

Why False Teachers Mock the Truth, Part 2

Scripture: Luke 16:14-16

Code: 42-210

Worship is a matter of responding to God, worshipping Him in truth, and that's why looking at His Word together is so critical because it informs and structures our worship. We worship Him as the God revealed in Scripture. When I come to you on the Lord's Day in this pulpit, I come as a messenger of the Lord and not assuming anything that I'm not entitled to. I am entitled to that if I faithfully discharge this responsibility and bring to you the Word of the Lord, so I come as the messenger of the Lord to lead you to understand His great truth revealed in Scripture.

And this morning, we come again to the 16th chapter of Luke. This is a very strong, stern, in some ways fearful, portion of Scripture but critical for us to understand, Luke chapter 16 verses 14-18, and while it is a brief passage, it is so packed...it is so condensed...that it takes time to work our way through it and so we'll spend even the next Lord's Day on this same text. But let me read it to you, Luke 16:14. "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and they were scoffing at Him and He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men; but God knows your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone is forcing his way into it but it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the law to fail. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.'"

The key phrase here is at the end of verse 14. "They were scoffing at Him." The Pharisees were mockers of Jesus and therefore they were mockers of God. This is a frightening indication of their character because they purported to be the true worshippers of God. They were the exact opposite of what they believed themselves to be and convinced the rest of the nation that they in fact were. They prided themselves on being the true worshippers, those who revered God, who adored and admired and honored and esteemed and glorified and worshipped God. Truth is they were God mockers, sneering at the living God incarnate before them in the person of Jesus Christ.

We all understand that the highest obligation of man is to honor God. We are called to love the Lord with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength, to worship Him and no other, to give Him ultimate respect, supreme admiration. We are called to worship Him and Him alone. This is what God demands of every person. He saves us to make us into true worshippers who will forever in heaven give Him honor. The very opposite of that is to mock God, to treat God with disdain, to sneer at Him,

to scorn Him, to treat Him with hatred, animosity, resentment, which is exactly what the Pharisees did. Don't be under any illusions about first century Judaism being acceptable to God. It wasn't then and it isn't now and the leaders of Jewish religion, the Pharisees, the architects of the existing religious belief system that dominated the populace, were God mockers, not God worshippers. But this is really not anything new. You remember back in the 13th chapter of Luke as that chapter ended, Jesus said this: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her." They had a long historical pattern of animosity toward God and it demonstrated itself in their killing the prophets of God and ultimately, of course, their animosity toward God demonstrated itself in their killing the Son of God, God Himself incarnate. Serious action....serious rejection.

In 2 Kings chapter 2, there is an amazing incident in only three verses. Elisha, the prophet of God, comes to Bethel and as he was going up by the way to Bethel, young lads came out from the city...these would be young men, maybe older teenagers at least...came out from the city and mocked him and said, "Go up, you bald head. Go up you bald head;" treated him with an epithet that was scorn, mocking the prophet of God. When he looked behind him and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up 42 lads of their number. A curse and God providentially sends two bears to shred 42 of them for yelling "bald head, bald head" at a prophet. God was conveying to us the seriousness with which His messengers are to be treated.

In the 20th chapter of Jeremiah, Jeremiah is faithfully preaching the Word of God to the people of Israel and they don't want to hear it. He says in verse 7, "I have become a laughingstock. All day long they all mock me." They mocked Elisha. They mocked Jeremiah. "Each time I speak, I cry aloud. I proclaim violence and destruction because for me the Word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long." All I ever get is reproach and scorn. "But if I say I will not remember Him or speak any more in His name...I'll just be silent because I don't want anymore of this scorn...then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones and I am weary of holding it in and I cannot endure it." Even though I would like to silence myself and not bring upon myself this scorn, I can't keep the message in. "I have heard the whispering of many, terror on every side, 'Denounce Him. Yes, let us denounce Him.' All my trusted friends watching for my fall say, 'Perhaps he will be deceived so that we may prevail against him and take our revenge on him.'" They wanted him dead. "But the Lord is with me like a dread champion. Therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail."

