

Sermon Notes – November 29, 2020

“John the Baptist Prepares the Way”

(Luke 3:2-3, 15-18)

How many of you have ever been to a country concert or a rock concert? Do you remember when you go that there is always a “warm-up band” - some singer or band that is not quite so well-known as the main attraction? When you get to the concert, the “warm-up band” plays or sings for 45 minutes to an hour before the main attraction.

I want you to know that John was kind of like the “warm-up band.” He came out before Jesus. Now keep in mind that John the Baptist was only a few months older than Jesus, and they were cousins. In fact their mothers were both cousins. If you remember, in Luke’s gospel, it tells you that Mary went and spent the first three-months of her pregnancy with Elizabeth and Zacharias. They were very close, so you know that John and Jesus influenced one another. I think John was influenced by Jesus and vice-versa. John the Baptist comes on the scene and he is the first prophet in Israel in 400 years!

The Old Testament prophets had told that there was a Messiah coming. “The King is coming and he’s going to usher in a new kingdom of justice and peace!” All of the Israelites were looking for this coming Messiah. They had a great sense of expectation. Do you know how kids are in anticipation for the coming of Christmas - how they can’t hardly wait for Christmas Day to get here? The Israelites had been expecting, waiting, and celebrating for hundreds of years for this new king to come who would possibly defeat the Romans (their enemies) and put them back in power - who would bring justice for all people, especially them.

John comes in and says, “There’s a King coming. The Messiah’s coming.” He was the first prophet in 400 years to have a message from God for the people of Israel. Do you know that every time a new prophet or priest came on the scene at that time, the people would ask, “Are you the Messiah?” “Are you the coming one?” So when John came, they asked, “Are you the one?” John said, “No. I am just preparing the way for the

one who is to come. I am not even worthy to untie the thongs of Jesus' sandals."

John came in preaching a message of expectation and he preached a message of preparation. Did you notice in the story that John said, "There's a voice of one calling in the desert - in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way. Make the road straight. Make the crooked places straight and smooth.'" That was a symbolism or an analogy to ancient times, when a king was going to visit a new town or village in his kingdom, he would send out one of his couriers (servants) to go and spend days or weeks getting the town ready before his arrival. The King was a very important person. The courier would ride in on his horse saying, "The King is coming! The King is coming! Prepare the way!" The courier was kind of like a city inspector - he would go in and stay, and order them to fix up things -- like pot holes or roadways so that the King would be traveling on smooth, straight roads. "Clear out this grass. Get rid of this garbage. Tweak the streets. Get prepared because somebody important is coming! The King is coming!"

When John is preaching he says, "Guys, you need to prepare -- for the Messiah who is coming. You need to get your minds and hearts spiritually ready for the coming of the Messiah." The people asked John what they needed to do. John preached about repentance for the forgiveness of your sins. Now the Jews didn't think they needed to repent for anything - they were God's favored people. They were the chosen. They were descendants of Abraham. They were claiming their inheritance from Abraham. Therefore, they didn't need to repent or do anything, so they thought. But John said, "Oh yes, you do!" He even called them a "brood of vipers." He told them to quit playing the game - to get real. "Salvation is for ALL people - Jews and Gentiles alike - and we ALL need to repent. Turn from your evil ways and turn toward God."

In our society today, we don't talk much about sin in church, do we? But, Jesus Christ came to forgive us of our sins and to give us eternal life. God asked us to believe in Him, to repent, to ask for forgiveness, and to choose to live for Him. Let Him come to live in our hearts and our lives

and transform our thinking, our attitudes, and our stinky behavior. We don't talk about it much because we think that we're "not much sinners." If we didn't rob a bank, murder someone, embezzle funds, or rape someone, we are probably pretty good people, aren't we? ... But guess what? God knows our hearts and our minds. There are times when we ALL need to repent and turn back to God. Maybe it's because we're carrying an attitude of unforgiveness or resentment or bitterness towards someone - maybe we have a broken relationship with someone - maybe we kind of embellish the truth. We ALL have things of which we need to repent. John said, "You need to repent and turn to God."

The Jews had to be cleansed, rinsed, and bathed before they went into the temple for their ceremonies. They also believed that the only persons who needed to be baptized were the Gentiles when they converted to Judaism. They didn't think they needed to repent or be baptized. John said they ALL need to repent and that baptism was the symbol of repentance for their sins.

