

Beginning

by Norman Meeten

Norman Meeten's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the beginnings of the gospel and the necessity of repentance in the believer's life.

Duration: 1:04:35

Scripture: Mark 1:15, Mark 12:30-31, Mark 16:15-20, Romans 14:17

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel and the need for repentance and belief in Jesus. He explains that the gospel is centered around Jesus and the four gospels in the Bible provide a comprehensive picture of his life and teachings. The preacher also highlights the significance of preparation and cleansing before receiving the gospel. He references the story of John the Baptist and his message of repentance. The sermon concludes with a mention of Mark's Gospel, which is described as simple and likely influenced by the apostle Peter.

Transcript

You all again, and a particular pleasure to see Gary, because I last, the last time I saw him he looked nearer death than life. In fact I wondered whether I was going to see him safely back to Ireland or not, but he's very much alive and recovered very quickly from his, um, brief expiry on Malta Airport. I did wonder whether he'd actually died or not on me, but he's here, praise God, and it's lovely to be with you all.

Looking forward to these days together with you, we've already been well padded out. No doubt we'll put on a few kilos before the end of the week, unless we exercise very, very great discipline. Um, but let's trust the Lord to feed our hearts.

That's why we come really. Um, it's not material things that we look for. One of the things that always challenges me when I'm in places overseas is the fact that they come for the Lord.

There isn't much else to come for. In the Cameroons we were in a half-built house on the first floor, sitting on long planks packed on stools. They were quite narrow planks, and I tell you when you've been sitting there a couple of hours you knew that they were narrow and hard, and very uncomfortable.

But they come, and they rejoice, and they love the Lord. Their faces just give them away. They're radiant.

And despite all the hardship and difficulty that they've gone through in the last twelve months, things that you and I probably would never have to face, they were triumphant. Hallelujah. There wasn't a groan, there wasn't a gripe, there wasn't a complaint, there wasn't a regret.

Just joy unspeakable. It's a gratitude to God for all his faithfulness and love to them, who's brought them through and caused them to triumph in the midst of adversity. We seem to accumulate so many problems, we have so many aches and pains and groans and complaints, when we have so much.

Let's go on. Now tonight I'd like you to turn with me into Mark's Gospel, chapter one, and I want to read the first fifteen verses. Mark's Gospel is a very simple gospel, and probably the informant behind it was Peter.

And Peter was a very down-to-earth, basic sort of man, a measurement by occupation, who learned most of his lessons by making huge mistakes. And how many of us haven't made mistakes? The important thing is, if we make mistakes, that we learn from our mistakes and don't go on making them, but discover the good which the Lord has in them for us. Peter learned his mistakes, and by the time he got down to writing his letters, he discovered some very real things in God.

Praise his name. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his path straight.

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And they went out unto him all the land of Judah, and there Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of skin about his lungs, and he did eat locusts and wild honey, and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to scoot down and unloose.

I indeed baptize you with water, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.

And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan, and was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered unto him.

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Amen. Now turn to the last chapter of Mark's gospel, and verse 15. Jesus said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them.

They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God, and preached everywhere the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

The opening words of this gospel say the beginning of the gospel. The last chapter, the last uttered words of Jesus, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. Amen.

Now that's our great commission, that's our great commitment, that's the whole purpose of gathering together, and being the people of God, trusting him to minister to us, we might go out and minister to others in the fullness of time. That we should preach the gospel. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The moment Jesus appeared on the public scene, he began to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God, and he said that we were to repent and believe the gospel. Now the gospel in one word is Jesus. That's the summary of the gospel, and the four gospels that we have recorded for us in this lovely book are simply portraits or biographies of Jesus, taken from four different angles, giving us a much more enlarged picture than we would have if we were only to have one gospel.

That's why it's good to read these lovely gospels comparatively or in parallel, one with the other. One will enrich the other and give you a larger impression of the Lord Jesus. Praise his name.

The beginning of the gospel. I believe the reason why many people never go on, and why many people collapse again and again in their spiritual pilgrimage, is because they never get the beginnings of the gospel really settled in their hearts. They don't clearly understand the beginning of the gospel.

I sometimes think in our own circles we tend to build castles in the air, and assume that people know what they don't know, that they are in what they are not in, and are trying to live a life up here when they haven't got it sorted out down here. And so they keep falling flat on their face again and again, and come to the point where they ask, is it real? Does it work? Can it work? Bless his name. So I thought on this first night we would look at some of the lovely truths related to the beginning of the gospel.

The first thing of course is, in one sense, not the beginning, because it began a long time before this, because if you read your bible properly, you discover that God preached the gospel to Abraham. If you study the character of Abraham, you'll find all the glorious truth of the gospel wrapped up in his biography. It's a wonderful exercise.

