

(John the Baptist Comes to Town) - Part 1

Preparatory Work

by Rolfe Barnard

The sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance and a broken heart in preparing for the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Duration: 18:23

Scripture: Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 3:8-11, Luke 3:10-14

Topics: "John The Baptist"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the need for a change in our approach to faith. He compares the current state of religious practices to the time of John the Baptist, where people were deeply convicted of their sins and sought repentance. The preacher highlights the importance of genuine repentance and a transformed attitude towards sin, Christ, oneself, and God. He warns that those who do not bear the fruits of repentance will face judgment and be cast into the fire. The sermon calls for a return to a true and sincere faith that is accompanied by the Spirit of God.

Transcript

The ministry of John the Baptist was the ministry of this leveling, of this making the crooked ways straight and the rough places smooth. And his ministry was to prepare the people for the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior from their sins in this life and the life to come. Now, my friends, in this way we see the pattern of God's work with men.

In this way you see how God prepares the people to receive his Son. God sent his forerunner, he sent his witness before the Lord, and even so today he sends the Holy Spirit, the forerunner, the witness before him. And the forerunners prophesied of him that he shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you.

He shall not speak of himself, and when he's come, he will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment to come. In the ministry of John the Baptist, therefore, we see a way being prepared for the Lord. And the Lord Jesus was not revealed until this work was done, and even so in this day, until the Holy Spirit of God has gone to work in a bulldozer operation, until he has brought low and filled up and straightened out crooked paths, until those changes are effectually wrought in one's life, and not until then will a sinner see the salvation of God.

And then John the Baptist said to the multitude who came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of bipers, you say, Preacher, I don't think people ought to use such language in the pulpit. It ought to be soft and easy. We ought not to offend people.

But old John had not learned how to soft-soap his congregation. All he knew to do was to call a spade a spade and a club a club, and that's just exactly what he did. He'd not all received all the education some of us have received, and he just thought the best way to do it was to tell the people the facts as they were.

So he said, O generation of bipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Why are you coming? And he said to them, Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. You do something to show that you're ready. You show evidence in your life that your ways have changed.

This, my friends, is a baptism unto repentance for the remission of sin. If you have truly repented, it will reflect itself in your conduct. And then he says, Don't begin to say unto yourself, We have Abraham thy father.

Don't say, We all right. We don't have to go through that. Why, we are messengers.

He said, Don't begin to tack such a label unto yourself. We all right. We are Americans.

You know all Americans belong to a Christian nation. We are all right. But John said, Listen, God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

That won't satisfy him. But somebody says, Well, we are Baptists. We believe Baptist doctrine.

All right, he said. Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. Bring forth some evidence that the crooked ways have been made straight, that the mountains have been brought low, that the valleys have been filled up, and that the rough places have been smoothed out.

Bring forth evidence that the operation of God has gone on in your life, whereby you have come to present yourself as a poor repentant sinner, to receive whatever God has for you. And then John says again, Begin not to say to yourself, We have Abraham thy father. For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

And now also the axe is laid to the root of the tree. It is already there. God's judgment is about to fall, and every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

Every soul that gives not forth the evidence of true repentance and a changed attitude toward sin, a changed attitude toward Christ, a changed attitude toward his own nature, and a changed attitude toward God, every one that brings not forth evidence of it shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, regardless of the title that he bears, regardless of the position that he holds, regardless of how much he can trace his bloodstream back to Abraham, unless he has brought forth proof worthy of repentance, he shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. Now that was preaching that was accompanied by the Spirit of God. And the people cried out, What shall we do then? Bless the Lord, in the New Testament times when they preached it got so rough, it got so hard, that the people were held to the issue so that they cried out in their sins, What shall we do? What shall we do? In Acts chapter 2 and verse 37 we find that some were cut and stabbed to the heart and cried out, Men and brethren, what shall we do? In Acts 16 and 30 the Philippian jailer cried out, What must I do? What must I do? My friends, this kind of religion that we have today where you have to get a hold of the man's arm and pull at him, the man behind him has got to push him and

finally drag him down and talk him into it and douse him under and that's all there is to it.