The messengers of God were hated. The messengers of God were tortured. The messengers of God were killed and the messengers of God were put out of reach, Jeremiah himself being thrown in a pit. Disdain for the messenger because of the message is disdain for God who is the source of the message and, finally, when the Lord Jesus Christ arrives, Isaiah 53, the prophet Isaiah says twice in that wonderful chapter that the Lord Jesus Christ would be despised...despised by His own people, Israel. The psalmist David in Psalm 22 foresaw the disdain and the hatred when he wrote of Christ, "All who see me sneer at me." In fact, he went on to say, "They separate the lip." That's literal. "They

make faces of disgust and contempt and they wag their heads back and forth in acts of ridicule and mockery. So said David of how people would treat the Lord Jesus Christ." Now there were many Old Testament saints, according to Hebrews 11:36, who were literally treated with "cruel mockings." That's the phrase in 11:36. "And our Lord, most cruel of all," says Hebrews 12, "endured despisings and hostilities by sinners."

Mocking God, sneering at God, sneering at the messengers of God, sneering at the Son of God while at the same time portraying yourself as the servant of God, is the most vile kind of hypocrisy but that's what false religion does...false Judaism or false Christianity or false any kind of religion. Never was this God-mocking attitude of religionists more evident than in the attitude and action of the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees. You cannot study the gospels, you cannot study the life of Christ, without understanding that this is an ongoing collision between the Pharisees, the leaders of apostate God-mocking Judaism, and the truth of God personified and proclaimed by Jesus Christ. For a long time, they had mocked God's messengers and even killed them and now they are eager, having mocked His Son, to kill Him as well. We are brought face to face then with a severe and fixed resentment of the religion of Judaism. They are set against the Son of God. It is a virulent kind of hatred that issues in public mockery, public scorn, public sneering as they endeavor to convince the people by doing it publicly that they should stay away from Jesus because He is such a threat to their false religion. So the key phrase here is, "They were scoffing at Him." Literally, I told you last week, it means to turn up your nose at. It is the lowest form of hatred. It is the most base way to treat someone, to treat them with ridicule. But Galatians 6:7, using the same exact Greek verb, says, "God is not mocked successfully. Whatever a man sows that will he also reap." You mock God and you will know God's judgment. Psalm 2:4, "He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord scoffs at them," meaning His enemies.

So we meet the God-mockers and this is the kingdom of darkness embedded in Judaism. Judaism, the true faith of the Old Testament, had long since apostatized. It was corrupt. It was in the hands of hypocrites and that's where Satan always wants to embed. He disguises himself as an angel of light, his ministers also disguised as angels of light. They work inside religion and that's the most effective posture for them in attacking the truth. As I pointed out last time, there's a concerted effort these days to try to convince us that the Jews are within the framework of salvation, inside the kingdom of God, on different terms than we must be, different things required of Gentiles and the church than of Jews, so that they have their own way to God, their own plan, their own covenant. That is exactly opposite what Jesus said. He said to them, "You are of your father the devil. You belong to his kingdom and he is a liar and a murderer as you are," John 8.

The kingdom of darkness had embedded itself in Judaism. That's why they rejected Jesus Christ and forced Him to the cross. Judaism then, Judaism now, Judaism through history, that rejects the truth of God, the true Messiah of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is a false and satanic religion and so is every other religion. Let's not leave Christianity out. There are many within the big word of Christianity who

do not know God, who are mocking God. They mock God by denying the veracity of Scripture, the authority and _____ of Scripture. They mock God by denying the deity of Christ. They mock God by denying salvation by grace through faith alone. They mock God in a number of ways, multiple ways. They mock God by adding to the Scripture false documents supposedly inspired that twist and pervert the message of the Bible and then there are those non-Christian, non-Jewish religions that proliferate all over the world and all of them mock God. This is news, you know, to most people because they assume that religious people are the ones who are most in touch with God. The truth is anything but believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ, any other kind of religion, any deviation from that even if it calls itself Christianity, mocks God. So the kingdom of darkness always embeds itself in false religion and the closer it can get to the truth, the more effective it becomes.

