

# A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

by Erlo Stegen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance, humility, and selflessness, and encourages Christians to prepare the way for God by removing obstacles to His work.*

**Duration:** 1:01:31

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-3, Matthew 3:1-4, Matthew 4:17, Matthew 11:11, Luke 1:15

**Topics:** "Sin"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by sharing a personal story of a man who traveled to apologize to his brother after being convicted by God. The preacher then discusses the importance of repentance and preparing the way for the Lord, referencing Matthew 3 and the prophecy of Isaiah. He also shares a story of a girl from Scotland who exemplified modesty and preached with conviction. The sermon concludes with a reminder for both men and women to dress and behave according to their gender, as taught in the Bible.

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## Transcript

Let's read our text in Matthew chapter 4, no 3, excuse me, chapter 3, from verse 1. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Let's pray once again. We ask you, Lord, please speak to us through your holy word.

This word has been on my heart for quite a few days. And I prayed, asking the Lord for an opportunity to preach about this John. Jesus said that of all that had been born of women, there was no one as great as John.

Even though the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. One might wonder, what does it mean? Surely Moses was greater than John the Baptist. Surely Elijah, because John the Baptist never called down fire from heaven or raised a person from the dead.

What, in what does his greatness lie? Some might say, but surely Abraham was greater because he's known as the father of all believers. But Jesus said there was no one born of a woman as great as John.

So I'd like to speak about just a few points and try and make the message, if it's possible, a bit shorter.

In the Old Testament, it ends with the prophet Malachi. After which there was silence. There was no prophet for 400 years until the arrival of John the Baptist.

God sent John. So what was it that he said? It says, That he grew up in the wilderness of Judea. There were only five or six little villages in Judea.

We're not told exactly where he grew up. We hear that Jesus was in Jerusalem speaking at the temple to the elders when he was 12. But we don't hear of John the Baptist ever being there.

It's as if though he is removed from the scene, but he was all the while in the wilderness. And he was an amazing man. Even while his mother was expecting him, as she was pregnant with him, he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

You might say, is that possible? Surely it's just a fairy tale that was filled with the Spirit in his mother. I wonder, mothers, you who are expecting children, what Spirit is there that comes into them whilst in you? Lord, let this child receive the Holy Spirit. Let your Holy Spirit work in this child.

And what a pity it is. How sad when pregnant women become so irritated and so frustrated. And I know of one case where the husband said, You go back to your family until you learn how to behave.

It is very sad. Where she becomes so unmanageable, where a pregnant woman has such strange ways, desiring all sorts of weird food. Remember, the way you behave is like an injection in your child.

It will grow up with that spirit. Another mother might be drinking alcohol. And that child has the influence of the alcohol and it grows up.

It's disobedient. It has defects. It got it from the mother.

Maybe the father uses drugs. How will children grow up if the father is a drug user? Look at how young people are in this world. They are influenced.

And if you as a parent, as a mother, while expecting the child, you now realize you've done those sinful things. Repent now. Confess that sin, that that curse would be removed.

His first words were those of the prophet saying, Repent. And he explains why. He says, Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Repentance. Repentance means a thorough conversion. So a person changed in such a way that his direction has changed 180 degrees.

Not a slight shift, but a completely different angle. Turn around. Change your mind completely.

Perfectly. Tells you to do it. Don't pray.

Oh God, may that miracle happen. You can do so if you like. But his commandment to you is repent.

Have remorse for your sin. Humble yourself because of your sin. Let there be such remorse that you can cry out to God for forgiveness.

So for 400 years, no prophet until the arrival of John. We don't know exactly where he was. So maybe God hid him.

Maybe he was completely protected and was not influenced by the bad behavior of other children. And grew up in the things of God. In the grace of God.

None of us know exactly where he was, but God hid him, protected him. Until his time arrived. God's time.

When he told people, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Now, you might say he was making a grave error because the kingdom never arrived. It hasn't even arrived now.

