of sense until the intense events begin. But the forerunners won't be prepared if they wait until the intense events begin to unfold. The forerunners are getting ready a decade before the intense events take place. You can't wait in Noah's Ark. You can't wait to say yes to the ark-building after it begins to rain. You've got to say yes during the building project to get on the boat.

So the Lord is calling forerunners, but there is not yet an intense revival; I'm talking about the book of Acts and beyond. There's not intense judgment yet, so a lot of people are saying, "I'm not really into the forerunner thing. I will get into it when the intensity begins to happen." That's like saying, "I'll jump in with agreement with Noah after the rain starts. When I see it rain, Noah, I'm on your team!" But the boat is already being built, meaning it's difficult to enter into the forerunner ministry after it begins. The forerunners are going deep a decade or two ahead of time. That's what's going on.

The wisdom of building Noah's ark isn't clear until it begins to rain, and then it's really clear how wise it was to build that ark. I mean, think about Noah and the ark. For 120 years Noah built an ark. Do you know how long it would be to build one project, for 120 years? Number one, there's never been a boat that has ever been built. He's the first one to build a boat. So the neighbors say, "What's that?"

"It's a boat."

"Okay. What does a boat do?"

"A boat floats when the water is really deep."

"Okay. Well, we aren't close to water."

"Well, we're going to be, because it's going to rain."

"What is rain?" Because, see, up until Noah's time, God watered the ground; before Noah, He watered the earth from the ground up. It had never rained, ever, not even once.

“Oh . . . so we’re going to have the ‘boat’ so we can float when the water gets high because the ‘rain’ is coming from the sky. Good, Noah. Noah, you know, you didn’t really pay attention in science class when you were a kid; water doesn’t come from above, it comes from below. Besides that, there’s no way to store water up there. It can’t come from the sky!” Water coming from the sky was an inconceivable concept. It was completely unprecedented.

Now you’ve got Noah’s sons. Where I can feel the tension is with the daughter-in-laws when the sons went home to their family for dinnertime for the holidays. For real; I mean, this is cute, but it’s real. It really happened: “Well, honey, is your husband still working with his dad on the ‘boat’?”

There has never been a boat before, because the water is going to get deep; it’s going to float because it’s coming from the sky. “It’s been eighty years, is there any? Are we getting close?” At eighty years, they’re still forty years out. Noah is cutting wood and assembling it for 120 years. I mean, I can’t fathom it.

It made no sense until one day when the rain started. Then everybody wanted to vote for Noah to be captain of the team. Everyone agreed with Noah after the rain.

THE NECESSITY OF GOING DEEPLY NOW

Beloved, we cannot wait for the intensity of the positive and the negative to come to go deeply as forerunners; we have to go deeply now. We have to get the message clearly. We have to get connected to the Lord now.

We need a decade or two to go deep, or we won’t have a bold, clear, powerful declaration of the truth. We won’t be sure or clear about them, and there will be many voices that are mocking, but if we have clarity, we can be bold. But we cannot be clear if we don’t take the time to go deeply. We need a decade or two to go deeply, or we won’t have a bold, clear, powerful declaration of the truth. We won’t be sure or clear about them, and there will be many voices that are mocking, but if we have clarity, we can be bold.

But we cannot be clear if we don’t take the time to go deeply. The Lord is not going to wave His hand and give everyone the same dream the same night, and download us with 100 gigabytes of information. We wake up the next day; we’ve got all the verses. No. We are going to get them day by day, line by line, precept upon precept (Is. 28:13). It’s going to take time to go deeply in this message. It doesn’t make sense until the intense events begin unless the Holy Spirit is drawing you.

BOLDNESS IN THE TIME OF INTENSITY

Beloved, God is calling us as a ministry, as a spiritual family. I have called you to be forerunners. I want you to go deeply ahead of time. I want you to embrace the wisdom of Noah, even though the others say you are talking about things that have never happened before.

We are talking about a revival equal to the book of Acts, but we're talking about going far beyond the book of Acts. It has never happened before. We're not talking about judgments like in the Old Testament. We're talking about the book of Revelation, far beyond any other season in history.

There has never been anything like it, so why should we prepare for it? The Lord says, "I will get My forerunners to go deeply." I am trusting God that there will be a couple of million forerunners. No one knows the number; that's a large number, but it's a very small percentage of the Body of Christ. It will be a fraction, a fraction of 1 percent of the Body of Christ, and God has called us to do that.

He has given us an identity; He has given us a mandate to do that as a ministry, and if He has called a thousand or ten thousand ministries, it would still be a fraction of one percent, but we're going to go after this. We are going to stay steady; we are going to go deeply in the Word. We are going to get clarity that will bring boldness in the time of the intensity.

THE FORERUNNERS OF THE MEDIA

Forerunners are messengers. They have a very specific message related to the end times and the end-times revival. They are preachers, but most forerunners are not preachers. I believe most of them will not be preachers in a pulpit. Maybe some tens of thousands will be, but there will be several million forerunners that are not preachers on a platform. They will be evangelists, artists, singers, musicians, actors, and writers, as I said last week.

With the YouTube technology where everyone can grab something on a film for sixty seconds, and you know in just a moment's time, in the next ten or twenty years, that technology is going to be so much more advanced; there will be a ninety-year old grandma who will write an email, or will have the little statement on her cell-phone camera, and a city or a nation will hear it, and it will change them.

So don't say, "I am not a preacher, so I'm not going to go deeply in the message." You may have the email. You may have the three-minute clip that goes around the world that changes an entire nation. You may be sitting right there with a couple of friends, and someone is taping you, and you say, "Well, here's what the Lord showed me," and it may be the word of clarity that brings understanding, instead of that city or nation drawing back in fear and confusion; they will have clarity and they will stand in boldness and say, "Lord, we are with You. We are on Your side. It makes sense: You are a God of love and a God of wisdom. It doesn't seem like a contradiction"—because that's what the devil is going to be saying: "It's contradicting God's love and God's wisdom."

Well, there will be media forerunners, marketplace forerunners, and intercessors; those who are in the prayer room singing and praying that the revival and the judgments be released, or the judgments be stopped. Those are the forerunners in intercession. There's the one-on-one discipleship. I believe that most of the forerunners will disciple people one-on-one. The vast majority, whether in the church, the marketplace, the campus, the home; I believe some of the

most powerful forerunners will be moms training two and three children in the home, or five or ten. I really believe this.

So don't think of the forerunner ministry as only a pulpit ministry. That's a really wrong concept. I went through this last week, and we have the notes on the website. I'm going to stay a couple of weeks in a row on the forerunner calling, because we need to strengthen this in our foundations and our sense of identity and focus as a ministry: not only as a ministry collectively, but as individuals. We need to strengthen this clarity of our forerunner calling.

The seven theological premises of the forerunner ministry we looked at; we took a few minutes on each one. I'll be really brief on them.

THE UNIQUE DYNAMICS OF THE LORD'S RETURN

Premise number one: the unique dynamics in the generation the Lord returns. The dynamics are very unique. It will be the most people in history experiencing the greatest manifestations of power, both God's and the devil's. It's not an accident that the most people in history will be on the planet, say those who do the studies, that within the span of one lifetime, seventy to eighty years in that window of time, there will be more people alive in that eighty-year period than in all of human history added up together.

That's not an accident. There will be greater good and bad demonstrations of power. The devil and Jesus will be demonstrating power, and beloved, it will take a unique focus, a unique understanding, and a unique preparation for that hour.

God is raising up people ten, twenty, and thirty years ahead of time. Who knows the time frame? He is getting forerunners ready now because forerunners are not raised up in one day. You've heard the statement: I've heard this preacher say that a king can be anointed in one day, but it takes a generation to raise up a deliverer. It takes a generation.

It takes decades to raise up a deliverer for a nation. A king is anointed in a day, but a deliverer is formed over decades. It's true! John the Baptist spent twenty years in the wilderness for two years of public ministry, and he thought it was a brilliant expression of God's wisdom. He wasn't offended by that; he spent twenty years feeding on the Word for two years of ministry, and then he died. The Lord effectively said, "Yeah, but with the unique dynamics of the first coming of the Lord, we have to have someone who clarity to make sense of what's happening to the nation of Israel."

The second premise: the revelation of the Father. The third premise: three facets of Jesus' beauty, three facets of His personality. He is a passionate bridegroom, a powerful king, a righteous judge; those are the three. Bridegroom, King, and Judge: Those are three faces, three facets of His personality that will be very, very important in coming together.

Premise four: three unprecedented activities of the Holy Spirit, globally restoring the first commandment to first place, the great harvest of a billion plus, and releasing the judgments of

the book of Revelation. Nothing has ever happened in history like those three things happening simultaneously.

IT TAKES YEARS TO DEVELOP A FORERUNNER

The fifth premise is important for us right now. The fifth premise is really what I'm focused on. God is raising up forerunners ahead of time in the wilderness. It takes a clear sense of mandate and identity to stay focused for a couple of decades and to get ready.

One of the premises of the forerunner ministry is that it takes years to develop a forerunner. Now a lot of people will jump on the bandwagon at the end and help a little, but God is looking for men and women who have depth of clarity, so that they will have a boldness necessary for the hour.

I'm not talking about a boldness in terms of their delivery or their personality; I'm talking about their unwavering. Again, it may be a ninety-year-old grandma with her email. She will not back away; it is clear; it is bold.

“Well, honey, there's no way that's going to happen. That's never happened before.”

“I don't care! God said it; I believe it; it will happen.”

So the fifth premise is the fact that it takes years to raise up forerunners. So forerunners must be focused. They must have a vision that the majority don't have, that the multitudes are unaware of and unconcerned about, but the forerunners are clear and focused ahead of time.

THE FASTED LIFESTYLE OF A FORERUNNER

That's one of the premises. Premise six: They must live a fasted lifestyle. It's not enough to get the message clear. There are five different types of fasting in the book we have in the bookstore on *The Rewards of Fasting* that myself and Dana Candler wrote. It talks about five types of fasting, not only food, but it includes food. I want to encourage you to check that out. Fasting accelerates our ability to receive more.

In fact, the forerunners are aware of how much is in the end-times prophecies about the end-times prayer movement. The forerunners are focused on the end-time prayer movement: building it, not just attending it, not just praying in their personal life. They are building the prayer movement across the earth.

There is more information in the Word of God about the end-time prayer movement than most activities that are going to happen in the end times. It's not number one on the list, but it's high up on the list.

It's like I love to tell the potential students and interns at conferences—we have info meetings—that the house of prayer is like a greenhouse where the young, tender plants can grow in an optimum environment of a house of prayer. It's the house of prayer environment. I don't mean

ours, I'm talking in general about the house of prayer environment. That is the optimum environment for quick growth.

Forerunners are calling and helping the house of prayer movement to be built. I'm not just talking about the fact that they pray; that's part of the fasted lifestyle. As part of their mandate, they're actually encouraging and building the house of prayer in the earth. I believe that is a premise of the forerunner ministry.

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist is the clearest model of the end-time forerunner because John was the one the Holy Spirit identified with Isaiah 40: "Prepare the way of the Lord . . . the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (v. 3, paraphrased).

John was identified with that passage by the Lord. But remember, that passage is about the end-time forerunners, so the very fact that God identified John with a passage that was yet for the future tells you that he is a model from God's point of view.

God intentionally wants us to understand John as a model of the end-time forerunner, because the end-time forerunner is Isaiah 40. John was a down payment of it. So we are to look at John's life and say, "That is what we are to understand." It's the message and the lifestyle of the forerunner ministry.

THE BURNING HEART, THE SHINING LIGHT

Jesus called John the burning and the shining lamp (Jn. 5:35). Amazing, that his heart was burning; his heart was on fire for God. He was engaged with God and his ministry lamp was shining, meaning it was clear: It was expelling darkness and confusing ideas.

So many today want to be politically correct. They want to be popular in ministry, and what God wants is men and women who can shine clearly and confront wrong ideas with bright light.

John the Baptist was a bright light. He was not politically correct. He was not concerned with that. He was concerned with it being right, not popular.

So Jesus brings together John's lifestyle, the burning heart, with the uncompromising clarity in his ministry: a shining light, a bright light. There was no ambiguity in what he said. It was clear what he meant. He meant what he said and he said what he meant. He wasn't hedging. He wasn't hedging himself in the hopes of opening a door for popularity. Some people are really bold, but they have a wrong spirit. John's heart was on fire with the Holy Spirit, engaged with God, and he was a bright and shining light.

We cannot separate the life from the message. They have to go together, and Jesus brought them together when He affirmed John.

THE GREATEST MAN OF WOMAN BORN

Jesus said in Matthew 11 that no one obeyed God more than John. There was no man greater than John; not one. No man obeyed God more consistently than John did, and no man prepared more diligently than John.

Why is it important to us that there was not another man greater than John? Because John's wisdom can be trusted; the wisdom of his message and the wisdom of his lifestyle can be trusted because Jesus looked at his wisdom, looked at his lifestyle, looked at his message, and said his life was burning. He said that his message was clear, and then called him the greatest man ever born of a woman.

Beloved, we can trust his example to follow it. That is the point, but beware: Following John the Baptist won't be romantic. "Wow, I'm going to be like John the Baptist!" Well, read the whole story before you put up that poster in your room. "I want to be like John the Baptist!" Do you know how John the Baptist lived? Do you know how he died?

"Well, I want to be famous like John the Baptist! I don't want to live like John or die like John; I want to be famous like John." Well, that's not the same thing as being like John the Baptist. Look what Jesus said about John the Baptist. Israel liked him for a while; he only ministered for about two years. He spent twenty years in preparation for two years of ministry, and Jesus said that he was the greatest man who ever lived.

Beloved, it's not how long your ministry is. It's not how many people receive it, because John only had a relatively small number of people who even received his ministry. John made it hard: He didn't have the conference in the main city on the Internet. They had to walk five miles out in the desert; bring their food, bring their kids, bring their chairs, and walk five miles in the heat to hear him preach.

He wasn't overly-concerned with crowds; I mean, he made it pretty hard to get to.

"Well, John, why don't you just go right into the middle of Jerusalem and make things better and get your mailing list going better?" And I'm all for that kind of thing, but I'm telling you, John's ministry wasn't very big and it wasn't very long. And the people who received him for a season turned on him.

WISDOM WILL BE JUSTIFIED BY HER CHILDREN

The people ended up saying John had a demon at the end of the story. I'm talking about Israel, who was looking for the Messiah. They ended up saying John was demonized and that he was dangerous to the purpose of God.

So if you want to go the John the Baptist route, there will be significant stigma within the community of God's people because it was the community of God's people who said that John was demonized.

The people who weren't of the people of God, they didn't even have an opinion about people being demonized. These were the community of God who said was demonized; these were the religious people.

But the Lord said, "Hang in there with John, because the wisdom of his lifestyle will be justified one day; when he stands before Me, it will be clear that John had a right message and a right lifestyle."

Jesus said in Matthew 11:19, "Wisdom will be justified by her children," which means John's lifestyle will be only vindicated by his long-term fruit, his children.

That's what that proverb means: his long-term fruit, meaning what God thinks about it at the judgment seat of Christ. Then we will see if John was wise or not. God will vindicate him. Jesus said, "I personally will vindicate that man on the last day."

That, in essence, is what Jesus was saying, because Jesus is the judge on the last day and John had already gotten his sentence: "I am going to vindicate you; I am going to justify you, John. They said your life was too fanatical; it didn't make sense. They said you were demonized; it was unbalanced. People didn't respond to it; the political arena rejected you." Jesus says, "I vindicate you, and I will openly declare it on the last day, that you are a wise man in agreement with My heart."

Of course, John was killed at about 32 years old.

THE FORERUNNER IS ALWAYS PREPARED IN THE WILDERNESS

It says in John 1:22 that the priests and Levites came to him and said, "Who are you; what do you say about yourself?" That's a very key question. What does the model forerunner say about himself, the man who is the picture of the Isaiah 40 end-time intercessors? What does he say?

He says, "I am a voice one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah has said (Is. 40:3).

I believe that John knew from his youth. He knew from his youth that the Bible mandated that he was prepared in the wilderness. He says, "I am a voice crying in the wilderness." The wilderness is the place where the voice, where the forerunner, is prepared. He knew it was in the Bible in the prophet Isaiah. He might have said, "I know the Bible." We're talking about when he was twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, eighteen years old. It's as if he said, "I know my preparation season is to be a voice in the wilderness."

Beloved, we have to be clear that the Bible backs up that forerunners are prepared with intense seasons of preparation. Everyone you will have from every corner of the religious community in the church and outside will find a reason for you not to go deeply in preparation. The biggest reason is that if you go deeply, they might think that you think they're supposed to go deeply.

More times than not, it isn't that they care about you doing it, it's that they don't want you suggesting that they're supposed to do what you're doing.

I've learned to tell people, "This is what I'm doing, and I don't think you're supposed to do it." But when I used to tell them what I'm doing, they thought, "Oh, you think I'm supposed to do that, and so that means I'm lesser than you because I don't do it," and there was so much confusion because they felt judged, because people feel pressure when others break out and break open into the deeper things of God.

It brings pressure. They say, "Are you suggesting I'm supposed to go deeper? Are you suggesting I'm wrong? Is that what you're doing by your lifestyle? Are you really thinking you're right and I'm wrong? Is that what's really going on?"

I'm not even thinking about you; I'm thinking about going deeply in God. I'm not thinking about you. The one crying in the wilderness: he knew his identity in ministry was to be prepared in the wilderness of fasting and prayer.

The forerunner is always prepared in the wilderness, always. We will get to that in a moment, what the wilderness is. John said he makes straight the way of the Lord. The word *straight* is the idea of making something clearer.

Now, this is one of the most difficult things about John's life. Well, the wilderness thing is pretty intense. Making it clear, that means no compromise; that means being politically incorrect. It often is. Making it straight means making it clear.

It's a lot easier to hedge these things. I tell you, beloved, it's easy to be clear inside of this context. We can be bold and clear here, but it's harder to be bold and clear out there.

The Lord is telling me, and He's telling you, get enough clarity to where you're clear when you say it. Make it clear. It's not just, "Don't be confused," as in, "Get your notes clear." There's more weight on it than that.

It means, "Don't draw back and make it softer than it's supposed to be." It doesn't mean you're harsh, but it means we say what it says. That's what forerunners do: They make it clear; they make it straight.

CONVERSING WITH THE KNESSET

I look at that and I think, "Ugh!" I remember telling the story about how I'm in the van with the Knesset members, the members of the Israeli government. I'm in a big meeting in New York City; we're honoring Israel. We have all these chief rabbis and authority figures from Israel; the Knesset is over. And it just so happened that the way the travel arrangement works is, we're at this hotel and we're all going to the big meeting hall. It's a fancy night, and all the dignitaries are there.

So they put me in the van. There's one empty spot; I'm travelling alone. There are six Knesset members and me. They all speak Hebrew. They're all a part of the government, like the Senate, in essence. They speak English. As far as I know, none of them are believers. It was pretty clear; it didn't seem like there were any believers in that car. I'll say it that way, they were pretty free-spirited; some of the things they were talking about doing after the meetings and what they were bragging about was clear. Some of it they said in Hebrew, some of it they said in English. I said, "Whoa!"

So we're driving. I'm going back and forth to three or four meetings; we have a couple of dinners. And for the next two days I go on to every meeting, and it's about a fifteen/twenty minute trip back and forth for me and them. I'm the only stranger in the van.

So they asked me, "What is your name?"

"Mike."

"Hi, Mike!"

"What do you do?"

"What do I do? I run a bookstore. Well, I do! I'm in property development; we have Herrnhu. I'm into education; we've got a couple of Bible schools and musical academies. I'm running a coffee shop. I mean, we're really entrepreneurs out in the marketplace."

They said, "What do you do?" unbelieving, calloused to what I believe.

And I told them what I did, and they said, "Oh." The main guy said, "I'm not a religious guy."

Then he asked the question, "What do you think is going to happen in Israel in the future?"

I said, "Who, me? Me?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Haven't thought much about that . . ." No, I didn't say that, but I thought, "Where are my notes? Where is my boldness? Where is, 'Hi bro, how are you doing? Tell me about your family?'" No. "What do you think is going to happen in Israel in the future?"

"Well, I'll give you the answer at another time . . ." Well, I put a little out there. I should have said more. Okay; let's put it this way: I'm committed to doing better next time. How's that for an answer? Okay, you're with me.

Now, I told them a few things; I didn't tell them everything. But in that situation, I remember thinking, "Whoa! I did not expect that."

I remember the same thing happened once when I sat with a U. S. senator and he asked me boldly, in a private time, “What’s going to happen in Israel?” from the Bible’s point of view. And he was talking really positively about everything getting better and how peace was coming. He said, “It’s going to work! What’s going to happen?”

I didn’t expect that question. And again, the same thing: I said some of what was going to happen, but I had a whole lot more hands out that I didn’t give him.

But I remember, in just those two experiences, that it’s easy not to make it as straight as it needs to be. That’s the point.

MORE THAN MERELY AN ECHO

Now, I’m normally the hero of the stories I tell about myself, but in these two, I am not the hero of the story. God wants forerunners to be a voice, not just an echo, a voice. Not just to repeat what others say. It’s okay to be an echo for a while, but the voices are the ones who believe it and go deeply when nobody is watching. An echo is when we just repeat what someone else is saying.

I have echoed other people’s truths, and I echo truths today. I hear something from someone else, and I echo it, and that’s cool, but I want it to be real, and a lot of times, while I’m echoing it, it becomes real in the process of telling it.

So I’m not against the echo; so much of my ministry has been an echo. It’s been repeating what I’ve heard. That’s good. I think that’s being teachable. But the Lord says, “I want more. I want it to get hold of you to where, if everyone denies it, you will stay true to it.”

THE LIFESTYLE OF THE WILDERNESS

There are four applications of the wilderness in the Bible. The wilderness talks about a posture of the heart. There are four complete, distinct applications of the wilderness for when it says, “I am in the wilderness.”

But the one that John is talking about is a wilderness lifestyle. It’s the lifestyle of prayer and fasting and the Word. Misty sings a song about how the way of God is in the wilderness. It’s referring to this first sense.

Now, you can have a worldwide ministry and be in the middle of everything but still live a wilderness lifestyle, and that’s where the voice comes, out of the wilderness and the lifestyle of the wilderness.

But then there’s another type of wilderness: It’s the spiritual condition of a church or a city or a nation; the dryness before a breakthrough. Now, Israel was in a wilderness of dryness, needing a breakthrough, while John the Baptist was in a lifestyle of wilderness confronting their spiritual condition.

Then there's the wilderness of difficult circumstances and unusual pain, a season of pain before the promise of God is released. You can speak of the wilderness that way. All these four are really distinct. And then there's the actual geographic location of the wilderness.

So when John was raised as a voice in the wilderness, it means several things. It means, number one, that the posture of his heart was one of fasting and prayer. Number two: Israel as a nation was in a wilderness time, and the voice was in the wilderness; even if he was geographically in the middle of Jerusalem, he was speaking in a wilderness season of history. He was still in the wilderness.

His difficult season: he was in prison. The voice was still sounding forth, and even though he was in prison, he did not back up. He was in the wilderness in that sense, and he lived in the Judean desert in the wilderness.

So in all four ways, the voice came out and was sustained in the wilderness context.

THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM

John's view of his life and ministry and his paradigm of Jesus: This is the most important verse. John talks about his own heart. It's the only time in the Bible when he opens and talks about his heart.

He said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled" (Jn 3:29).

Now there are three basic themes going on in this passage. I've laid it out there and you can read it in more detail later.

THE BRIDEGROOM KING

Theme number one: John is describing what Jesus felt emotionally. He says about Jesus, "He who has the bride is the Bridegroom." He's giving an insight into Jesus and how He felt. He said, "This Messiah, this messianic King, is more than a king. He has more than power and authority over nations. He's more than a king, He's a bridegroom king."

Everyone knew the Messiah was a king, but the part that people weren't clear about was that He was more than a man with power; He was a man with deep feeling.

He says, "Number one, He has a bride. He has the Bride." The Bride was in Jesus' heart when He was ministering; the Bride is in His heart now. We're not just talking about a king with power, we're talking about a king with deep feeling, and that is the paradigm of Jesus that the forerunner is communicating.

He is a bridegroom. It's not just that He acts like a bridegroom where He goes to the wedding ceremony at the end of the age; then, once the wedding is over, He says, "Hey, that was cool; now let's get down to business." He didn't just act like a bridegroom; He didn't just go to a bridegroom ceremony. At the core of His being, He is one forever. He has deep feelings forever.

