

True Preparation for Christmas

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon calls for true spiritual preparation for Christmas through repentance and experiencing the goodness of the Lord.

Duration: 1:08:25

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-2, Matthew 3:11, Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:3-7, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Spiritual Preparation", "Christian Witness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the testimony of John the Baptist and the importance of being transparent and confident in our faith. He emphasizes the need for believers to know and understand their calling from God and to be certain about what the Lord wants from them. The speaker also draws a parallel between the approaching Christmas season and the parable of the Ten Virgins, highlighting the importance of being prepared and filled with the Holy Spirit. He concludes by referencing 1 Peter 3:15, which encourages believers to sanctify the Lord in their hearts and be ready to give a defense for their faith with meekness and fear.

Transcript

We are approaching Christmas time, it is the final week before Christmas. It's not that Jesus was born exactly on that day, however, we remember his birth. Thus, we want to remind each other about the birth of our Lord.

There is a text I would like to read now. As I read it, I thought, well, it is so deep, so profound, I cannot preach on all the points, I'll just highlight a few points. Let us read from the Gospel according to John, chapter 1, from verse 19.

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.

Then they said to him, who are you that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? John answered them saying, I baptize with water, but there stands one among you whom you do not know.

It is he who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me. I did not know him, but that he should be revealed to Israel. Therefore I came, baptizing with water.

Well, let's speak about this and see where we end. Our text begins with the subtitle saying, The testimony of John the Baptist. John gave his testimony in particular about Jesus.

But I don't think I'm going to get as far as that where he testifies about Jesus. But we'll just look at the very introduction to his testimony. John preached in the wilderness, and he preached about repentance.

Before Jesus and after Jesus, I don't think there was a man who preached about repentance like he did. And I agree with what the Lord Jesus says where he said, Of all those born of women, no one is as great as John. He preached with tremendous authority about repentance.

The whole world was shaken. In the cities, those in the rural areas, at home, on the farms. The very sophisticated, right down to those who were the nothings of the world.

From those in the towns to those in the rural areas. From businessmen to farmers. From the military through to the tax collectors.

All of them. All of them. They came all and sundry into the wilderness thronging to listen to this message from this man being baptized, confessing their sins.

But don't be confused, this was the baptism of John, of repentance. It wasn't yet the baptism of Jesus. The world was shaken.

The religious authorities and the council in Jerusalem held a meeting. But they agreed upon the point that they should send representatives to go and ask John exactly who he was. Is he the Christ? Is he the Messiah? Is he the Christ or the Messiah or one of the prophets? Just think what tremendous authority he was preaching with to cause such a reaction that the religious leaders thought he must be the Messiah or the Christ or the Messiah.

Or one of the prophets. Or they had said maybe he's Elijah. Remember Elijah had never seen death, instead God had raptured him with a fiery chariot taking him straight to heaven.

But it shows how shaken they were and how they were inquisitive to know and they sent priests and Levites, their top authorities as representatives to ask who are you and whose authority are you preaching. It's not that they were mistaken in doing that. After all they were the religious leaders of the Jews in Israel.

Just think of the stirring, the shaking, the magnetic force that drew people and throngs from everywhere. Into the wilderness to listen to this great man and what he was saying. The word says from being in his mother's womb he was already filled with the spirit.

And even though he had the opportunity to grab some limelight he just gave his honest testimony when they asked are you the Christ or the Messiah or one of the prophets he said no I am just one who is a voice. Are you the prophet or Elijah he answered no. He said I'm simply, I'm just the voice of one

preaching.

He doesn't say I'm the person he says I am the voice, just the voice. In this itself we behold a wondrous mystery for it wasn't John's voice it was the voice of him, it was the voice of God himself speaking through John. And that is no small thing it is highly exalted.

He was the voice of God. God was preaching, God was speaking there in the wilderness. What makes me marvel is that we find not a trace of pride or haughtiness.