God preached the gospel unto Abraham. He preached it out there, the church was established in the wilderness. It meant there was a great anticipation, a great preparation.

When we open up this lovely gospel of Mark, we see that it's the fulfillment of prophetic utterance. God had been preparing the way before John, the great preparer of the way, came to earth. The two quotations which we have here in the beginning of Mark's gospel, one comes from Malachi chapter 3 verse 1, and the other one comes from Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3. And they are just two of many quotations that you will discover as you read through the gospel narrative, telling us that God had anticipated, prepared for this great moment in time when the reality of the gospel would come in the reach of every man and every woman.

They'd learned for it, they'd longed for it, they'd lived with the hope that one day it would all happen. And of course there's many people who still live in the terrible darkness and deception of believing that it hasn't happened, that Jesus hasn't come. And Paul refers to them in his second letter to the Corinthians by saying that when they even read the gospel, when they read the scriptures, they read it as one having a veil over their eyes and they do not see.

And there are many people, bloody, who read this book, who profess and call themselves Christians, who still have veils over their eyes and they do not see. They do not understand. Jesus said they hear, you hear, but you don't hear.

And therefore you don't understand. Glory be to God. May God open our eyes and cause us to see, and if it's to see afresh anew some of the great fundamental truths of the gospel, to come to our hearts with greater clarity and to find it out working in our lives in a greater reality.

Lots of people have tremendous revelations and claim great clarity, but the important thing, bloody, does it work out in reality? It's the thing that exercises my heart. You can have tremendous revelations, tremendous illumination, great visions from heaven, but unless there is a practical application and outworking those certain truths in daily living that revolutionise the lives of men and women, then what's the use of it all? We only confound our terrible position. Amy, I'm so glad that the prophets came, that they spoke, and there came a day when the great prophetic utterances of the gospel began to find their fulfilment.

And of course the first great prophecy that relates to Jesus you find right back in the third chapter of the book of Genesis, verse 15, where it says, the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent's head. There is the gospel. The book of Genesis is a magnificent exposition of the gospel.

It's all there, because it's all related to the beginning. As it was in the beginning. That's how John's gospel opened up.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God. John's first epistle opens up in the same way. In the beginning.

You know that very quotation in Matthew's gospel where Jesus is talking about the human relationships, and he said, it was not so in the beginning. You know many women were baptised in the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. That was the beginning.

That was the beginning of the gospel. Perhaps you don't believe that. But that's when the gospel really began.

All that is foretold in the gospel record finds its realistic beginning on the day of Pentecost. And then later on, when Cornelius and his household got baptised in the Holy Ghost, Peter said, what happened to them is what happened to us at the beginning. Now I want to ask you, beloved, what happened at the beginning? What happened at your beginning? That's the important thing.

I remember what happened at my beginning. Now there was a great prelude to it, but I know when it really began. When God spoke me out of death into life.

When he brought me out in into righteousness. When he brought me out of darkness into light. When he brought me out of the kingdom of Satan and transplanted me down into the kingdom of the son of his love.

That's when the real beginning took place. But prior to that, beloved, there was a great build-up. Blessed the Lord.

And that's why we get this lovely phrase twice here. In verse 2 it says, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. And then in verse 3, the voice of one crying in

the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.

Make his paths straight. Preparations. There is a great preparatory work of the Spirit of God.

Lots of people think that the first time they hear the gospel and respond to it, beloved, that's it. Not necessarily so. It can be so.

But even prior to that, beloved, in the life of most of us there's been a long preparation. There was a preparation for the coming of Jesus. Amen.

There's a preparation of the work of the Spirit in the life of every man or woman to bring them to Jesus. And if we overlook and neglect, beloved, the preparatory work of the Spirit of God in a person's life, then as I say, we're building castles in the air. We're building on sand.

In the realm of a natural, beloved, if you're going to build a house there has to be preparation. Does there not? You've got the story in the scriptures about the wise man who made preparation and the foolish man who failed to make the right preparation. You get also stories of Jesus about the man who went to war and made no preparation to guarantee the victory.

Or another man who planned to build a house and didn't make preparation. He didn't make estimation as to how much it was going to cost him to put the roof on and get it all fixed. You've only got to go to Italy or Sicily, beloved, and see many people in the natural who set out like that.

They started building. There are skeletons all over the place. Buildings that started but have never found completion because they didn't make the right preparations for one reason or another.

And that's true in the spiritual realm. Many people haven't made real preparation. Now John the Baptist, beloved, was the great preparer of the way.

Now he was the last of the great prophetic line. Jesus referred to him as the greatest of the prophets. I often say you wouldn't have estimated him as the greatest, but Jesus did.

