

Three Radical Prophets - 3. John the Baptist

by Zac Poonen

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet of all because he changed lives radically and spoke only what God told him to say, and his message of repentance for the kingdom of heaven is near is a challenge to us today.

Duration: 57:39

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-3, John 3:30, Acts 1:3-8

Topics: "Prophets"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of setting our minds on heavenly things while still being responsible for earthly matters. He encourages believers to be forerunners for Jesus Christ in their local areas, reaching out to those who may not have access to the internet or other means of hearing the message. The speaker references John the Baptist's call for humility and repentance, urging listeners to fill up any depression or discouragement and to straighten out any crookedness in their lives. The sermon also highlights the central message of Jesus during his post-resurrection appearances, which was the coming of the kingdom of God and the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

So we come to the concluding Bible study on three radical prophets. You remember the first evening we saw Moses and yesterday we saw Elijah, the two greatest prophets in the Old Testament who had the privilege to stand with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and representing the law and the prophets the entire Old Testament. Now today I want to speak on the one whom Jesus called the greatest prophet of all and you know who that is, John the Baptist.

These were the three greatest prophets under the Old Covenant even though John the Baptist appears in the New Testament he was under the Old Covenant and Jesus declared him not only to be the greatest prophet up to the time of Christ from Adam but also the greatest man ever born of women and when Jesus gives a certificate like that, that's really something. He was greater than Job, greater than Abraham, greater than Moses, greater than Elijah and greater than every single great man of God in the Old Testament right up until Christ. It was only Christ who was above him in that entire history of man from Adam to Christ and Moses and Elijah did numerous miracles, amazing miracles, but the greatest prophet of all, John the Baptist, did no miracles at all.

He never did a single miracle. That teaches us that it's not the calling of a prophet to do miracles because the greatest prophet of all never did any miracles and many of the prophets in the Old Testament, there's

no record that Isaiah and Jeremiah ever did any miracles and they were fantastic prophets. Miracles is more the ministry of those who have that gift.

I want you to see in John's Gospel chapter 10 where it states that. It states very clearly that in John chapter 10 and verse 41, John the Baptist did no miracles. So there you have the record in Scripture.

People who had observed him all through his ministry, they saw one significant thing about this man. He never did a single miracle and that is what has taught me not to look for miracles as a sign of a man of God because Jesus also said that there are many who do many miracles in my name who will go to hell and here is a man who did no miracle who's not only going to heaven but who's the greatest man ever born of women. You know our human thinking, even the thinking of many Christians is so warped and crooked.

I tell you if you were to take a survey of all the hundreds of thousands of believers in India, I think most of them, if you ask them to write the name of a man of God, I think ninety-nine percent of them will write the name of somebody who does miracles and if they were living in John the Baptist's time, John the Baptist's name wouldn't even have occurred in their list of great men of God because he did no miracle. But Jesus had a completely different opinion which teaches us that sometimes our view can be totally different from Christ's. What did John the Baptist do that he became the greatest man born of women, the greatest prophet without doing a single miracle? He changed lives radically and that's what God is after.

The miracles are only to confirm his work. He's not interested. You know the number of people who were healed by Jesus finally shouted crucify him and there are many people who got miracles and who did miracles.

God was not happy with them. Do you know that the people who saw the greatest miracles and experienced the greatest miracles in the entire Bible were not the people in Jesus' lifetime. Jesus did miracles for three and a half years.

In the wilderness, two million people experience miracles every day for forty years. You know if you got bread dropping from heaven one day in your life, you'd never forget it. It's a miracle if God sent you bread from heaven, straight from heaven.

These people got it every day. One year, two years, forty years. How many of them? Not one or two.

Two million people, six hundred thousand men plus many women and children. And yet the Bible says in Hebrews chapter three, the last few verses, God was angry with all of them. Can God be angry with the people for whom he did the maximum number of miracles for forty years? I mean most churches would have got that man to come up and give their testimony.

Imagine a man getting up and saying, brothers and sisters, you know what I saw? Bread falling from heaven. Not one day, brothers and sisters, every day I tasted bread, the bread of angels. He would be the main speaker in many, many churches.

Do you think any of those churches would have a clue that God is angry with this man? And he also would say, do you know when we were thirsty, where we got water from? We hit a rock and we get water from there. He would be the main speaker at most conventions and conferences today because he can talk about actual miracles and he wouldn't be bluffing like some people bluff today about their miracles. He'd be telling the truth.

And he'd say, brothers and sisters, you know, we got bitten by the most poisonous snakes at all. We looked at a bronze serpent and we were healed immediately. And further, for forty years, I wore the same sandals.

They never wore out. And none of us got sick. For forty years.

Can you imagine? So we need to change our way of thinking. And John the Baptist helps us to change our way of thinking concerning whether a miracle identifies a man of God or not. And it's very important because Jesus called him the greatest prophet of all up to his time and the greatest man of all altogether.