The kingdom of heaven means the area where God is ruler. And you're speaking, John was speaking about the arrival of Jesus. If you accept Jesus, there is the kingdom of heaven.

John was preparing the way for Jesus. We don't have time to go into all these things, but on one occasion where Jesus came to John to be baptized. John spoke marvelous things about Jesus.

And all of Jerusalem came out to hear John, not just from these tiny villages, but from the city. They came and asked him, are you the promised Messiah? He said, I am not. Are you the one who is the savior? Or are you Elijah who has come back? He said, I am not.

Then they said, well, tell us who you are. He said, I am just the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. It was God speaking.

He never claimed divinity. It was God, though, speaking through him. He becoming the voice of God.

He was saying, repent. It was because Jesus was attacked. He was preparing the way for Jesus.

When Jesus came close to him in the wilderness, John said, no, never. I cannot baptize you. I need to be baptized by you.

Never has there been a man who spoke like he did. He said, I'm not even worthy to tie the shoelaces of this man. That was the work of a slave.

And this giant, heavenly hero, he says, I'm smaller than a slave. Not a trace of pride in his life. Not a trace of self-consciousness.

He's filled with the spirit of God. If God works through you, there shouldn't be a trace of pride. Even if thousands get saved, woe to you if you allow the slightest bit of pride.

It is utter foolishness. In saying, I'm not worthy to untie his shoelaces, he was saying, I'm not even worthy of being a slave of his. This is true greatness.

Not the scent of pride like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they came out of that furnace. There wasn't even the scent of smoke on them. And when they asked him, are you the Messiah? Are you, in other words, Jesus? He said no.

They asked him, who is he then? And he said, I'm just the voice of the one crying in the wilderness. How wonderful if you'd bring up children like this instead of children who are like the scum of the earth. He said, prepare the way for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

It's close by. Now I hear that there's somebody trying to arrange that I meet with an important rabbi. And it's interesting.

This rabbi claims that the end is nigh and that we need to repent. Now repentance means a 180 degree turnaround. If you're facing that direction, let your back be faced to it now.

Now we hear what John started with. John was indeed a prophet of prophets. Saying, repent.

Jesus also, his first words, repent. You see, that is a command for Jesus has now come. Don't say, well, I'm waiting till I get the feel, until I want to.

No, this is a command. Jesus has come. The kingdom has come.

Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his path straight. We pray and we sometimes sing, Lord, come down.

How will the Lord come down if we haven't prepared his way? If you had ears to hear, you would hear the Lord saying to you, how can I come down because you have not prepared a way for me? If you have obstacles in your life, how can you pray and expect God to answer when you say, Lord, come down in power? The Lord says, repent. Repentance means a change of mind. It is a turnaround.

Now, when we were in Armenia, they drove us around in a massive car, an American car, where to climb up steps to get the Americans now to build big things. Even if you own a Cadillac, there are certain places that a Cadillac can't drive to, because like in Armenia, we saw there were many places without any roads, even with the best of cars, there's no road to travel on. So if you'd have an ear to hear, you'd hear God saying, answering you if you say, oh God, come down and work in my family, work in my children.

And he'd tell you, there is no way for me to do it. You've blocked the road. Work in my family, work in my husband, work in my husband.

But the Lord might be answering you. There is no way. Your sins have blocked my path to you.

That is the greatest message that has ever been preached and will ever be preached on earth. Prepare the way for God. We're living in an evil time.

We can expect anything, any day. The end may be very close by, but if we don't prepare the way for him, nothing will happen. Things will just go from bad to worse.

Things must be prepared. Get things right, sorted out. Pray and ask the Lord to show you if there are things that are still not right in your life, that that would be put right.

I remember when I was preaching, when we were praying for the Lord to come in revival in Mapumulo, I was staying there with the Cope family. I preached on this text and after the service, this, um, the father of the family disappeared. I didn't see him.

Hours went by. When he then arrived, I said, now tell me, where have you been? He said, I traveled to Mpofana, to a certain area there that is known near Tugela Ferry. I asked him what he did there.