He lived shorter life than any. He prophesied a shorter message than any, but he was the greatest. He was the last of the long line.

And of course within that line, beloved, there had come Moses who had brought the law, and that's a part of the prophetic work of God. Paul speaks of the law in the Galatian epistle in particular, and also in the Roman epistle, as being a schoolmaster that brings us to Christ. The law also was told shuts us up until Christ comes.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? You know that's bad psychology, but it's magnificent theology. You're not told to shut people up these days. You're not told to inhibit people these days.

You're not told, beloved, to discipline your children. He says, I knew a couple who went out to China. They're back in England now, but before they went out, beloved, one day they were out and their little girl, I related this to someone only today, came back to my mind.

It's years ago when they talked to me. They went out one day and they got a young child who was very difficult to handle, and one day she'd driven them almost to the brink of their resources. And the mother, I think it was, or the father, I'm not sure which, took it, ran behind the bush, down with its pants and

walloped its bottom.

They reported to the authorities, beloved, they had this person, that person, the other person on their back for months. Now they'd be the last people, beloved, to advocate brutality. But they did observe, beloved, the importance of the law to bring a sense of discipline and uprightness into the life of their family.

The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to class. You know, if you had gone to the preachings of, for instance, Charles Grandison Finney, or if you'd gone to the preachings of George Whitfield, or Jonathan Edwards, or even the Westwoods, you would have found that for weeks, beloved, they would preach the law. So you would go to a place and for a solid week he preached the law, until people came to a place where they were so aware of their inability to come anywhere near God's standard that they cried for mercy.

It's as if when Edwards preached for a very long time, it was just through ground-opening controversy and terror. They preached the law, they prepared the world. We preach love.

Amen. And so we should. But we never understand the love of God, beloved, until we understand the law of God.

For the culmination of the law is to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and love thy neighbor as thyself. This is the fulfillment of the whole law. It's not the destruction of the law.

Read the Roman Epistle of God. It's not the destruction of the law. It's not repudiating the law.

Amen. But it's imparting to a man or a woman the ability to live in the fullness of the law, that the law of God might be fulfilled in us. We'll read in Romans chapter 8, that magnificent chapter on life in the Spirit.

Glory to his name. Moses, beloved, was one of the great preparers of the world. He introduced the law, the prophets, one after the other, and then it comes to this magnificent man, John.

Glory to his name. He came preparing the way for Jesus. Many people have problems of getting through to Jesus.

Perhaps it's because the way hasn't been prepared. The road hasn't been cleared. The obstacles still have struck the way.

Listen, this is the first thing that John the Baptist says. It says in verse four, John did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judah and there of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

This is the great clarity work of the Spirit. That's why the first work of the Spirit, beloved, is to convince or convict a man or woman of sin, sin of righteousness, sin of judgment. And where there's no conviction of sin, there's another great man.

There's no genuine conversion, because there's no realization or understanding for a need of conversion, for a need of salvation, for a need of responding to the gospel. Amen. A person who has no sense of me, you cannot slide into the gospel, beloved.

You cannot slide into the kingdom of God. You have to understand what you need to be saved from. That's why when John came, he preached repentance.

We don't often hear repentance preached in our midst, we say. Repentance. Lots of people love to quote that scripture, love covers a multitude of sin.

Amen. But the greatest of the prophets, beloved, here is saying repent. Repent.

You'll find later down in the chapter, beloved, that Jesus also said repent and believe the gospel. Now Jesus' definition of repentance was greater than John's, we'll come to it in a little while. But John is dealing, beloved, with sins.

You know, lots of people excuse themselves. We take up that lovely verse that appears in the second chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, where it talks about the prince of the power of the air working in the children of disobedience, among whom we all had a manner of life in time past in the lust of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. And we use that as an excuse, beloved, for not being prepared to face up to our moral responsibility of acknowledging where we have sinned, as a sense in which you and I don't need the Holy Ghost to tell us where we've sinned, we know.

They knew. They knew that they'd broken God's law. And he said repent.

Repent. And unless that preparatory work is done, beloved, you won't come to Jesus. John was preparing the way, removing the stones, getting rid of the obstacles that stood between man and Christ.

He said repent. Now lots of people say, if I confess my sins, God is faithful and just to forgive me of my sins and will cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Have you ever looked at that scripture? I think it's in Matthew's Gospel.

If I can find it, sorry. Where he's talking about forgiveness, if anyone else, yes, yes, here we are. It's in chapter six, in the Sermon on the Mount.

It says, For if we forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Amen.

If you and I don't repent, beloved, and put those things right, which we know to be wrong in our life, and if it's an issue between you and God alone, it's something that you have to confess and repent to him. If it involves you and another person, it involves you confessing to God and to that other person. If it involves you and the church, beloved, you have to repent in your own heart and repent before the church.