So it's good to look at this man. Like we said about all the other two, about both of them, John the Baptist also was a man who was alone with God. All these prophets were people who spent a lot of time alone with God.

Moses up in the mountain, Elijah out of the forest. And in another country, Sidon. And John the Baptist in the jungles.

I don't know at what age he left his home and went into the jungles. We don't know anything about his history, just like we don't know anything about the history of Elijah. But I'm sure God trained him through a very hard, disciplined route.

A prophet may arise suddenly on the scene. But behind that, there's been years of discipline under the hand of God that's made him such that he doesn't get puffed up by his ministry. He recognizes his boundaries.

He speaks only what God tells him to say. He's not influenced by the opinions of people. He doesn't care for what people say about him, good or bad.

And he doesn't use an authority which God has not given him. And he's fearless. And kings and beggars are the same to him.

He's not partial to anybody. Behind all this character has been years of discipline and breaking and teaching him about the nature of God. This is how God raises a prophet.

Do you think India needs prophets? I believe that with all my heart. I asked the Lord once. I said, Lord, we've got 1.2 billion people in India.

Where are the prophets? Don't you love India? And the answer I got from the Lord was that he had called many young people to be prophets. But many of them fell by the wayside. They married the wrong person.

They went after money. They joined some Western organization. They were influenced by current theology.

They went off to a Bible school. Not a single prophet in the Bible came from a Bible school. Not even one.

They were all trained under the hand of God. And then I realized it's possible there are some young people sitting here. God may be calling you to be a prophet to this nation.

I have prayed for years. God is my witness that God will raise up apostles and prophets in India. You have heard so much.

I don't know because I can't call anybody. God has to call. But it's likely there could be at least one or two whom God may be calling here to be a prophet to this country.

But you have a very hard road to get there. Maybe like John the Baptist, you'll be hidden for many years. And during those years, you'll have to get to know God.

And I tell you this, if you're seeking for honor to be a prophet, forget it. You're not the person. You are disqualified immediately.

The only person who qualifies to be a prophet is the one who is not at all concerned about any honor. But he's burdened because the name of Jesus is dishonored in India. And that's what concerns him.

He doesn't want anybody to know his name or get any honor. He's burdened that the name of Jesus should be glorified. His prayer is, Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

That's his prayer. He's not bothered about his name. Only such a man will ever be a prophet.

John the Baptist was like that. He said he must increase and I must decrease. That's the mark of a true prophet.

He wants to become smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. He stands up preaching like John the Baptist only because he has to. Because God says, stand up there and say it.

But deep in his heart, he has no desire to be known, no desire for fame, no desire for honor, no desire to be accepted, no desire for title or position or degree or approval of anybody. It doesn't matter to him at all. That's the type of person, servant of God, that God wants in this land.

And I'm speaking to you, dear brothers and sisters. Some of you should be like that. India needs such people.

I'll tell you why. Because when in the last verse of Malachi, we read yesterday that God said, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, I will send Elijah the prophet. And when John the Baptist arose, people thought, hey, this is Elijah, because I'll tell you why.

Because in Luke chapter one, when his father, Zachariah, was met by the angel Gabriel, what Gabriel told him was in Luke chapter one, Zachariah, don't be afraid. Your prayer has been heard. Luke chapter one, verse 13.

Elizabeth, you'll bury your son and you'll give him a name John. And he will not drink any liquor. He'll be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And he will turn many back to Israel, back to the Lord. And listen to this, verse 17 of Luke one. He will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children.

This is a quotation from Malachi 4.6. That's exactly what the Gabriel told Zachariah. Your son is going to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. And so there were people who asked John the Baptist, are you Elijah? He said, no, I'm not.

He said, I'm just a voice in the wilderness. That's all I am. I'm nothing more than that.

What a man. Oh, Lord, make us like him. He only wanted to be known as a voice crying out in the wilderness.

It says in Luke chapter three and verse one, a voice crying in the wilderness. Verse four saying, make ready the way of the Lord. Make his path straight.

Whose voice is that? Not important. Who is that? Not important. Just a voice.

That is the type of man whom God calls to be a prophet. And Jesus said in Matthew chapter 11 concerning John the Baptist, he said, Jesus started talking to the crowd about John, Matthew chapter 11 in verse seven. He said, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Verse eight, no, such people are in king's palaces.

Did you go to see a prophet? Verse nine, you know, because whole crowds were going out to listen to John the Baptist. He said, I tell you, one who is more than a prophet. And among those born of women, that is from the time of Eve, from Cain onwards, the first man born of women and all human beings were born of women.

There has never arisen a man greater than John the Baptist. And yet we who are in the kingdom of heaven, the next line says, can rise higher than even him because we can have the Holy Spirit within us. That is John the Baptist had the Holy Spirit only upon him.