The look that we want to have in this text is at what is behind this scoffing but before we do that, I want to show you one portion of Scripture that I think better than any other sort of tells you where the Pharisees stood. Look at John 3, just so you understand how they should be characterized. We'll let the Lord characterize them for us. John 3, a Pharisee named Nicodemus; this is a very significant man. He is a ruler of the Jews. He is a big-time Pharisee. He is even called the teacher of Israel. He may have been the most prominent teaching Pharisee. He certainly knew their system very well. He was a proclaimer and a purveyor and a model of Pharisaic Judaism. He comes to Jesus by night. He has a question in his heart. He wants to know how to get into the kingdom of God. Here is the teacher, super Pharisee, you could call him, who doesn't know how to get into the kingdom of God. That's obviously true. On another occasion Jesus said, "Not only do you not know how to get into the kingdom of God, you don't know how to let anybody else in. In fact, you who are sons of hell make your proselytes or your converts twice the sons of hell that you are." You're on your way to hell and you're taking everybody with you that you influence.

How does it happen? How can one have eternal life? How can one be in the kingdom of God? Jesus gives him an answer. Nicodemus in verse 9, where I want to pick it up. John 3:9 says, "How can these things be?" I don't get it. I don't get it. I don't understand it. This is unfamiliar to me. "And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?'" There is the wholesale indictment of Pharisaic religion. You don't understand the basic issue of entering the kingdom of God...salvation. We're not talking about some detailed nuances. They had all kinds of allegorical interpretations of everything, all kinds of rabbinical complexities which they loved. They were fascinated by things. The more complex they were the more they liked them. That is still true of rabbinic Judaism even today. The basic about how to enter the kingdom of God and be saved from your sins, they didn't understand at all. "How is it that you are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you...this is evident; this is obvious..." "We speak that which we know and bear witness of that which we have seen and you do not receive our witness." You don't get it. You don't listen. You don't receive it. "If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" When I tell you things that are earthly, you don't respond knowingly, understandingly. Of course, you can't respond to that which is spiritual.

There is, I think, the clearest and most concise indictment of them. They didn't know the truth of salvation. They didn't listen. They didn't hear it. They didn't understand it. In fact, they related to it with anger and hostility, resentment and vengeance. The truth is always a threat to false religion and the reason the Pharisees pressed the issue and finally brought about the death of Christ was because they hated what He said and it was no different than the way the young men treated Elisha or the way the people treated Jeremiah or any of the other prophets which they killed. They hated the message of God; therefore, they hated God. Thus the conflict and the conflict throughout the life of Jesus as it escalates is who speaks for God. That's the whole issue here, folks, and that's the issue today. Who speaks for God?

When I'm sitting on the Larry King program and there are five people there and there's a Muslim and there's a Catholic priest and I'm there and there's a Jewish rabbi and there's a Hindu mystic, there's only one question: Who speaks for God? That's the compelling question. Do we all speak for God? Is the father right who says, "Well, my Jesus loves everybody and we're all one in this religion, with religious differences all heading toward the same God." Is that right? Does he speak for God? Is that the Word of God? Who speaks for God? The conflict is no different today. Does Mohammed speak for God? Does Joseph Smith speak for God? Does Mary Baker Eddy Patterson Glover Fry speak for God, just to let you know she had a problem with men? Does Bishop Spong speak for God? Does Archbishop Robinson speak for God? Does homosexual Anglican bishop Robinson speak for God? Who speaks for God? Do the syncretists speak for God? Does John Hagee on television speak for God when he says the Jews don't need Jesus to enter the kingdom? Does he speak for God? Who speaks for God?

Well, I'll tell you the answer to that is whoever says what is a true and consistent interpretation of what God has said. That's the issue. It was the issue then; it's the issue today. And anyone who doesn't say what God has said and affirm what God has said is the enemy of truth and all that contradicts the Scripture or alters the Scripture or misinterprets the Scripture is a lie to be rejected and the false will always be angry and always antagonistic and always critical and always judgmental of those who uphold the truth. They will sneer. They sneered and mocked Elisha. They sneered and mocked Jeremiah and they did the same to Jesus and why would we who are faithful to the gospel and confront them in their false religion think they would do anything other than that with us?

I remember sitting on the Larry King program one night and I said to one of the guests; I said, "I have a book that speaks to the truth of these matters and I'd be happy to give it to you. I've written it if you would be interested." He looked at me with beady eyes and said, "I wouldn't read anything you ever wrote." I said, "Well, that's fine. Just thought I'd offer." There's a sneering, condescending, mocking animosity on the part of people who are confronted with the truth and exposed. Now what is behind this? What motivates this? Certainly, they are blind. Certainly, they are dead. Certainly, they are lost, deaf, can't see, can't hear, can't understand, hard hearts, all of that, but apart from that, what is in the inside driving this? What is the heart like? And that's what the passage tells us. Number 1, false

teachers, people in false religion mock God, mock the truth, because, one, they have corrupt motives. They have corrupt motives. In verse 14, "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money." That states it all right there. They were lovers of money. Their motives were personal, crass, self-centered. They didn't have a concern about people's eternal souls, people's eternal destinies. They would devour widow's houses in a heartbeat. They would do whatever they needed to do to bring a convert their way for their own personal self aggrandizement. They didn't have pure motives because there is no false religion that can suppress the flesh. There is no false religion that can overcome sin. There is no false religion that can heal a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and, therefore, they are deceitful, desperately wicked people, dominated by sin, self-centered, pride, self-aggrandizing and that's what motivates people in false religion. It isn't that they're so inherently good and noble and God-fearing and spiritual and compassionate and kind and all of that. It is not that at all. People in false religious systems are in it, as the Bible says, from beginning to end because they want to pad their own wallet. They want to find a life of comfort and ease to one degree or another, some more than others, and they find religion as a means to do that. Their motives are corrupt. Don't say to yourself, "Well, I know they're in false religion but they have pure motives." No, they don't. They can't have pure motives. The only pure motive for any religion is to glorify and honor God and "You cannot glorify and honor God unless you acknowledge His Son because He who honors Me honors My Father. He who does not honor Me, does not honor My Father," said Jesus.

Secondly, they are antagonistic to God's demands. They are antagonistic. They're not just indifferent. They're not mild-mannered. They're antagonistic. You say, "Well, there certainly seem to be a lot of false religions embracing evangelicals today. They don't seem too antagonistic." And that's because the "evangelicals" have withheld the truth. If you hold the truth back then you don't generate the appropriate kind of animosity that is necessary for a person to come to grips with the truth and the condition they're in to bring them out of that error into the truth. You're not doing anybody a favor by soft-soaping them, by taking out the truth to make them feel good. That is a damning strategy. If you give them the truth as Jesus did and as all the faithful have always done, they're going to be antagonistic to it. We see that in verse 14. What launched the scoffing? They were listening to all these things. They didn't like what Jesus was saying. It wasn't that they didn't like His personality or they didn't like His style or they didn't like His methodology. It wasn't that He was competing with them for some turf. It was what He said that made them so angry and turned them into God mockers. They were not people who delighted in the law of the Lord as Psalm 1 indicated. They were not those kinds of people. They were the scoffers. They hated the truth and they were listening and the very experience of hearing Jesus teach what is true righteousness, about loving God and not money, about using all your resources for that which is eternal irritated them. It was the experience of hearing the truth from Jesus and maybe even chapter 15, those powerful, penetrating, almost overwhelming and stunning parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and the tale of two sons. Those powerful stories were indictments of their indifference. They could get sympathetic about a sheep that was lost and sympathetic about a coin that was only and only could they could they get irritated and angry about a loving father who would forgive a lost and profligate son. They were exposed by Jesus

teaching again and again and it was the exposure to those truths that unleashed their scorn. It is always so when you bring to bear upon people in any false religion the clear truth of God, they will react violently. They will react defensively. They will react with hatred. They run from it. They love darkness rather than light. You shine the light on them and they run to the darkness and they are not happy about you turning on the light. The more you proclaim the truth, the more clearly people are brought into the understanding of what you're saying, the more animosity and antagonism to God's clear demands.