They didn't know anything like that in John's day. John stripped men of their veneer. He laid men out before the Lord God of heaven and when they found themselves faced with a holy God in the midst of their sin and despair, in spite of the fact that they claimed to be children of Israel, still they cried out, What must we do? John begins to tell them, he says, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none.

And he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Now John, you just can't ask us to do that. We'll have to give up some things that belong to us that are our rightful possessions.

That demand is too great. It struck at their selfishness. It struck at their covetousness.

It struck at their idolatry. John said, That's got to go. It's got to go.

Give evidence that you really mean business about this thing. And then up came the publicans. I can see them coming to him and saying, What do you want us to do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

See them look at one another. Why, that'll put us out of business. That'll just kill us all.

Why? Because the reason the publican was in business was in order to illegally extort money from the people. The Roman government would assign these Kaliwag fellows a certain amount of taxes to be collected from their district, and anything they could get over that, they pocketed for their own. So they came and said, Now, we want to get right with God.

What must we do? And he said, You must stop taking anything more than that which is appointed for you to take. But that's why we are publicans. Why, you mean we'll have to quit? He said, Yes, you'll have to quit.

And they said, That's too hard. He said, Already the axe is laid to the root of the tree, and every tree that bring it not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. And then up come the soldiers, and they say, What'll we do? We'd like to get in on this.

We'd like a little salvation. We'd like to be right with God. We'd like to have our sins forgiven.

What do you want us to do? He said to them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any false and be content with your wages. But that's why we're in the soldier business. John, do you not know you'll put us completely out of business? If we quit this and have to quit that and have to quit the other thing, it'll ruin us.

John said, You'll have to be ruined then. God's not going to accept you. He's not going to have anything to do with you.

There's no Lamb of God. There's no sacrifice of Calvary for that man who's going to keep on in his sin. But they say, We can't do that.

He says, All right. The axe is already laid at the root of the tree, and every tree that bring it not forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. And I hear one of the soldiers say, Fellas, we can't do like we've been doing now.

We cannot play the games we've been playing at the guardhouse. We're going to have to stop talking the way we've been talking. My friends, the mountains are being brought low.

They're being cut down. Some valleys are being filled up. Some crooked ways are being made straight.

Some rough places are being smoothed out. That is a necessary operation before the revealing of the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. How different it is in our day.

Some people walk down the aisle of what we call our churches, and they say, What will we do? And see, we say, Well, do you believe Jesus is the Son of God? And they say, Yes. Well, give me your hand, and you will accept him. And you say, All right.

And they say, All right. That's all you do. Come right on in.

We'll take you. And we tell them they're all right. My friends, old John the Baptist, he'd come back to this country to see what's going on.

He'd roll over in his grave. I can hear a soldier saying, We don't believe God requires that of any man. John says, All right.

We are Abraham's children. We believe that's enough. John says, That's all right.

He says, Go on. The ax is laid to the root of the tree. He said, Some mountains have got to be cut down.

Some hills have got to be brought low. Some valleys and deep places and depressions are going to have to be brought up to surface. All those crooked ways have got to be straightened.

All those rough places have got to be made smooth. And you say, Well, now, Preacher, that's the way John preached, but that's not the gospel for our day. But I ask you, when did it change? Do you mean my Lord would shut out the rich young ruler for one tiny defect and let the poor fellow go on to hell? And then he lowered his terms a little later.

No, sir. Somebody else lowered it, but my Lord didn't. And the Scriptures say all the people were in suspense.

They said they thought he was Jesus. I can hear them talking. Maybe he is the one.

We never heard anything like this before in our lives. What strange new doctrine is this? This is awful. He must be the Christ.

So John answered, saying unto them, I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloosen. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. My friends, this is just preparation.

But when he comes, he will really do a work in you. You will never get over it. He is going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

He is really going to do something. The bulldozer operation is going to take place, and the Lord is going to come. And on that level spot, he is going to rear their structure that will be incorruptible.

Storms may rage, and floods may come, and winds may blow, and tornadoes may strike, and all the world come crumbling down around it. But on that level spot, as he comes to do his work, he is going to build something that is going to last forever and ever. He is going to plant there a new life.

He is going to build there a new house. He is going to establish there a new dwelling place. And he himself shall come and live within.