We find no trace of pride or haughtiness. Just think of the pressure placed on you if you were asked these questions are you the Messiah, are you the Christ, are you the prophet but for him he simply answered no, no, no I'm not all those things. Not that he was unaware of who he was he said I'm the voice of him in the wilderness.

Yes he was conscious of the greatness of that which he was doing but he didn't have a sense of or a trace of pride about him while he was doing this ministry. Now this audience that thronged about him now were making demands, placing pressure upon him and they felt they had the right, they wanted to know who are you. Now this audience that thronged about him now were making demands, placing pressure upon him and they felt they had the right, they wanted to know who are you.

If we have somebody standing up in our midst and preaching we too would want to find out who the person is, we would want to know where is he from, with whose authority is he preaching because as shepherds we need to know so that we can shepherd properly our sheep. We can't just close our eyes and let anybody just stand up and preach. We can't just close our eyes and let anybody just stand up and preach.

I question people as well if they come and want to preach in our services or ask who they are, where they're from and even what they would like to preach about. We ought to know otherwise we can have false prophets and erroneous messages bringing error among the sheep. There's a person with a very large church or denomination in Korea, he's visited by many visitors and in particular many Americans and they come to him and they say howdy so and so and they say on Sunday we want to preach in your church.

It's not that he has invited them, they want to preach in his church and it's their feeling or their wish to be behind his pulpit. It's not that he has invited them, they want to preach in his church and it's their feeling or their wish to be behind his pulpit. And one day a particular person came who put so much pressure on him and he was as tactful as an elephant.

Like we say an elephant in a china shop that's how tactful he was saying I must preach in your pulpit. Now the preacher the pastor felt well he's saying he must and what do I do he's placing so much pressure on me I said he said to himself all right I'll allow him to but I will be his interpreter. Now at that time English wasn't so well known in Korea and so that man that American got into the pulpit and he was so glad and he preached eloquently.

Not full of the Holy Spirit but full of himself. And so the pastor interpreted. He, the man preached, interpreted, interpreted and interpreted.

And then the pastor interpreted. Then suddenly the pastor who was the interpreter turned to this American visitor preacher and said you can stop with your sermon, you can stop because I have finished my

sermon. The interpreter had been preaching his own sermon.

Now they came and found John expecting him to speak about his greatness and something great achievements but they found him to be a lowly man, a normal person perhaps except for his diet and his clothing. It was not pride at work in John the Baptist when there's self-consciousness and a person's just thinking of his own self image and who he is it's never the Holy Spirit who's at work it's the devil himself. And also John's humility was not an artificial put on facade humility it was real.

John answered them their questions because they pressed him saying we need to go back and give a report as to who you are. And he's open and transparent and clear exactly who he is and who he is not and he said I've been sent by God. He did as we find is commanded in 1 Peter chapter 3 in verse 15.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. It says sanctify the Lord in your hearts. You too have that same attitude be ready and alert to be able to defend yourself.

Remember other people have the right to ask you as to the hope within you why you are a Christian and you should be able to honestly say and give an answer why you have this reason of hope. It's a pity that time doesn't allow for us to ask each and every one of you to come to the front and to give a defense in other words to give your testimony and say who you are spiritually why there is hope in you where you from what has been happening to you. Now these men did that they came to John being sent from the highest council in Jerusalem saying now tell us who you are give us your testimony.

He told them he was totally transparent with them he said exactly who he was they asked and he confessed he said what it was all about he said who he was. We need a similar confidence knowing and an assurance knowing what God has called us to being certain about what the Lord wants from us. I continue I said this is the last week approaching Christmas where we remember in particular the birth of Jesus Christ.

So Christmas is just outside the door just around the corner just a few days till the day. Now this matter also reminds us of the parable of the ten virgins. Five were wise five were foolish it was said it was announced the bridegroom cometh.

And they had been preparing to get ready for the bridegroom as a bride prepares herself for her bridegroom. Five were burning for the Lord their oil lamps were burning and full of oil the other five had their vessels empty and they all met the bridegroom. We are meeting with Christmas in that we are remembering the coming of Jesus into this world.