You can't sweep sin under the carpet. You can't lightly dispense with it and say, oh, it's covered up, I've said sorry for it. Repentance was a very radical thing, but when they came out there into the wilderness, and you remember in Matthew's Gospel, beloved, he said that they would bring forth proofs meet unto repentance.

It wasn't just skimming over the surface, it wasn't an excusing of the situation, it wasn't just covering up that things had been done wrong and just passing them off as if they didn't matter. God was putting his finger on it. Repentance, beloved, is a very personal thing.

It can also be a thing that implicates another person or other persons. You can't pretend. And if you harbour, and if I harbour, if I harbour, beloved, something against another brother or another sister, or if I'm not willing to forgive this one or that one, then God says, I won't know the joy of forgiveness.

Not that God's ability to forgive, beloved, is conditioned by my behaviour, but my ability to receive and enter in to the reality of what it means to be forgiven, beloved, will be conditioned by the way that I behave. He says, repent. If you read all the Gospel preachers, beloved, you start with John, you go on to Jesus, you go on to Peter, you go on to Paul, beloved, they all begin by preaching, repent, repent, repent.

Beloved, are we harbouring anything in our hearts? Is there any issue? Now this is where the Spirit of God does have to come. No preacher, beloved, can point the finger. No other person can come to you and say this or that or the other.

Although the Scripture said, if thy brother hath aught against thee, first say to thy brother. To say, if you've got aught against him, if you know that someone's got something against you, you go to that person, have it out with them. Amen.

That's the radical nature of repentance. Beloved, in the past twelve months amongst our fellowship, not only talking about here, I don't know much about here because I'm not here very much yet, but over in the United Kingdom there have been divisions, there have been misunderstandings, there have been breakdowns in relationships, breakdowns in marriages, numerous. And this is one of the reasons, it must speak.

Because a breach of fellowship, beloved, a breach of relationships can only explain, beloved, by sin or patience. Now we can cast it all on fame. We say it's the devil's fault, the devil's having a heyday.

Of course he's having a heyday, beloved, but he can have a heyday when men and women give him the ground and the opportunity to have a heyday. When the devil came to Jesus he found no place in him. The reason why he has a heyday, beloved, is there must be some place that he's taking advantage of to reap havoc in the lives of individual men and women, in the lives of couples, in the lives of churches.

Amen. And we go on sort of smoothing it over and stroking the feathers and molly-calling it all, beloved, and calling it something other than sin. Many people, beloved, absolutely stuck because they've never faced up to sin, not just general sin, but sin in particular.

Amen. Something that's lodged, it may be near, may come from years ago. There was once a time in my life when I asked the Lord, I'd be reading a book by Corrie ten Boom called Defeated Enemies, and I was never aware of having dabbled in the things of darkness, in the things of the occult, never.

Now I read this book and I prayed after reading that book, and there's no point in reading a book, beloved, unless what you read, if you find it any sign, is not going to be applied onto your life and worked out in reality. So I prayed after reading that book. I said, Lord, show me if at any time in my life, deliberately, inadvertently, or ignorantly, I got involved.

And the Lord showed me immediately, as if it were yesterday, two occasions in my early childhood when I was involved in two situations, and they were so vivid I could have described to you every single detail of the room in which they had happened. And once God showed me that I could no longer blame the devil, beloved, I had to acknowledge it was sin. I'd done it, I'd been involved in it, I'd dabbled, not worthily, not deliberately, but ignorantly.

I'd been drawn into it. But once God showed it to me, beloved, I had to confess it. I had to repent of it.

I had to take my moral responsibility for it. You know, we can say the sins of the fathers were visited upon the children under the third and fourth generation. Yes, that's what the Scripture teaches.

But once God shows you, beloved, you can no longer blame your mother or your father or your grandfather or great-grandfather. We can use these sort of Scriptures to excuse ourselves, instead of being prepared to face up to the personal responsibility as a moral creature, beloved, for our own sin. And that's what the Scripture says ultimately we will have to do.

Your father won't be able to answer for you, beloved. Your elders won't be able to answer for you in heaven. No one else will be able to answer, beloved.

We'll all stand before the judgment seat alone. Glory be to God. I want to ask you, beloved, at the beginning of this conference, are you prepared to expose yourself to the Lord and say, Lord, reveal to me, speak to me, convict me, show me, show me anything in my life that has given occasion to the enemy, either to prostrate your work in me or make my life a hindrance in the work of the lives of other people or in the church at large? Is there anything that I am harboring, known or unknown, anything that I have not dealt with, I have not come to you with and allowed you to deal with? John said repentance.

Now when Jesus later on talks about repentance, you can see it, we won't get there tonight probably, when you see later on in verse 15 it says, and saying the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye, I believe the gospel. Jesus was speaking of repentance in a much greater, greater, a much deeper way.

John was dealing specifically with sin, amen, and he was being very specific. Sin. Paul deals with this subject in the Roman Epistle, beloved, he starts with sins and then he goes on to sin, and when Jesus comes to it, whether he's dealing with sin, when he says repent, he says, repent of being you.

A much more radical thing. But if the present hasn't taken place, beloved, you'll never come to terms with the reality of you. Amen.

So we start with sins. Glory be to God. God doesn't condemn us because we've committed sins, we'll condemn, beloved, because we reject the solution that he provides for us in the person of his Son.

Glory be to his Son. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. He preached a baptism of repentance.

That's how he's baptised, beloved, different from the baptism of the Lord Jesus. Paul makes this very clear in the 19th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, when he came to Ephesus, and he asked them under what baptism, in verse 3 he says, in chapter 19 of Acts, verse 3, and he said, under what then will ye baptise? And they said, under John's baptism. Then said Paul, John's early baptise was a baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him.

That is on Jesus Christ. Paul made it quite clear, beloved, that the baptism of John was quite different from the baptism of Jesus, whether you take the truth of water baptism or baptism in the Holy Ghost, and those who are married in Christ Jesus, they're not two separate things at once. Glory to his name.

But John begins, beloved, with sins. Repent for the remission of sins. And they came from all Judea and Jerusalem.

They all were baptised in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. They wanted to make a clear breath. Isn't it a wonderful thing, beloved? I'll tell you, forgiveness of sins is the most wonderful thing.

Someone was saying this to me, saying to this at tea time, when she first heard the gospel and realised that she could have her sins forgiven and completely washed away, blotted out, as far as the east is from the west, to be remembered by God no more. She said that was absolute joy in her heart. She'd never heard the likes in her life before.

She never believed that she could be sure that her sins were forgiven. They had to go on and on and on. I want to tell you in the name of Jesus, beloved, every single sin that you've ever committed can be forgiven.

Now, you will never be able to recall all the sins that you have committed. There are sins of commission, there are sins of omission. There are sins that come into the realm of the conscious, and there are sins that belong to the realm of the unconscious.

And I want to exhort you tonight, beloved, don't start digging around, and start analysing yourself until you get into such bondage that you don't know how to get out of it. But open yourself up to the Lord and say, Lord, show me, if there's anything in me which is blotting me, and the ongoing work of your Spirit in me, if there's anything in me that's injuring another brother or another sister, any unresolved issue that I'm not being prepared to face up to, because I don't want to take the blame for it. Well, take the blame for it, beloved.

Anything in me that's causing me to be an atron in the church, that's reaping havoc in the great new Israel of God. Terrible thing to be in a camp. See, sin was very trivial, but sin never is trivial.

It's just a little bit of profit, a little bit of gold, a little bit of silver hidden under his tent, beloved, that ransacks the whole nation. And Joshua went pleading with God, God said, get up off of your knees and get shit out of the tent. In other words, deal with it.

Don't play with it, don't apologize for it, don't care about it, get it out. Amen. I wonder what we'd do if we had some of these Old Testament prophets amongst us tonight.

Amen. It's a wonderful thing, beloved, to know that your sins can be forgiven if we confess our sins. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all the unrighteousness.

Glory to his name. But the condition, beloved, if we confess. A little word.

It's not a comfortable subject and you probably won't want to invite me for the first evening of conference ever again. Amen. But if you don't get clear and clean, beloved, at the beginning, all the rest of the week will be useless.

The beginning of the gospel, beloved, is a gospel that has to be a preparation, there has to be, a toasting up of seeing why John preached in the way that he did. Let's see the second thing that he teaches. He's a remarkable man.

No wonder Jesus called him the greatest of the prophets, as John was clothed with camel's hair and with a girdle of sin about his loins and did eat locusts and wild honey. How would you like it? Hmm. Huh? But he presented a lifestyle which was a challenge for the whole materialistic disposition of the age and

generation in which he lived.

Gary's already lamented, beloved, the fact that the world is sweeping in. The standards have been done, the principles, beloved, have been compromised with. Qualities of morality, not rightness, are becoming variable rather than ultimate, see God.

Of course, because many women have lost sight of the ultimate, beloved, that they no longer have any standards. Anything goes. Still moving into the first epistle of John, see what he has to say.

His great apostle of love, praise God, reads in chapter two of his first letter, verse 15, says, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. All that is of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the world parteth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Love not the world. James has a little word about it, too, in chapter four of his letter, where he says, writing to the church of his day, he said, Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is endless? Whosoever will be a friend of the world is an enemy of God.