So this was a radical new paradigm of the Messianic King: He's a bridegroom king. He has deep feelings about the one He is redeeming and leading. Wow!

Now it's not just interesting that John said it. John is clearly the model of the Isaiah 40 end-time forerunners. All forerunners must have this reality of the tenderness of Jesus' heart for His people. He has them in His heart as a bride. He didn't just save them; they're a bride to Him. And He's not just attending a wedding; He's a bridegroom at the heart-level forever. He never changes.

THE GREATEST MAN WAS ALSO THE 'BEST MAN'

Now John switches over to theme number two. He's going to describe his own ministry now. He's moving off of Jesus. He says, "The friend of the bridegroom . . . stands and hears Him" (Jn. 3:29). He's going to talk about his ministry as a friend of the Bridegroom. We're going to find out about his focus and his style of ministry; then he's going to talk about his lifestyle. He stands and he hears. He calls himself a friend of the Bridegroom.

Now, as a friend of the Bridegroom, it means he's the best man in the wedding. So his focus of ministry is as the best man in the wedding. Now remember, the Jewish wedding would go on, ideally, for seven straight days. They would have a big celebration each night and it ended on the final night; so it was a long ordeal. There was a lot involved.

The friend of the Bridegroom—his goal was to serve the Bridegroom and the bride, to make sure things went well so that they could connect at the heart level. He was serving them to make things go well, because the point of the friend of the Bridegroom as the best man is to see that everything is moved out of the way, that they connect, and that they receive one another's embrace.

This is a ministry focus and a ministry style, the friend of the Bridegroom. We don't want a ministry where people are enamored with us; we want them enamored with Him.

I mean, what would a friend of the Bridegroom be if he met the bride on the side and tried to win her affections from the Bridegroom? But a whole lot of ministries function this way.

But the true forerunner ministry will be a "friend of the Bridegroom" ministry. They have no interest in garnering the affections of the people for themselves. They're in it to connect them to Him in love.

"HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE"

I've said it a time or two lately, but here's one of the things I have really cared about, and am so proud of in the right sense, regarding this community. I have had people come over the years, and one of the main statements I hear people say is, "I get touched by the Lord," and this is good, and I hear that a lot, but one of the statements I hear regularly from leaders who come in is, "I don't see any hype on the platform at all."

It's amazing. Nobody is up there with their little idiosyncrasies, their signature moves, their stamp on things to be them and there, and they're on their own—everybody knows who they are, and they stick out.

I'm all for different personalities and styles and that kind of thing, but over the years it has been an amazing testimony of the people, and mostly young people, in this community. There's not a desire, whether in preaching, or the healing rooms, or the prophecies, or on the platform and in the music, to make sure you are the center of attention.

THE PROPHET OF GOD, OR THE GOD OF THE PROPHET?

It's amazing. It's a miracle, because there is such excellence in this place on that. Here is our desire: They come in the meeting, and it happens—a guy just told me today; it was beautiful—they come into the meeting, or the prayer room; they worship; they're there from two o'clock to four o'clock, six o'clock, eight o'clock, am/pm, it doesn't matter, so they're on their way out and they're crying, and the guy says, "Hey, who was the worship leader?"

"Uh, let me see . . . I don't really remember. Umm . . . that one guy or gal, I don't know . . . I was writing, journaling and crying, and the Lord was touching me. I'm not sure who the worship leader was; but boy, that one guy really sang, and that other gal. And oh, that one! Oh, I was so moved, I didn't really look up. I was so moved, I was so enthralled by the Lord."

So when they go into the prophecy rooms they're not enamored or preoccupied with the prophet of God, but with the God of the prophet. They leave and they go to the parking lot and they get in their car. "I don't really remember who it was who said that really cool thing! All I know is, my heart is on fire because I visited those people."

That is the friend of the Bridegroom spirit. It is a grace of God that the Lord has on us. I don't mean we can't excel more in it; I don't want to overstate it, but it's an amazing reality. I see no hype!