He said, you know, I've been praying for that brother there for years, but hearing this word in the sermon today, I was so convicted. God told me to go and get right with him, to go and make an apology that needed to be made with my brother. He forgot that he was lost and damned and doomed forever.

He just saw one thing. I have sinned in the past against my brother and I didn't go and make it right. So, this old man went to his brother.

He traveled quite a distance to get there. And he said, brother, I have sinned. I need to apologize to you.

I need to make, I need to get right. I've heard a sermon. I was convicted by God.

I apologize. I said, I want to make the service short. And the time has passed.

It's actually not my watch. I think it's my son-in-law's watch. My watch, the battery seems to be flat.

So, he gave me his watch. So, I've got to close, draw close to the end. You watch.

You pray and say, Lord, what is it? What obstacle is there for your spirit in my life? We read in Matthew 3. The first point I've spoken about. The second point I'd want to speak about. The garment that John wore of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist.

What has that got to do with us? The clothing he wore. If we'd only have eyes to hear, Christians, we'd be cured for the rest of our life concerning clothing that we wear. John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim's Progress.

John Bunyan said, we don't need clothing to see the heart of it. God doesn't need clothing. He doesn't look like at the outside.

God doesn't need clothing to see the heart. But we human beings, we need the clothing that reveals the hearts of men and women. It's not difficult.

If you look at a woman to see whether she's moral or immoral. It's easy. Clothing does reveal the inside of a person.

I remember years back, two girls walking with skirts that seemed to drag in the dust. They were so long. Some said, well, we don't want to be Christians.

Just look at them. And it caused the name of the Lord to be blessed. It doesn't mean that you should dress in an ugly fashion.

Dress nicely, but appropriately. If you're a wife, dress like that. If you're a granny or if you're a child, be appropriate.

I once told the story of where I grew up at Mbalana. We were all born at home, old fashioned. My brother said, we've seen something amazing.

We had overseas people visiting us. Some big. Some thin.

Now, our father had a certain seat where he always sits. The ladies entered. One lady who was rather large.

Was sat in this armchair of our father's. Now, the dress lifted and she sat with her arm. With her legs spread out like a man does.

It was spread out like a man. My father went and sat over there on the other side. It's sad when people expose their bodies.

That is really not modest. It should not be immodest because, or it shouldn't be like that. But rather that we remember we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The thrice holy God. If you're a girl, sit like a girl. If you're a woman, then sit like a woman.

It's not attractive to look at legs. Exposed. In another country or another area.

In another country where there is a certain work, ministry where there are sisters, as they call them. They have their particular type of bonnet. And their nun clothing.

And they had a portrait, a picture of that vision of Nebuchadnezzar, of the different parts of him going down to the feet. And they drew a picture of that man. We've got to forgive them.

Brothers and sisters, they live a pure life. They've never seen a naked man. But when I looked at it, I said, oh, these poor sisters.

Those two legs were like the legs of a woman. Now, excuse me. Close your eyes.

I'm in Africa now and I speak like an African. Umu Sway. If you dig in an ant heap of white ants, you'll find the queen.

That is the queen and she is protected, covered. And she's fought like this. Small head, the end of her head and she's white.

And it went like this, like this, like this, like this, like that. And I said, oh, pardon these dear people. They've never seen a naked man, the legs of a naked man.

Those are the legs of a woman and you should see to it that you don't show them to every Dick, Tom and Harry. In 1954, around about 1955, I remember a certain girl from Scotland who came. She got saved in the revival of the Hebrides.

She was to take a certain service and speak in a service and I went and I thought, let me go and hear what this girl has to say. She walked in, her chair which she sat in. She was a picture of modesty.

She sat down in such a way of modesty, covering, her knees covered. As a perfect example for any married woman or unmarried in this world. And when she started preaching, I listened.

And I gave heed to what that person said. Namuzwa. Hear John.

