

3. The Forerunner of Jesus

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There is not many characters in the Bible who stand out like John the Baptist.

Who is he? Is he Christ? Or is he Elijah? Let's hear the answer from his own mouth:

John 1:19-21 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

He was the first hippie recorded in the Bible. Eating organic food and living in the wilderness and wearing strange clothes. I am sure that you could see a locust leg sticking out between John's teeth while he was talking to the people who came to be baptized.

He didn't go around Jerusalem neighborhood yelling, "Time to get baptized, Today's special – two for one. This sale won't last long."

People came after him out to the wilderness. They came to him to be baptized and to repent from their sins and to find God's way. Nowadays, there is a lot of churches around the country that want to be so-called seeker sensitive. It means that they would dilute the Gospel truth that includes the words such as "sin, adultery, perversion, condemnation against homosexuality and so on" to something softer to those who are involved with these sins to have more people in their churches. It is my promise to you: I will not compromise, nor dilute God's truth for the sake of more people in our church or for more offerings.

A. JOHN'S MESSAGE

Matthew 3:1-2 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" John the Baptist came preaching, "Repent." First word of God, breaking the silence of 400 years. John preceded the Lord Jesus in birth, ministry and death as a relative.

John was called "the Baptist" not because he started the baptist denomination, but because he baptized people of repentance.

The Greek verb translated "Repent" indicates a change of attitude and outlook which will result in sorrow for sins and change one's life. Repent isn't a "feelings" word. It is an action word. Real repentance will show itself in life. It has to be a matter of living repentance, not just talking about repentance.

B. JOHN'S AUTHORITY

Matthew 3:3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' "

Whenever a king was coming to visit a territory, there was a lot of preparation prior to the coming of the king. There would be tremendous road building projects, making a highway, making the roads straight and taking out the curves. In this role, John's purpose was to prepare hearts for the Messiah, and to bring an awareness of

sin among Israel so they could receive the salvation offered by the Messiah.

C. JOHN AS A PERSON

Matthew 3:4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

I am sure that his apparel intrigued many fashion companies, such as Christian Dior, Calvin Klein, and Armani. His diet also would inspire health food industry with high protein diet from locusts and high energy pills from wild honey.

He was humble and rustic in manner and appearance. His dress reminds one of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). In Mal. 4:5-6, God promised that Elijah would come before the dreadful Day of the Lord. So John came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

D. JOHN'S BAPTISM

Matthew 3:5-6 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

It was a baptism of repentance, he was calling people to repentance, to change. The river Jordan in typology is a type of death. In other words, the baptism in the river Jordan represents sort of the death to the old life. It's a repentance and a change, going to live a new life. It is somewhat similar to the baptism in Christianity, only our baptism is identifying in the death of Jesus Christ and the new life that we have in the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

John's baptism was for two purposes:

- 1) To introduce Christ to the nation (John 1:31)
- 2) To prepare their hearts for the coming of the King.

E. PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

Matthew 3:7-9 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

John really knew how to make friends by calling these religious leaders a few chosen names as they deserved.

Who are these Pharisees and Sadducees? Why is John so upset with their presence? The Pharisees were legal literalists who turned the law into a burden to everyone in Israel. They demanded people to follow their rules and regulations over God's commandments.

The Sadducees were "liberals" who denied much of the OT including resurrection and angels and spirits. Both of them are sorry excuses for spiritual leaders. We, too, have a plenty of them still.

On three occasions, the Pharisees were called "generation of vipers": by John the Baptist, and by Jesus (12:34 and 23:33).

Acts 23:8 For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

Their boast was that they're descendants of Abraham and they were trusting in that for salvation. It is no different than many American believe that they are Christians, because they were born in America.

It was widely taught in that day that Abraham's merits were plenty for any Jew's salvation, that a Jewish person couldn't go to hell. John points out that these Pharisees and Scribes are of a different family. They are a brood of vipers - meaning a family associated with satan.

2 Tim 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

F. GOD'S RESPONSE FOR THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Matthew 3:10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. For these kinds of fake spiritual leaders, God has a special plan for them: Clearing His orchard of dead wood that do not bear the fruit of repentance.

Matthew 3:11-12 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

John said, "whose sandals I am not worthy to carry," he recognized his own place before Jesus instead of getting a big head because of the crowds he is drawing.

We find John talking about two baptisms:

- 1) John's baptism - the element is water and the issue is repentance
- 2) Jesus' baptism - Jesus is going to come, He is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The fire is oftentimes referred to in the Pentecostal churches as this wild emotionalism. It is NOT so.

It is about that purifying process of our lives through the Holy Spirit. And the fire is that which consumes the chaff in order that we might be cleansed, purified, refined, where the impurities of our lives are removed in order that you might be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of the Holy Spirit.

G. JESUS AND JOHN

Matthew 3:13-15 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

We must ask ourselves a question, "Why was the sinless Jesus Son of God baptized?" There are six reasons:

1. Obligation – "To fulfill all righteousness"

John 8:29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.

2. Consecration – The OT priest was washed, then anointed. Jesus submitted to water baptism, then the Holy Spirit came as a dove. See Ex. 29.

3. Commendation – Jesus gave His approval of John’s ministry and thus obligated the people to listen to John and obey him. Instead, the religious leaders rejected John’s baptism (Matthew 21:23–27).

4. Proclamation – This was John’s official introduction of Jesus to the Jewish nation.
John 1:31.

5. Anticipation – This water baptism looked forward to Jesus’ baptism of suffering for us on the cross (Luke 12:50). Jesus fulfilled all righteousness through His sacrificial death on Calvary.

6. Identification – Jesus identified Himself with sinful men. Immediately after, the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. There may be here a picture of the “scapegoat” that symbolically carried the nation’s sins into the wilderness (Lev. 16:1–10).

The Greek word “baptizo” means “to dip, to immerse,” and John required “much water” for his baptism (John 3:23). All the wrath of God against mankind’s sins were experienced by Jesus on the cross.

H. JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

Matthew 3:16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

This was the sign God had promised to give John to identify Christ (John 1:31–34). The symbol of the Spirit as a dove is important: the dove is a clean bird; it is faithful to its mate in love; it is peaceful and gentle. Christ was born through the power of the Spirit (Luke 1:34–35) and was also empowered by the Spirit for His life and ministry.

The images of the dove, water, death and life reminds me of two analogies from the Old Testament:

1) Noah - His name means “Bringing Rest” or “Comforter.”

In Genesis ch 8, he also was surrounded by water. He was surrounded by the corrupted world that is filled with perversion and violence before the great flood. After the rain stopped, Noah let out a raven and dove to check out the situation. The raven didn’t come back because he had enough dead bodies to eat from. But the dove descended upon Noah.

It is the picture of separating ourselves from the dying world around us.

1 Peter 3:18-22 also declares the Noah’s flood is a picture of baptism.

2) Jonah - His name means “Dove” literally.

When Jonah declared the God’s judgement to the wicked people of Nineveh, they repented and came to God. In this case, it is the picture of discarding his own selfish desire for the dying world around us to declare the truth of God.

The slogan of the ministry of Calvary Chapel of Sahuarita is “Spreading the Truth!” - knowing Jesus and making Him known to the others.

I. JESUS AND THE FATHER

Matthew 3:17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This is the first of three occasions when the Father spoke to the Son from heaven (Matt. 17:5, John 12:28). We have the Trinity revealed here all at once: the Son is baptized, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father speaks from heaven. As He entered His ministry, the Son was approved by the Father for His complete obedience.

J. APPLICATIONS

1) Proclaim the truth of God to the lost world boldly in love.

While we declare the truth of Jesus Christ, we feel like we stand all alone against the whole world. But let's remember that when we do it, we are standing on the Word of God with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and the approval of the Father in heaven. Now beat that!

2) Jesus must increase, we must decrease, for it is all about Him.

The flower of humility is one of the most beautiful flowers in the field of Christianity. But as soon as it shows the beauty to other or even itself, it dies. The great reformer of Christianity Martin Luther said, "God creates out of nothing. Therefore, until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him."

3) Baptism of Jesus is identifying ourselves with His death and resurrection. Nothing more and nothing less.

Phil 3:10 I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.