A CAUTIONARY NOTE

Now, let me make this clear, because I said this one time a year or two ago and a couple of guys thought "no hype" meant they went comatose. They thought "no hype" meant that if they had a heartbeat, somehow that was hype. No, no, no. I don't mean you have no energy. That's not what hype means. It means trying to make something happen that draws attention to yourself. "Man, we want energy and light!" That is not hype. That is not hype.

So a couple of them went comatose. They had to wake them up a little bit. They said, “I don’t want to be hype!”

I said, “Yeah, but you’re still supposed to be alive.”

Just don’t draw attention to yourself. Do it with all your vigor, all your energy. That is not hype, so don’t mix those two things up. It’s talking about the focus, the motive, style of so much that happens. It’s a true friend of the Bridegroom style.

THE JOY OF THE BRIDEGROOM’S VOICE

Now John goes on and talks about his dedication. He says, “I stand and I hear Him” (Jn. 3:29, paraphrased). We talked about this for a moment last week. To stand meant to stand in the presence of the Lord. The priests would stand before the Lord. It means this aggressive going after God: “I will stand in the counsel of the Lord; I will be in the Word.” It doesn’t mean standing versus sitting while you’re in a prayer meeting. That’s not the point, but it means this aggressive attentiveness.

John the Baptist was talking about his own life. He didn’t mean he was standing at that moment. He meant, “For the last twenty years I have been standing before Him, pressing in, and in the routine and mundanity of life I have stayed pressing into Him. So I have stood before Him.”

Wow; what a statement. Jesus said, “He that has ears, let him hear.” To hear means to respond. Hearing in the New Testament means responding with follow-through. He says, “I hear; I have been responding;” and then John goes on. Now he describes his joyful, emotional impact because he heard the voice of the Bridegroom.

He said, “It is the Bridegroom’s voice that gives me joy” (Jn. 3:29, paraphrased). Beloved, how do we hear the Bridegroom’s voice? Not just audibly, though that is nice. You might hear the audible voice of the Lord in your life, and maybe more. But that’s not what it means.

To hear the Bridegroom’s voice means that we have revelation of it. The primary way we get it is through focusing on the subject of the Bridegroom God when we study the Scriptures. We read books and study the Scriptures; we hear songs. We are involved in the art and the drama around the subject of the Bridegroom, and in that way, we grow in the revelation of His voice.

Here is what John said: “It is the voice of the Bridegroom that gave me joy” (Jn. 3:29, paraphrased).

THE PERILS OF THE WILDERNESS

Now, this is a most remarkable thing, because he’s living in the difficulty of a desert lifestyle. I’ll just end with this. I mean, the Judean desert, how do you have joy there? No, for real. I remember I was all excited about John the Baptist. I was about eighteen years old and I said, “Man, forty days? I’m going to do it!” I was in college. I got a jug of water, and told everyone—

of course, only so they could pray for me—“I’m going to go out in the wilderness for forty days: me and God, a jug of water, and a blanket. It is awesome!”

They said, “Whoa!”

I marched out. It was great. There I am, in hour one, walking back and forth; hour four, still walking, okay; hour five, I sit down. Hour eight, I’m still sitting on the rock. It hurts. Hour nine, I lay down.

Hour twelve, a day or two goes by, and I’m hurting. I’m hurting everywhere. “How are you supposed to do this?” Then it’s hot. Mosquitoes are biting me; I forgot to bring the spray. Then it’s nighttime. It’s hot, there are mosquitoes and little noises. I’m out in the woods thinking, “Uh-oh!”

The next day I feel rotten. I cannot rest. Anyway, three days later, I’m bitten; I’m sweating; I’m dirty; I’m hurt; I feel sore; I can’t sit anywhere. I mean, you try to go out in just a raw wilderness. I came marching back in total defeat.

“Well, there’s thirty-seven days to go!”

“Ah, forget it. That must be the devil. That was warfare!”

So, a year or two later, I got cured of that bad experience and tried it again. It was the same thing: mosquitoes, bugs, no fan; I said, “Man.” So when I read this verse, that he rejoiced, I remember those two times in the wilderness.

Man, I like it at home: my recliner, my Starbucks, a little fan, a little air conditioner, a little web stream, my computer . . . Now that is fasting—I mean, that is cruising in the wilderness! Anyway, let’s stand.