How many of you take that as a challenge? I say, Lord, I want to take it that I can rise to a greater height than even John the Baptist because you say so. According to your faith, be it unto you. Ninety nine point nine percent of Christians are way below John the Baptist because they don't have the faith.

They're not willing to make the sacrifice. But it's for you, brothers and sisters. This is God's word.

These are the words of Jesus. You, if you are willing to pay the price, it doesn't matter who you are. If you are willing to pay the price, if you have faith for it, you can rise to a life higher than John the Baptist.

If Jesus hadn't said it, I wouldn't dare to make such a statement because John the Baptist's life was so fantastically great. But because Jesus said it, I believe it. And I want to dare to believe it for myself.

Whether you believe it for yourself or not is up to you. I can't have faith for you. I can have only faith for myself.

But if you take it, it's got nothing to do with your being able or capable or smart or any such thing. It's got to do with whether you have faith. It's not according to your cleverness, be it unto you, according to your zeal, be it unto you.

It is according to your faith, be it unto you. Thank God for that. It's not according to your gift, not according to your background, intelligence, ability, knowledge of the Bible.

No, according to your faith. I trusted the Lord. I said, Lord, many years ago, I said, Lord, this is your word.

I said, well, I'm going to rise to a life greater than John the Baptist myself. I'm not better than you. I just believe what Jesus said.

You're welcome to believe too. And this man, Jesus further said about him in verse 14. This is why it's important for you to know verse 14.

Jesus looked at the Jews and said, if, there's a big if there, capital I-F, if you Jewish people will accept him, then he is Elijah. Elijah prophesied by Malachi in chapter 4. Tell me, did the Jewish people accept John the Baptist and his message? Yes or no? No. Then, then he's not the Elijah prophesied in Malachi 4. He could have been.

He said, if you accept it, he is. But when they didn't accept it, that means he's not. That means, like I said yesterday, there has to be another Elijah.

Before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And that is the church. As I said, it's not an individual like in Old Testament times.

Old Testament, it was one Isaiah, one Elijah, one Elisha, one John the Baptist. But now it is the body of Christ, the new man, the one new man. It's a body, a local church holding forth the message of John the Baptist.

That can be your local church. If you believe that the coming of the Lord is near, the great and dreadful day of the Lord is coming very near, then there must be a ministry like Elijah's, like John the Baptist's in your local church. Your local church must have that ministry.

That's why it's so important to study the ministry of Elijah and John the Baptist. I believe that with all my heart that the local church I'm connected with must have the ministry of Elijah in these last days, must be a forerunner for the second coming of Christ, just like John the Baptist was a forerunner for the first coming of Christ. And what is our message to be? Listen, if you want to be part of that Elijah ministry as a local church, your message is not to be, you can make money if you trust in Jesus.

That is a deception. That is the doctrine of Balaam. You got to stand against that.

The message of John the Baptist is the exact opposite of that. What is it? Matthew chapter 3. What was John the Baptist preaching? His preaching is summed up in one sentence, and that is a very pregnant sentence. That means a sentence full of content.

Matthew 3 verse 1. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. It hasn't yet come, but it is near. And when John the Baptist was imprisoned, as we read in Matthew chapter 4, we read in Matthew chapter 4 that John the Baptist was imprisoned, then Jesus continued to preach the same message, saying, Repent, verse 17 of Matthew 4. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

So, what is the message? Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near. Now let's think about it. Don't rush past that verse.

What did the Israelites have for 1500 years from the time of Moses? A kingdom of earth. All the blessings God promised them were earthly. There was not one heavenly blessing God promised Israel or even Abraham.

God never said to Abraham that even one of his children will go to heaven. Did you know that? Never. The children of Abraham don't go to heaven.

There's no promise like that. What God did promise Abraham was, I will give your children a certain portion of land in the center of the earth, which is at the present occupied by the Canaanites. Abraham, 400 years after you die, I will give them to your children and it will be theirs forever.

When they disobey me, I'll send them out of the land, punish them, but then I will bring them back. If they disobey me again, I'll send them out, but I'll bring them back, because I've given it to you and your children forever. When they disobeyed God in the time of Jeremiah, he sent them out of the land for 70 years.

That time it was because they didn't keep the Sabbaths, didn't obey God, they worshiped idols. And God said, I'll teach you fellows a lesson, you idol-worshipping Jews, Israelis, and do you know, if you read the history of Israel, after they came back from that Babylonian captivity for the last 2500 years, no Jewish person has worshipped idols. Isn't that amazing? If you read the book of Kings and Chronicles, they were worshipping idols all the time.

God cured them completely with one 70 year captivity. Then they disobeyed God and killed Jesus Christ. That was a terrible crime.

Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, which is only the horizontal part of sin. As a man, he forgave them, but the vertical, that they sinned against God by killing his son, God never forgave them that. They got released from the horizontal aspect of sin, the human aspect.

You know, if I slap a man, he can forgive me, but if I don't repent before God, God will still punish me, even though that man has forgiven me. Jesus forgave them, but God did not, because they did not repent. As human beings, we forgive people, even though they don't repent.

But God won't forgive a man if he doesn't repent. I'm ready to forgive every person who has harmed me, who does not repent. He doesn't have to repent.

I'm not God. But God will not forgive him, and God never forgave those Jews. He gave them 40 years to repent.

They did not repent. He scattered them all over the world for 2000 years, 1900 years. But then, according to the promise he gave Abraham 4000 years ago, he brought them back.

That's where they are in the land of Israel today. He keeps his word, but he's not promised heaven to any of them. It was earthly blessing.

I'll give you an earthly land. I'll make you very rich. Do you know that the Jews are some of the richest people in the whole world? The whole banking system of the world is controlled by Jewish people.

They are the richest people, as a people, and they are a very small percentage of the world's population, but they control the world. They control so much of the world's money. It's a blessing of God, not on Christians.

It's an old covenant blessing, because they are children of Abraham. He gave them brilliant minds. Some of the greatest scientists have been Jewish people.

And money, earthly things, and many, many promises he gave them in Deuteronomy 28. You'll never be in debt. You'll have plenty of money.

Your children, if you obey me, you won't have any miscarriages. Your wives won't have miscarriages. Your business will prosper.

It was all earthly, earthly, earthly. And that is what today's blind Christians have taken over as a prosperity gospel for themselves. They have gone back to the old covenant.

They are leading people away in the opposite direction from John the Baptist, who said, repent, the kingdom of heaven is coming. Here are preachers saying, no, we want the kingdom of earth. God says, you'll have it.

It's a great deception which is going on today with this prosperity gospel. And there's hardly a voice raised against it, because people say, oh, don't judge. The Bible says, don't judge.

We're not judging. We're exposing corruption and false teaching. Don't we have to do that? And then the other verse, people say, oh, don't speak against the Holy Spirit.

I'm not speaking against the Holy Spirit. I'm examining whether this is the Holy Spirit at all. Believe not every spirit, the Bible says.

So I'm not afraid, because I know God, and I know the Bible. And John the Baptist was not afraid. He was not afraid, whatever people told him.

You know, he said to them, don't say that you have got Abraham for your father, verse 9. He doesn't make a difference, he says, that Abraham was your ancestor. God's not happy with you like he was with Abraham. God can raise children to Abraham from these stones.

He doesn't need you. You know, when a preacher preaches like that, he's not going to be very popular. God wants a witness like John the Baptist in the last days to be a forerunner for the second coming of Christ, and that's your church.

You are an elder brother, your church is to be the last days forerunner for Jesus Christ in your area. He needs many such churches, because one church in one corner of India is not going to be a witness for the whole world. We thank God for the internet, we thank God for television in which we can have our programs, but still, it's a very small part of the world that we can reach.

We thank God for every possible means by which we can reach the message out to other parts of the world. But you in your locality, there are lots of people there who have no internet connection. Who's going to be a forerunner for them? You, in your local language.

And 80% or 90% of India don't watch the internet. They're not going to watch our programs on CFC. It's you, in your local languages, who are going to be a witness there, forerunner for the second coming of Christ.

That's your calling as a church. And that's why you need to study the ministry of John the Baptist. How he prepared people.

He was not interested in a name for himself. He kept on saying, I must decrease, he must increase. Make that your goal.

Be concerned about his name and not the name of your church. Don't seek a reputation before people that your church is a spiritual church. Forget it.

Say, Lord, I want your name to be hallowed. That's all. I'm not interested in other people thinking ours is a spiritual church or I'm a spiritual elder.

Not interested in that at all. It's those type of ambitions that corrupt the church. We need men of God who are only concerned about the name of Jesus being glorified.

That's all. And who are not interested and not bothered if everybody calls them false prophet, heretic, false teacher. Let them say that till doomsday.

One day they will realize the truth. But your calling in your church is to proclaim the name of Christ that it can be hallowed. A voice crying in the wilderness saying, repent.

Till now you have lived for earth. Now turn from that living for the earth to turn to the kingdom of heaven which is near. In those days, he said the kingdom of heaven is near.

After the day of Pentecost, we say the kingdom of heaven has come. Do you know that the kingdom of heaven came to earth on the day of Pentecost? When John the Baptist said it's near, he was not talking about 2000 years. He was talking about three and a half years.

That's all. When Jesus said, repent for the kingdom of God is near. He wasn't talking about 2000 years.

He was talking about just three and a half years. See in Mark's gospel chapter 9. Mark's gospel chapter 9 and verse 1. This is something more than John the Baptist preached. