

The Wilderness Preacher

Matthew 3: 1-17

We have the account of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. He was given the task of preparing the way for Christ. This was a time of great importance for the church. Christ was soon to begin his ministry.

John was not the typical man of God in that day; in fact he was very unorthodox in his presentation of the gospel. He went against the grain of the religious leaders of that time. They were caught up in religious ceremony and weren't ready to hear the gospel. John took his message to anyone who would listen.

I am increasingly concerned about the way the gospel is being presented today. Are we really sharing the message, or do we just have a form of godliness? I want to look at the message of this wilderness preacher and the impact of his ministry.

I. John's Message (1-2) – In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. John's message was simple and to the point; Repent ye: for the kingdom of God is at hand. He boldly declared that man must repent of their sin and turn to God. This was met with much resistance because most didn't accept Christ as the Messiah.

- This is a message that is little heard today. We live in an age where many don't accept Christ as Lord and Savior. We need men of God who will preach repentance to a lost and dying world. I Co.1:23 – But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.
- Christ himself preached the message of repentance. He said to Nicodemus – Jn.3:3 – Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. V.6 – That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. V.16 – For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Man must repent of sin and receive Christ for salvation. This was John's message and should be ours today.

II. John's Manner (3-4) – For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. [4] And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. John was ordained of God to be the forerunner of Christ. He was a man very different from the Pharisees and Sadducees of his day. They were very religious men, but had no faith in Christ. John didn't associate himself with this empty show

of religion. He wasn't preaching in the temples and synagogues, but rather in the wilderness and countryside.

- His dress was also different from those of the religious sect. He had separated himself from this self-righteous form of dead religion. The need for such men and churches is needful in our day. We are plagued with those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. Churches will try every type of program, activity, or entertainment to draw a crowd; all the while leaving the soul lost and bound for hell.
- I pray we will have a genuine concern for men's souls and where they will spend eternity. I am not interested in being like the modern churches of our day. I want Fellowship to be a place where the gospel is preached, sinners are saved, and the saints are encouraged. Let's look at his ministry.

III. John's Ministry (5-6) – Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, [6] And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. John's ministry wasn't one that was dead in the water, but was alive and thriving for God. He was reaching people for Christ. This was his goal, his purpose in life.

- The success of ministry won't be measured by the salary I receive, the size of the church I pastor, or how well known I am. My success will be measured by the number of souls I am able to reach for Christ. The key to that success is to preach the Word without compromise, with a love and compassion for sinful man.
- We have talked about some of the gimmicks that are being used to draw a crowd. We don't need committees and study groups to evaluate this problem. What churches need is for the Word of God to be preached. This will get the job done. God's Word will convict man's heart.

IV. John's Mandate (7-12) – He immediately confronted sin and its source. He challenged the religious pretenders regarding their faith in Christ. Vv.7-8 –

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: John knew their hearts were not right with the Lord.

A. The Experience (9) – And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Salvation was not inherited simply because they were Jews. It was not earned based upon their relation to Abraham. Salvation must be experienced within the heart.

B. The Evidence (10) – And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Their hearts were already known of the Lord. He knew their desires and their relationship to Him. The saved would produce fruit revealing the change that had taken place within the heart.

- Our salvation is not based or earned by our works, but those who belong to the Lord will produce fruit for Him. Jam.2:17-18 – Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. [18] Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Salvation will produce fruit!

C. The Evaluation (12) – Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Jesus knows all who belong to Him. As He returns to claim His own, only those who are saved will be accepted. All of the saved and only the saved will inherit eternal life. The wheat will be gathered into the barn and the chaff will be consumed in everlasting fire and torments.

I. John's Message

II. John's Manner

III. John's Ministry

IV. John's Mandate

V. John's Messiah (13-17) – Vv.16-17 – And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: [17] And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. John wasn't promoting himself, or the 1st Baptist Church of Jerusalem. He wasn't preaching church membership or religious affiliation. He was preaching Christ to all that would hear. He was preaching about the Messiah, our blessed Redeemer.

- If you see nothing else in the service today, I pray that you will see Christ, the One who died for the sins of the world. He is the One we need to focus on. If I haven't presented Christ, then I have failed in what I do. Jesus said in Jn.12:32 – And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This is the message of the gospel in a simple phrase. He came to earth to become our sacrifice, the Atonement for our sin. He was crucified upon a Roman cross and hung between heaven and earth for the sins of this world. He was buried and rose again the 3rd day victorious. He is today at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us.

We are going to have our baptism in a few moments. These have trusted Christ as their Savior and are publicly testifying of their death to sinful flesh and their resurrection in Christ, a new creature before God. They have been accepted in the beloved, now a child of the King. Where do you stand this morning? You have heard the message of the gospel. Will you accept Him as these already have? The choice is yours. Will you come as we sing?