Now as we are preparing to meet Christmas how does Christmas find us? Are we like an empty tin with just a noise coming from inside because there is nothing inside nothing of the spirit we are just a noisy instrument. If we are in that condition of emptiness Christmas will pass us by just like this Christmas tree just with a few decorations and it is meaningless to us. You won't be blessed by the coming of the Son of Man into this world and the Son of God.

It will just pass you by you will not feel a thing you might as well have an earthly celebration a worldly thing. You are very coming to these services do you come to the meetings with your oil being full or do you just come because it is the done thing. Some people are like that they come to the service and they go out as empty as they came they are unchanged.

They will say it was a blessed service it was nice you ask them well what was said and the person has to scratch their head and they say well I don't remember. The seed of the word is sown. From Christmas to Christmas from Christmas to New Year you remain the same unchanged.

You might as well not come to the services. If you are planting a vegetable patch and sowing seed you want seedlings you will take tremendous care. You won't just throw out the carrot seed or cabbage seed any old how you will make sure that you create a vegetable bed and if the sun is too hot you will cut grass and put it on it to protect it from the burning sun.

In the same way as you prepare yourself to come to a service you need to really prepare yourself for what God is going to do. That your heart is ready that you say oh heart of mine be quiet pay attention totally now unreservedly to the message of the Lord you are preparing that seed bed you are turning over the clods you are making sure that the good seed will find fertile good soil. You are preparing yourself for what God is going to do.

It won't help to come into the service unprepared and out of sorts. You might as well not come because Satan sends his birds to come and eat the good seed so that you benefit nothing out of the service. And if Christmas is just your being anxious and buying presents and receiving presents from God.

Receiving presents and all those things and that's what Christmas is to you well Christmas will come and go without your being blessed. If this Christmas has got to be a Christmas with a difference you've got to prepare the ground and prepare for it. If you haven't repented then repent if you have repented continue with Jesus seeking him growing with him and being blessed and receiving the joys of the season.

In the same way as with the wise virgins preparing themselves for the coming of the Lord. In the same way as with the wise virgins preparing themselves for the bridegroom who was to come they were busy with keeping their oil full. In the same way as with the wise virgins preparing themselves for the coming of the Lord they were busy with keeping their oil full.

This text is also a preparation for this time of Christmas as you are preparing to meet it. If you don't prepare and get your heart ready and in true repentance stopping with the dealing with sin or are you just continuing with those wicked things that you've been doing. In the Zulu tradition you ask where you say we're going to eat Christmas and in response you say you enjoy Christmas by eating Christmas well.

If it's been a blessing to you then you say well I ate Christmas very well. May sound a strange thing but you find that so called strange thing in the Bible. In 1 Peter 2 verse 3. If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Taste Him, have you tasted His kindness, His mercy. In Psalm 34 verse 8. In German version verse 9. In verse 8 in English version. It says in Psalm 34 verse 8. Have you tasted His goodness, His loving kindness.

Taste it. Taste. You taste it and it tastes good.

In English version. I wonder how you will taste Christmas. Whether you'll just taste the cakes and the puddings and the special food that there is or whether you'll taste of His goodness, His compassions.

Otherwise it will just pass you by and you might as well not have had Christmas. And you won't have an idea what Christmas joy tastes like. And you'll never forget the taste.

Have you tasted and experienced the wonderful taste of the goodness and compassions of the Lord. Or does Christmas come and find you as you were last year. You were drunk last time and so too you're drunk this time.

Or on the same drugs and pills that you were on last time. Or like a girl who goes to the family planning clinic. She's not married.

It is nonsense. You can see by that that person's not even married. They're directly on the way to hell.

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They're directly on the way to hell. You can see by that that person's not even married. They're directly on the way to hell.

You can see by that that person's not even married. They're directly on the way to hell. Was he misinformed? Wasn't he told about the visitation that Elizabeth, his mother, had? Is he lying here in the statement to say, I did not know him? No, he's not lying.