There are two things that we want to notice about John: He had an important role in the birth story of Jesus and he was also very popular. Can you imagine? Here was a very poor man who dressed in animal skins, ate bugs or locusts, and lived in a tent in the desert. Still people came from miles and miles just to hear him preach. John the Baptist "told it like it was." He was his own person. He was the cousin of Jesus - the forerunner - the "warm-up band" to prepare people for the main attraction - Jesus. People came from all over to ask John the Baptist what they needed to do - tax collectors, soldiers, etc. He replied, "Repent and bear fruit." What he was saying was that your life should show evidence of the change that God is making in your life and he gave them three examples:

1. "***You should be generous.*** You should share your abundance with those in need." If you have two tunics, share one with somebody in need. In those days, it was not unusual for a man to wear two tunics or to carry an extra one with him. (A tunic was the cloth next to their skin under their coat.) When we think about generosity, we often think about money - but it is more than just money. It may be

our financial resources – it may be giving 15 minutes of our quality time to somebody that needs it – it may be sharing your skills and talents with someone – it may be sharing food with someone.

Maybe it's being generous with your kindness and your words of encouragement. *Generosity is a big thing and God calls us to be generous and share from the abundance of what we have.*

2. "You should stop exploiting the people. Stop cheating the people and taking advantage of them. You're padding your pockets and they already pay you. Take what you got and stop padding your pockets with their money." ***John the Baptist told them that they should be persons of integrity.***

Francis Bacon (a great philosopher and statesman) once said, "It's not what you profess or say, but what you practice that gives you integrity." It's more about what you do than what you say.

Integrity is doing the right thing when nobody is looking.

Christopher Montgomery is a 19-year-old young man who works in a movie theater. He goes in and has to sweep the floor and pick-up the trash in between the features. One night he was cleaning and he found this thick padded envelope with money in it. Guess how much money was in it? ... \$24,000.00! Now he could've kept it; he could've hidden it; he could've taken it home that night and no one would've ever known; or he could give it to the manager and report it. He did just that. He turned it in to the manager. It belonged to a woman who had worked all day and needed to make a bank deposit – but she had promised her 6-year-old daughter that she would take her to the movies that evening. She decided to get her daughter, go see the movie, and then go make the bank deposit. She placed the money in an envelope in her purse. Sometime during the movie, the purse tilted over and the money fell out. She went home and didn't even notice until she was at home. Can't you imagine what she was feeling when she got home? But thank goodness, Christopher Montgomery was honest and had enough integrity to do the right thing. He could've taken the money when nobody was looking. \$24,000 was more money that he could've

made in two years, but he chose to do the right thing. *John the Baptist told these soldiers and tax collectors to be a person of integrity and point the way to Christ - to be a person who is generous with your kindness, your love, your money, and your resources.* Share with those who are in need. That person in need may be a friend, a family member, or a stranger - maybe somebody that is difficult - maybe someone that is not even your favorite person - but they are in need. John says we are to be generous and be a person of integrity.

3. There's something else he told them - ***to be consistent.*** "***Be consistent in your walk with God.*** Live it every day so that people can see Christ in you." Let your talk and your walk match - your words and your actions go together. Be a person that lives by your commitment to God, not your emotions, because your emotions are up and down and wishy-washy. Sometimes you feel like serving God, some days you don't. Some days you feel like reading the Bible and some days you don't. Be a person who is committed to your walk with God. Let your walk and your talk match -- every day so that you're pointing the way toward Christ.

John the Baptist was like a trailblazer - he blazed a path to Christ so that others could see Him. He was humble. He said, "I'm not even worthy to tie the guy's sandals." Can you imagine? This was his cousin - and yet he knew that Jesus was different. Maybe at a young age, he knew that Jesus was the Son of God. I don't know. But he said, "I am not the Messiah. The One who is coming is greater than me and I'm not even worthy to tie his sandals." John the Baptist came to prepare us for the coming of Christ and he preached a message of repentance. Sometimes we need to repent. He preached a message of how we are to bear fruit and be generous with ALL that we have in the abundance that God has given us. Be a person of integrity. Be a person who is consistent in your walk with Christ. Let us live in such a way that others see Christ in us every day. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus, the Light of the World. May our lives point to the Light and the Hope of the World - Jesus Christ. Amen.