Strong words, aren't they? Do you expect them from James? Perhaps you didn't expect them from John. You can also hear them from the lips of Jesus in the context of his prayer in John chapter 17. In verse 15, he says, I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth.

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world, and for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Amen. Now John the Baptist, of course, is anticipating this great doctrine of sanctification, and here the word sanctification means to set apart exclusively for God.

Paul talks about it in reference to the young man, Timothy, when he talks about the vessels in the house. In chapter 2 of his second vessel, he says, There are vessels under one a sanctified set apart and meet for the master she's prepared unto every good work. The great kiss to the prophets, beloved, is setting a pattern of otherworldliness.

Amen. Separateness. We read it again in the second edition of the Corinthians, where Paul is talking about you and me being the temple of God.

In the sixth chapter of 2 Corinthians, Be not amicably yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion has light with darkness, and what concord has Christ with Delial, and what part as a believer with an infidel, and what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and they shall, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from among them, and be separate, saith the Lord, and catch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

That's the great fidelity of the work of the Lord God. If you and I are not prepared to be separated from the world, its standards, its ideas, its opinions, its philosophers, its ever-decreasing moral standards, beloved,

then we will have struck the curse of Jesus into our lives. John was speaking of historically, beloved, Jesus was on the way, glory to his name.

He was preparing the way, and really preparing the way for him to come, glory to his name, and live, beloved, within men and women, to transform them, and conform them to his own likeness and image. Amen. The lifestyle, beloved, which meant a rather normal fit to the pattern of the great declaration of the prophet.

You know, sometimes you can speak louder by actions than you can by words. It wasn't just what John said, it was what he was. Look at his lifestyle, beloved.

Let me read it to you again. He was clothed in camel's hair, with a girdle of skin about his loins, and he did eat locusts and wild honey. Some lifestyle.

You say aesthetic. You say, I'm not called to the aesthetic life. Well, you'd better change your mind.

Praise God. Now, God's not necessarily telling you to wear a camel hair shirt, and a belt of skin around your loins, and he's not particularly legislating as to what your diet should be. Locusts and wild honey, better than some.

Amen. He's talking about a lifestyle, beloved, of simplicity. Paul talks about, he says, there is a simplicity in Christ.

Amen. A simplicity. Many of our lives, beloved, have become cluttered, complicated.

Someone said to me in France last week, he believed that the greatest testimony to the world was a living church living in the reality of what the New Testament says. There's nothing more powerful than the testimony of an individual, accompanied people, who live a lifestyle that is consistent with the gospel of Christ. Paul talks about that, doesn't he, in the Philippian epistle in chapter one, where in verse 27 he says, let your conversation, that is your lifestyle or your citizenship, literally, be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.

And then he enlarges on that in chapter two, and some of you have seen this before, because years ago I preached this here, that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and a perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life. What a of a crooked and a perverse nation. He didn't say in the monastery, he didn't say in a Christian meeting or Christian conference, he didn't say in a nice secluded religious environment, he says in the midst of a crooked and a perverse nation.

You're to shine as lights in the world. He said you're to be the light of the world, you're to be the salt of the earth. He said, the salt is lost, it's said, or wherewith shall it be sorted? Henceforth put for nothing but to be cast out and trodden underfoot of men.

Let your light so shine before men that they may see, holding forth the word of life. What it is, your life is my life, an exposition of the word of God. John preached the life of an exposition of the simplicity of that life, that he lived in the anticipation that Christ was coming.

He was preparing the world, the way is blotful of it by sin, unrepentant sin. The way is blotful of it by lifestyle, a hindrance and an affront to him. And then in verse seven we see this lovely statement, and he preached saying, there cometh one mightier than I, the latter whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

Glory to his name. He pointed at one mightier than himself. There cometh one mightier than I. Jesus.

In John's gospel we read John the Baptist saying, I must decrease in order that he might increase. That wasn't just an expression that tipped off of a lip, I am not, I am not. He had no delusions, he had no delusions about himself.

The Spirit of God had worked for him. That which made him the greatest of all was because he was prepared to be the least. I often say the way up, beloved, is to go down.

Peter says it, James, but James says it. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and he will exalt you in due time. Amen.

The way in which Jesus will be exalted in your life and my life, beloved, as you and I are prepared to be nothing. God takes those which are not, for things that are, but no flesh should glory in his presence. John said, I'm not worthy, not even worthy to stoop down and unloose the latchet of his shoes.

Jesus went further than that, didn't he? In John chapter 13, when he didn't only unloose the latchet of their shoes, beloved, but he took them off and washed their feet and after it he said, I've set you an example, go and do thine likewise. Hallelujah. He's just reiterating, beloved, and restating more powerfully and wonderfully than John could ever have done, saying great glorious truths, looking for men and women, beloved, who are prepared to be of no reputation.