He's speaking the truth. And actually, he's saying it in a spiritual way. He does say he comes after me, but before that, he was, he existed before that.

In other words, God was revealing to him this mystery that Jesus wasn't just a man, he was God. He is saying, he comes after me, but he always was, the I Am always was, before me. I am not worthy to untie his sandals, for he is so much greater than I am.

For I baptized with water, and he will baptize with fire, and with the Spirit. But now, as he suddenly comes to this realization, as he sees this man in the crowd, Jesus, and says, Behold, look at the one who is the Lamb slain for our sins. It was the revelation of God coming to him, making it real to him at that time.

He says, I did not know him. Indeed, it was the case. He didn't know him that this is God himself manifest in the flesh, the one who takes away the sin of the world.

It is true. He who came after him, John said, I did not know him, for I did not know him as the one who takes away the sin of the world. The day when he met with Jesus, great things were revealed to him about Jesus, that he says, I didn't know him.

How often have we accepted Jesus Christ? What has happened? We proclaim him. What has been revealed to us concerning him? You will accept Christ and confess Christ is in you, and you go and sin with a woman? You go and take some tablets? You go and smoke? You go and drink? Oh, you child of the devil. You say you know him.

He doesn't know you. And in actual fact, you don't know him either. If you knew him, whom you have accepted, you'd be a different person.

You wouldn't be that filthy sinner anymore. You'd be a sanctified soul. You wouldn't like it like a drunkard anymore, and a liar.

You'd look like a saint, and a sanctified soul. When you have accepted Jesus Christ, you will be a different person. When Jesus lied to you, when he told you, When Jesus asked John then to be baptized, John

protested, said, No, I cannot baptize you.

You should rather baptize me. But Jesus said, No, but that the law should be fulfilled. Because though Jesus was sinless, he was the Lamb of God carrying the sin of the world.

That's why he had to be baptized as a sinner. And the Gospel of John says, This is the testimony of Jesus Christ. This is John the Baptist's testimony.

I wish you could give us your testimony about Christ. As to what Jesus has done in you, what has he revealed in you? Have you a testimony? The testimony of Jesus? When you met with Jesus, what went through you? What happened to you? What changed? What revelation? What treasure? What taste was there? I don't know, friends, whether my preaching to you means anything or whether I could have just as well kept quiet. Does it mean anything to you? Does something happen in your life? You want to carry on living like this till you die? And then you still expect that I should bury you? May God grant that I won't be at your burial.

John the disciple says, This is the testimony of John the Baptist. What is your testimony? We've heard about John's life and how he was pressurized and closely questioned, and he humbled himself and then later on he says, I did not know him. Blessed is the man and the woman who can say, I didn't know him because of all that he's revealed to me.

I didn't know that he was so great, that he was so wonderful, that he was so marvelous. These spiritual truths that he's revealed to me, that have revolutionized my life, not just for a week, forever, till I die by his grace. Now we can see and understand his life, why he was so humble, why he was so lowly, why he was so pure, so clean.

He says, I'm not worthy to carry or to bind, tie his shoelaces. Because of his relationship with the one who was after him and yet he was before him. He experienced him as the eternal God, the holy God, the real one.

Those things for which Jesus stands. Great is the mystery of Jesus coming into this world. Maybe if you should experience that your own wife, your own mother, your own father will say, I didn't know my husband, I didn't know my wife, I don't know my child.

Like this, since Jesus has come into his or her heart. And that your relatives say, we didn't know our relative, we didn't know him as he is now. This is so astonishing, bewildering to us.

May God help that this service will not have been absolutely in vain, but that the Lord would bring it about that something truly happens to you. Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord Jesus, we've heard of the testimony of John the Baptist testifying of you.

And Lord, we've heard of how he was questioned and interrogated as to who he was and where he had come from. Lord, may our lives have a true and proper testimony. Amen.

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