So John the Baptist came to town, and he gathered a great group of people around him who brought forth proofs worthy of repentance. They had been baptized in the Jordan, confessing their sins. And then one day the Lord came along, and John said, Behold the Lamb of God.

Here he is, the one you have been waiting for. There is the one to take away your sin. Now the blessed Savior is revealed.

What took place? They left John to follow the Lord. Yes, sir, they were ready. Therefore you find John saying, He must increase, and I must decrease.

What did he mean by that? He meant that the following after Jesus increased as they left John, his preparatory work had been done. They had come repenting, confessing their sins, acknowledging their condition, and bringing forth proofs worthy of repentance. So when John said, There goes the Lord Jesus, they said, This is what we have been waiting for.

And salvation came to their house. This is the work of God that must take place. And if you will turn to Matthew chapter 13, you will discover the reason.

There in that chapter the record tells us of the sower who went forth to sow the seed and found four different kinds of soil. He found soil by the roadside. It was hard.

It had never been broken up. It had never been plowed under. There was no growth when the seed lit on that soil.

The birds of the air came and picked it up. It never had a chance. Some of the seed fell on rocky soil.

The rocks had not been cleared out. They were still there. So when the seed fell, they had struggled for growth but could not make it.

There was a superficial growth for a little while, but when the sun came up it withered because it had no root. Down underneath the external pressure there were rocks that had never been removed. The third type of soil was soil that was infested with thorns and thistles that had not been plowed under nor rooted out.

The seed still did not have a chance. It was choked out. But the soil in which the seed fell and produced and brought forth fruit unto everlasting life was soil that had felt the sharp edge of the plow, that had been cleansed of the rocks that had the thorns and the thistles and the briars taken out of it, and it was prepared to receive the seed.

Now, my friends, that is what the Scripture means when it says we have to repent or we will perish. The soil that received the seed and brought forth fruit unto everlasting life was soil that had experienced the preparation. My Lord never takes up habitation in any kind of a heart or soul until that heart has been plowed under and broken up.

He does not find any growth or root in any life that has not the stones cleared out. Jeremiah, the old prophet, says, Break up your fallow ground. Hosea says, So do yourself in righteousness, reap in mercy.

Break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord. Why, Hosea, you should not talk like that. You know that all you have to do is trip down the aisle and give the preacher a hand, believe and join the church.

Poor old Hosea, he never had caught up with modern times. Break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and rain righteousness upon you. You have plowed wickedness and have reaped iniquity.

You have eaten the fruit of lies but caused our distrust in thy way and the multitude of thy mighty men. It is time for you to break up the fallow ground. What is fallow ground? It is ground that is lain idle, infested with stumps.

It has got to be broken up. It has got to be prepared to receive the seed. Isaiah 40, chapter 6, verse 8, says, The same voice said, Cry, and he said, What shall I cry? Cry, O flesh and grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. Sure the people is like grass, all flesh is as grass, and it has to be withered. Will you hear me? My Lord Jesus Christ enters only a broken heart.

Psalms 34 and 18, The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. It seems as though David did not caught up with our new theology which says, No use of being sorry about your sins, no need of quitting your sins, no need of this repentance business. But he says that the Lord is near those of a broken heart, and he saves those that are contrite.

Psalms 51, verse 11, verse 17, says, For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Simply going up to the temple, putting in my offering and partaking of the ordinances will not satisfy the Lord. David said, If it would, I'd surely do that, but that'll not satisfy him.

Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices that are acceptable unto God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. So my friends, there must be a work of the Holy Spirit in your life and mine.

The mountains of our pride, of our boastfulness, and of our self-confidence must be brought low. The deep depressions of things that are hid from view, the filth of our mouths, the stories that puke forth from the venom of our souls, our slanderous tongues, our harsh sayings, the cesspools of our hearts must be filled up crooked ways. The little trimming of corners, the little falsifying of truth, the little deceit must be made straight.

The rough places must be made smooth. Isaiah 57, verse 15 reads, For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabited eternity, whose name is Holy. I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

The Lord says he's particular about where he lives, and he says he does not come in to take up his dwelling place except in a contrite and a humble heart. As the Lord's spirit ploughed your old wicked heart and brought you to the place of coming clean with him, may God speak to your heart.

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