Thirdly, we saw last time, they're self-justifying, verse 15. "You are those," He says, "who justify yourselves." In other words, you declare yourselves righteous. To be justified is to be declared righteous, to stand before God as acceptable, to stand before God as worthy, to stand before God as able to enter into His heaven, into His presence forever, to stand before God and be approved, and they literally did it for themselves. Isn't that great? That's characteristic, by the way, of all false religion and that's what everybody thinks. I mean that's the way the whole world thinks. You stop anybody on the street and say, "How do you get to heaven?" and people are going to say, "Well, you need to be a person. You need to do what's right and blah, blah, blah." That's standard stuff. Even people will say, "Well, you need to believe in Jesus." Well, is believing in Jesus all? No, you need to be a good person, do good things and, you know, then God will let you in. That's standard stuff because that's the biggest lie that exists in the history of the human race. That's the biggest lie. That's the one huge damning lie...that you can justify yourselves and all religions practice some form of it, including the Judaism of the past, the apostate Judaism of the past and the present.

And fourthly, we saw last time, they sought human approval. Verse 15, they were eager to justify themselves, to declare themselves righteous in the sight of men. It was all about how they appeared before people. That was part of the strategy to get them the money, the prestige, the power, the prominence that they sought through their religion and in Matthew 23 in very clear words, Jesus indicts them for this. In speaking to them, he says to the multitude, the crowd, one day and the disciples; he said, "The scribes and the Pharisees, let Me talk about them." Verse 5, "They do all their deeds to be noticed by men." That says it. That's Jesus' assessment. "They do all their deeds to be noticed by men. They broaden their phylacteries..." Phylacteries are little boxes in which the Deuteronomic shamah was placed and you put the little boxes, you put the law in there. They did and they wrapped it on their wrist and they stuck it on their head. You know, the Old Testament said, "Write it on your head and put it on your hand," and that was metaphoric but in order to parade their devotion to the law, they strapped a box to their head and they strapped a box to their arm. You still see that going on in Judaism even today and the more holy they wanted to appear, the bigger the box got and the wider the cord got and eventually, it's very sophisticated. You have to know how to wrap that in the form of certain Hebrew letters on your arm. Some of you from Jewish background know that and you parade your holiness and your commitment to the law that way before men. "They lengthened the tassels of their garments," again, symbols of their godliness and virtue. They had long tassels flowing out. You see it in remnants of that today sometimes with Orthodox Jewish people and

the tassels flowing out from under their coats. They do this to be seen. "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplace and they want everybody to call them rabbi," which means teacher, source. They want to be called father. They want to be called leader. They do what they do to please men, to get human approval.

False religion is always like this and we talked about it last time...that was just a review...corrupt motives, antagonistic to God's demands, self-justifying, seeking human approval. That brings us to No. 5. This is key. They were evil at heart...they were evil at heart. God knows your hearts...God knows your hearts. Boy, what a simple and direct hit that is. God knows your hearts. All that stuff on the outside and God omniscient, knowing all things, knows the truth. Jesus said, "Outside, you're painted white. Inside, you're full of stinking, dead bones," Matthew 23. "You are wretched on the inside." Proverbs or Psalm, rather, 44:21, "Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart." Matthew 6:18, "God sees in secret. God knows in secret." Psalm 139:2, "You understand my thought," says the psalmist, "far off." Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord." 1 Samuel 16:7, "Man looks at the outward appearance. God looks at the heart." 1 Kings 8:39, "You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men." Jeremiah 17:10, "I, the Lord, search the heart." And Jesus in John 2, "Of Him it is said no man needed to tell Him anything for He knew what was in the heart of man."

God knows the heart. That's why in chapter 12 of Luke and verse 1, Jesus told the disciples, "Beware of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They are hypocrites. I know their hearts." They're phony and so are all these religious people. They're frauds. They're God mockers. They're sneering at the true and living God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and anyone who doesn't acknowledge Christ and the gospel is a God mocker of the highest rank who has substituted some other God for the true God and thus violated the first and greatest commandment and the people, of course, revered these Pharisees for their external religion and they revered them for their superficial piety. But go back to verse 15 for a moment, "That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God...that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God." Boy, that would make a great series, just to do a whole series on what is highly esteemed among men. That is such a general statement. That covers sweeping, sweeping denunciation. Just take everything in the realm of human opinion, everything in the realm of human honor, everything in the realm of human esteem. Take all the prizes, all the rewards, all the honors, all the achievements, in all the fields of human effort...physical, intellectual, all of them. Just take everything that is esteemed among men and it is all...what?...detestable in the sight of God.