Jesus himself of no reputation. He took upon himself the form of a slave, was made in the likeness of man and being found in fashion as a man. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

And preceding that statement he said, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God did capture a God of equality with God. Amen, but let it all go, glory to his name, in order that you and I might come into it all. I guess that's why Jesus says again and again, if you won't take up your cross and follow me, you can't be my disciple.

It's where he humbled himself and became obedient unto death. He says, there's one master that I, for lack of the proofs of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down, and I know she pointed from the blood of Jesus, to whom the fulfilment he was making preparation for would come into being. Glory to his name, and then immediately he says, I indeed have baptised you with water, but he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost.

Amen. That's the gospel, beloved. That's the gospel.

It only takes you about two minutes to get from verse one down to verse eight, beloved, and that's how long it should get you, it should take you and me to get from the place, beloved, where the Spirit of God begins to work on our life, we face up to the reality of it, and let the Holy Ghost come. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, beloved. We lay such store by water baptism, and so often, beloved, it's John's baptism, not Jesus' baptism.

So many people get baptised in water, beloved, they're only going through John's baptism. They've never understood the nature of Jesus' baptism. Water baptism, beloved, in the name of Jesus, into the nature of Jesus, can only be accomplished by the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

The two are waving scripture. Jesus didn't come primarily to baptise with water. John said, I came to do that.

He said, he will come and baptise you with the Holy Ghost. The point of water, beloved, is that it is a testimony, an invisible sign of a reality that's already taken place. You cannot divide them.

He shall baptise the Holy Ghost. Whose baptism do you want, John's or Jesus'? And then Jesus, prophetically, dramatically, revealed, beloved, what would happen in you and me when we are baptised in the Holy Ghost? Listen to it. He came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee to be baptised of John in Jordan.

And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens open and the spirit like a dove descending upon him. And there came a voice out of heaven saying, go out my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Amen.

Jesus was prophetically, dramatically, drama, beloved, dramatically displaying before all men what he was going to ultimately do at Calvary, followed by resurrection, exaltation and the coming of the Holy Ghost. Glory to his name. He died, he was buried, rose from the dead, heaven opened, beloved, and God said, he's my son.

Now, that's what happens when a man gets baptised in the Holy Ghost. He dies, he gets buried, rises from the dead and God says, you're my son. That's not accomplished by water, that's accomplished by the spirit.

But Jesus enacted it all in the water. That's why Jesus says, you're saved by baptism. Amen.

That text, beloved, is an enigma to most people. Jesus says, you're saved by baptism. Well, we know that we're not saved by water baptism.

No one gets saved by water baptism. All the water in the world, beloved, won't improve anyone. Our jails are full of people who've been baptised in water.

That's the problem, beloved, it's one of the great compromises that has taken place in Christ, beloved, and watered the truth down and moved it away from the biblical emphasis. It's not the water, it's what the Spirit of God does, glory to his name. The beginning of the gospel, that's when you enter into it.

All that John says prior to this point, beloved, is preposterous. He says, repent, confess your sins, change your lifestyle, look away from yourself unto him, the mightier one, then he will baptise you with the Holy Ghost. And this is what he will do.

He'll crucify you. He'll bury you. He'll raise you up.

He'll open heaven for you. He'll say, you're my son. Amen.

Shall God say to you tonight, beloved, exactly what he said to Jesus, this thou art my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Is he pleased, beloved, what he finds in you? Because you've allowed the Spirit

of God to do the great propriety working in your life. You believe, beloved, in God's pre-venient grace that's been activating in your life before you were conceived in your mother's womb.

God's been working under this glorious mercy at one end and the other to make you a son. That's the point of the whole point of the gospel, to beget sons. That's the point of preaching the gospel.

That's why he said go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, not to edify them, intellectually, as we've already been warned prophetically tonight, beloved, but to allow that work of God by the operation of the Holy Ghost to effect a miracle of regeneration in your being to make you a new creation, another person, a son of God. Oh, glorious things now. Is that what your water baptism meant for you, beloved? Or would Paul say to you tonight, what were you baptised into? Would you have to say John's baptism? If you hadn't gone beyond forgiveness of sins, repentance? There are many people in that position, beloved.

You see, this is why the baptism in the Spirit is not an option, an extra, it's not an appendage, it's not power for service, it's not this or that or the other. The baptism in the Spirit, beloved, is foundational to our understanding of the gospel. It comes right at the beginning.

Glorious things now. And of course the devil took him up into the wilderness and he only proved one thing, that he was the son of God, and that's what he'll do with you, beloved. If God can't take you up into the wilderness, beloved, if God can't take you out into the world and put you under pressure a little and prove that what you claim and what you say, what you believe is real, amen, you have to question whether you're really submitting yourself to the propriety work of the Spirit of God, or if there is some area there that God is still trying to resolve.