We hear what you say. And then God tells us about his clothing, but why should it even be mentioned for God sees the heart? And young ladies, married or unmarried, please behave like a pure woman. Not like an immoral person.

You're not a man, you're a woman. And there should be a difference between a man and a woman. Not like today, we are becoming more and more one.

Like in Ireland, they passed a law now that homosexuality is legal. And here in South Africa, they busy with it right now. But there should be a difference between a man and a woman.

Although it's difficult nowadays. I've told you when I was in Switzerland, going up the mountain. It was with one of those Swiss trains.

When we got to the station, here was a man taller than I was, walking with a handbag over his arm in a very feminine way. Walking with high heels. He had red lipstick on.

He had earrings of a woman. I could see immediately, this was a homosexual. Like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Your clothing does depict who you are. Whether you're a school child, whether you're a teen, whether you're an adult, whether you're a granny, an older person, remember, you are the temple of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And you impress no real man.

He must be an immoral man to look at the sight of such a thing. If you are just craving for marriage, you just can't control this desire, rather come and ask for prayer that you get a married marriage partner. Things are being ruined in this world.

And this man now who was walking, walking along with this handbag, speaking with a high-pitched voice, he had a dress on, a skirt. You men don't try and imitate the way women dress. That is an abomination.

And you women don't try and imitate men either. I'm not telling you what to wear. I'm just telling you the plain truth.

You're a woman and behave like a woman. And there must be a difference between you and a man. That's what the Bible teaches.

That's the voice we hear from heaven, which is God's voice. God's voice. May God help us, for this is the voice crying out in the wilderness, our homes, our cities have become a wilderness and these days two ladies came to me, wives, said we come across an experience.

We walked into Woolworths to buy to shop and when we wanted to shop there were some ladies that looked at them. Now they were well dressed, these wives, like a wife should be. The two people in the shop spoke in Zulu, not knowing that the two wives understood Zulu.

They said these people can't be from our area, they must come from another country. They said they definitely not from our city, they must be from afar off. And then the two wives said Lord here is an opportunity to witness to them.

One said greetings in Zulu. They were flabbergasted. Then they said where are you from? We're saying you're from another country.

Maybe they were speaking German to each other because they realised they're not speaking Afrikaans or English or Glossa or any South African language. The shop assistant said we love the way that you are dressed. I could mention more people.

One white man with his wife and children went to a certain firm. The next time when they got there the manager said not bad when you left. We all spoke about your wife and your children, the way they were dressed, those young girls.

How wonderful, how marvellous it is. A white man whom you can't reach with your words, but you can reach him with your deeds, you can reach him with your dress. And that's what you women should be like.



I can only say your God is not my God. I can only say your God is not my The whole world, so to say, came to listen to what he said. And he didn't speak the way I speak.

You think the words I use incite you brood of vipers. You confess your sin, but you don't stop sinning, bring forth fruit of repentance. And you know how he died.

Not because of Muslims, but because of Herod, his wife. Herod was an immoral man, and his brother's wife was immoral as well, and he took his own brothers and sinned with his own brother's wife. And on the baptism, God doesn't allow that.

That voice in the wilderness, in that wilderness in which Herod lived, God doesn't agree. And you know that he was beheaded. Young people and old, I end now.

Listen, time is short. The return of the Lord is near. Shouldn't we live accordingly? Maybe he'll come in a day we don't expect it, and we'll regret that he's found us in such a way.

And what if your future should be in eternal condemnation? On the day of judgment, don't say Elo never told us the way we should live, the way we should believe, the way we should clothe ourselves. It shouldn't even be a need for me to mention this. If the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, unless you've got the wrong spirit, the Holy Spirit is in you, he'll speak to you.

Close your eyes, it's enough. Let's bow and pray. Lord Jesus, we've heard of John, who was the voice in the wilderness.

And today, Lord, the whole world is a wilderness. All the nations are a wilderness. Be gracious to us, so that you'll be able to speak through us to the whole world, that your name would be glorified.

Amen. Amen.

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