

Matthew 3:1-6. John Preaches in the Wilderness.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

John the Baptist preached repentance and the coming of the Lord, pointing people to Jesus as the one who takes away the sins of the world.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:18, Acts 2:38, Colossians 1:13, Revelation 7:14

Topics: "Repentance", "Baptism"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer delves into the life and ministry of John the Baptist, highlighting his unique lifestyle in the wilderness, his call to repentance, and his role as a herald announcing the coming of the Lord. John emphasized that true repentance is a gift from God, involving a genuine change of heart and mind, not just external reform or sorrow for consequences. He baptized people in the Jordan River as a symbol of their need for purification, ultimately pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world through His blood.

Transcript

We hear nothing of John the Baptist during his youth, excepting that he was pious, and lived much in the deserts. When he was about thirty years old, he began to preach. He did not, however, go to the cities, but remained in the wilderness.

We may wonder how he found a congregation there. Probably his singular habits and his holy life had caused him to be much spoken of. He was clothed in a manner unlike other people; for he wore a sort of cloth made of coarse camel's hair, and a leather belt; and he ate locusts--little insects, about an inch long, which are fit to eat; he fed also on honey, which is abundant in the woods and among the rocks of Judea. Men went into the wilderness to see him, and these, bringing back a wonderful report of him, induced others to come, until at length crowds were collected to hear his sermons. God can easily draw people to hear his faithful ministers, if he wills. No doubt John was rejoiced to behold such multitudes of people, for he longed to point them all to the only Savior.

What was the subject of his first sermons? Repentance! What is repentance? Is it change of conduct only? No! people who have never repented, sometimes reform their lives. A person may see it to be his interest to lead a better life, and for that reason he may amend. Is it sorrow for sin? Sorrow is part of repentance, but there is a sorrow that is not repentance--sorrow for the consequences of sin is not repentance. Saul,

the king of Israel, was sorry when he heard he had lost his kingdom by his disobedience, but he was not sorry for his sin, only for his punishment. True repentance is a change of mind and heart. A man who really repents, feels grieved because he has offended God, and he longs to serve God better in time to come.

Can a person change his own heart? It is impossible; therefore we know that repentance must be the gift of God. Yet John told the people to repent, because he knew that God was willing to bestow repentance.

The chief object of John's ministry was to announce the coming of the Lord. This he did when he said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." No doubt he explained to the people the meaning of this declaration. We may understand its meaning by comparing it with other parts of Scripture. When Satan tempted our first parents to eat the forbidden fruit, he set up his own kingdom upon the earth; he became the god of this world. But God sent his Son to dethrone Satan, and establish his own kingdom. As soon as a sinner believes in Christ, he passes into the kingdom of heaven--or the kingdom of Christ. Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, speaking of the Father, says, "Who has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."--Col. 1:13.

John the Baptist was like a herald who proclaims the approach of a glorious monarch, or like a pioneer who prepares his way through a desert. He knew that unless men repented of their sins, they would not receive the Savior with gladness. He did not preach in vain. Many felt convicted of their sins, and anxious to be cleansed from their guilt and pollution; then they were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins.

But could the waters of Jordan cleanse their souls? The waters of all the rivers in the world could not wash out one spot from the soul! Why then were they baptized? It had long been the custom for the Jews to baptize heathen who had forsaken idols for the worship of the true God. But John baptized the Jews, as a testimony that they also needed purification. At length he pointed to Jesus and cried, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." It is the blood of that Lamb which cleanses from sin--and that blood alone. The believers in heaven are now clothed in pure and spotless garments. But was it baptism that made them white? Hear what the Scripture says, "These are those who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."--Rev. 7:14.

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