Why are so many people blocked? Why is there so much occasion, brother, for the enemy to take advantage? He's having a hay day. Glory be to God. God doesn't come to condemn us, beloved, He comes to provoke us and shut us away, whereby we can come into the reality of what it really means to be a son of God.

The fullness of time, this is what he says in verse 14, now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel. It takes on dimensions, as I've already said, that are greater than anything that John ever said, and those dimensions come into being, brother, when the Holy Ghost comes to you and me, He preaches the gospel of the Kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God? Look into the Roman epistle, chapter, where is it, chapter 14, verse 17, for the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

The Kingdom of God, righteousness, joy, peace in the Holy Ghost. He came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel.

Go over into the Galatian epistle, chapter 4. It's a wonderful book, beloved, you just have to keep turning over the pages here and there and it will yield up its truth. Amen. This is one of the things that convinces me, beloved, that the book is that utterly pliable, because you can almost turn anywhere and it keeps corroborating what it said elsewhere.

Wonderful. Here it is in verse 4 of chapter 4 of Galatians, for when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that

we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your heart.

That happens when you're baptized in the Holy Ghost. That's the great miracle of the Pentecost. It wasn't that they spoke in tongues, it wasn't that they got power for service.

The miracle of the Pentecost was that God came to live permanently in the hearts and lives of men and women for the first time in all of history. The beginning of gospel had come to a reality. That's what God intended right in the beginning.

That's what he intended, beloved, in England. That's why he invited Adam to eat of the tree of life and live forever. Had he done that, beloved, he would have received the Spirit, he would have received Christ.

Jesus does it in a different way, doesn't he? In John chapter 6, he drinks me. He said, if you won't, I have no life in you. Had they eaten of the tree of life, beloved, they would have had life in them.

They ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and forfeited what God wanted in the beginning. Here is God, beloved, coming back and reintroducing them into that which they could have known in the beginning. Glory to his name.

And he has to bring us back to the beginning. When the fullness of time was come, because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your heart, crying out, O Father, now that's the witness of the Spirit. And you haven't got it until you're baptized in the Spirit.

That's how we know we're sons of God, Romans 3. Gloriously to his name, when Jesus emerges, the kingdom of God is at hand. Not meat and drink, not these external things, not the materialism that gobbling men and women are supposed to be content with, locusts and wild honey. I was just going to give you some alternatives.

Someone reminded me of one of my favorite dishes in Bhutan, curried bones. And the bones were over a year old and they'd been hanging up outdoors. And they were brewed, beloved, in neat chili sauce and served with the coarsest rice that would take the lining off your gullet and your stomach.

Amen. Thought out whether you've got to identify with the people or not. Not my favorite dish, I must admit.

People said, what was it like to eat? I said, like a combination of blue fire and needle. It was a reasonable alternative to locusts, I should think. I was once in Nigeria in a meeting club, roaring around the meeting, grabbing the termites out of the sky and eating them there on the spot.

What they didn't eat there on the spot, they put in a little pot and took home. They said, just like baking an egg. Mrs. Parnell doesn't look as she'd like it as a substitute for a nice breakfast in the morning, which she won't have this year.

Unless her daughter cooks it for her. Amen. I sat at a table in front, beloved, and I informed the people that we ate more food in one meal than an Indian family would eat in a whole month.

And there were six people on our table. Not necessarily quantity, but quality. We moan, groan, complain.

I think the hard done by, we're all overfed, a lot of us, including me. Not meat and drink, but joy and peace and righteousness in the Holy Ghost. That's the kingdom of God, beloved.

And that would distill into your heart and into my heart when the Holy Ghost comes. The fullness of time has come, glory be said. Jesus has come, beloved, and died that we might live.

He has the earnestness of the Spirit in our hearts, declaring that we're sons. Amen. Lots of people don't know it, even in our own church, because we haven't come to terms with the great heritage work of God.

They've anticipated our birth, beloved, and have been seeking to work on it from before we were formed in our mother's womb. They haven't come to the terms, beloved, with the righteousness of God's demise under the law, or the realisation of our own utter inability ever to come anywhere near to attaining unto it, so that we've had to cry to him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Glory to his name.

Is it unconfessed sins? Is it compromised with the world, beloved, and very acceptable within our circle? Or is it our failure, beloved, to catch us tight of Him to close our eyes, because we're still preoccupied and obsessed with ourselves? He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, bringing you into death, burial, resurrection. We're going to look at that more fully tomorrow morning. Amen.

So that heaven can open, the Spirit of God can say to you and me, you're my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

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