That is another way of saying it is not a sufficient offering to please Him. "Where is the scribe?" 1 Corinthians 1:20. "Where is the wise man? Where is the great debater of this age? In God's eyes, they're all fools." Romans 1, "They, professing themselves to be wise, became fools." And when you were saved, dear friend, you were delivered, Galatians 1:4, "...out of this present evil age." This present evil age is defined by what is highly esteemed among men. You were delivered from that.

Sweeping denunciation of anything but a biblical world view. By the way, the word "detestable," it's an interesting English word. But the Greek is even more interesting, *bdelugma*. It means something that stinks and, by the way, this is a lexical definition from an old lexicon, something that is noxious, anything but a sweet-smelling savor rising to God which is biblical imagery of a pleasing sacrifice. It is abominable. It is disgusting. It is revolting. It is shameful. It is scandalous. It is sacrilegious, anything but pleasing to God. God finds that which men esteem to be utterly repulsive to Him. All...that includes and primarily refers to all false religion including Judaism without Christ...amazing. The Judaism of the Pharisees stunk to God. So does all false religion. So does everything else that men consider important.

This is God's commentary, particularly on all religion, which rejects the gospel and that leads to the sixth component that is behind the scorn, and it's really important, and we'll close with this one this morning. They were lovers of money, that is they had corrupt motives as all false religious leaders do and the victims of their leadership. They are antagonistic to God's demands, proud of their own self-righteousness, seekers for human honor and corrupt hypocrites at heart. But I want you to get this sixth one because it's really the core of everything. They rejected the gospel of the kingdom. This is what made it all true. They rejected the gospel of the kingdom. Verse 16, "The law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached..." I want to stop there. This is why they are detestable to God. This is why anyone is detestable to God. This is why what rises to God in their religious offerings and religious duties and religious functions and moral acts, what rises to God is noxious and stinks because they don't get it. "The law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Since then..." That little two words, "since then," is a familiar marker in Luke. About seven times he uses that kind of time marker that signifies a very critical turning point.

Here's the problem. "The law and the prophets," that's simply a way to refer to the Old Testament. They didn't call it the Old Testament. Why would they? There was no New Testament. So they called it the law and the prophets. In fact, you'll find later on in the 24th chapter of Luke and the 27th verse that Jesus beginning with Moses, the law, and with all the prophets, explained the Scripture. So the law and the prophets were the same as the Scriptures. They called it the law and the prophets. So we're talking about what we call the Old Testament, the Scriptures. The Scriptures, the Old Testament, were proclaimed until John...John the Baptist. What is He saying? He's saying...very important...the law and the prophets, that's the era of promise. That's the era of promise. That's the era of prophesy. That's the era of prediction. But I like the word "promise." That's the era of promise. The final representative in the era of promise is John the Baptist. He is the last prophet of the Old Testament. There hasn't been a prophet. There hasn't been a voice from God for 400 years until John arrives. When he comes, he is the final representative of the era of promise and the first representative of the era of fulfillment. He's the bridge. He's the last and he's the first. In Matthew 11, Jesus said about him he was the greatest human being who ever lived up until his day. Why? Because no one had...not because he was more personally powerful or spiritual, but because no one

ever had such a massive privilege as this man did to be the forerunner, the announcer, the presenter, the pointer, to the Messiah and thereby he is the prophetic instrument who not only closes out the era of promise but opens up the era of fulfillment...monumental.

Go back to Luke chapter 1 and toward the end of Luke 1, Zacharias who was a priest...you remember God miraculously let him and his wife have a baby, Elizabeth, when they were way past the age for that and the baby was the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, and when the word came to him about it before the child was born, he, verse 67 of Luke 1, was filled with the Holy Spirit and he launches off in this marvelous benedictus praise to God because a child is going to be born and this is what he says, "Blessed be the God, the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people." He understood that the old, the past, was promise. Now this is accomplishment. This is fulfillment. We could even read it. "He visited us and fulfilled redemption for His people." He knew that the coming of the forerunner meant the coming of the Messiah. If he was going to have a son who would present the Messiah then the Messiah was coming and he knew in verse 69 that God had raised up a horn of salvation for us as promised to David and then if you drop down to verse 73, as sworn to Abraham. He knew it was now time for the promise of the Davidic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant. This was about fulfillment. "We're going to be delivered," verse 74, "from the hand of our enemies to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days...this is salvation...and you, child, will be called the prophet of the most high for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins." Salvation has come at last and you, child, are going to point to Him.

One day, John stood by the Jordan River and when in the midst of his ministry, Jesus showed up, he pointed to Him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." He did his job. He came to bring the knowledge of salvation. "He," verse 78, "is the sunrise who shines on those who sit in darkness in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace." Chapter 3 of Luke, John begins his ministry, "...The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord. Make His paths straight. Every ravine shall be filled up. Every mountain and hill shall be brought low. The crooked shall become straight, the rough roads smooth.'" And he's not talking about getting some bulldozers out there and knocking mountains down. He's talking about the heart. You're going to have to prepare your heart because Messiah is coming. You're going to have to repent for the forgiveness of sins. He understood salvation came through repentance and a crying out to God for mercy and forgiveness and this is what he preached. He preached repentance and a baptism of repentance and one day Jesus came and when Jesus came, He was baptized by John and heaven was opened, verse 22, "And the Holy Spirit descended and the voice of the Father came out of heaven. 'You are my beloved Son. In You I'm well pleased.'" And John's job was done really and soon after, he was beheaded, taken to his heavenly reward...big change. John is the bridge.

And so back to Luke 16:16, "The law and the prophets...the Old Testament as we know it...were proclaimed until John. Since then...there's that key time marker...the gospel of the kingdom of God is

preached." Holding onto the old is not good enough. Your problem is you have not moved to the gospel of the kingdom of God and what is the gospel...good news...and what does it mean "the gospel of the kingdom of God?" That God has a kingdom. God has a sphere of rule. God has a realm of life which can be entered and in which one can dwell forever. The kingdom of God is open. The doors to the kingdom are open but there's only one way in and that is through Jesus Christ. The gospel of the kingdom of God is being preached. John preached it. "He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." John said, "I must decrease; He must increase," which was a way of saying, "Forget about me and turn to Him." Since the ministry then of John the Baptist, Jesus has become the focal point. The gospel of Jesus is the fulfillment of all Old Testament promises all the way back to Genesis 3:15, "The seed of the woman who would come to crush the serpent's head," the promise in the law of Moses that a greater than Moses would come, that a great prophet would come, that a ruler would come out of Shiloh, all of that in the Pentateuch. All the Old Testament sacrifices depicted the one final sacrifice that Christ would make. He is the true one of God who will come and be the redeemer pictured in all other unredeeming sacrifices.

The good news for sinners, the kingdom is open. The door is open. Christ is that door. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me." John, at the end of his gospel, chapter 20 verse 31, says, "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name." You have life only when believing in Jesus Christ. In Acts 4:12, Peter preaches, "There is salvation in no one else. There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." I did message a couple of years ago called "No Gospel, No Salvation." I think it was a two-part series, if you're interested in following up on that. But Jesus said, "This is your problem. Your problem is you're stuck not only in the law and the prophets but in a twisted and perverted and apostate perspective because," as He said to them, "if you knew the Scripture, if you really knew what God meant by what He said in the law and the prophets, you would believe in Me. Search the Scripture," He said, "for they are they which speak of Me." He says to Nicodemus, "How can you be the teacher and not understand these things?" So false religion motivated by corrupt self-indulgence, resistant to the truth, self-justifying, concerned about receiving accolades from men but God knows the heart. It is corrupt and stinking hypocrisy to Him and it all is because people don't make the move to the gospel in which alone salvation is found. The end of verse 16, "...and everyone is forcing his way into it." That's a strange statement, isn't it? We're going to find out what it means next time. Bow with me in prayer.

This is all so potent to us, Lord, because it's so real. Thank you for exposing us to it even though it's painful and sad because we need to know this so we are not deceived and seduced away by people who appear to be God-lovers who are really God-mockers. Help us to know the truth so that we can proclaim it to others. All of this, beloved, is summed up in one statement made by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:22. "If anyone does not love the Lord, the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed. If anyone doesn't love the Lord, the Lord Jesus, let him be accursed." There is no other way. It's always the question, "Who speaks for God?" The one who rightly represents the gospel which is consistent with

the whole of biblical revelation.

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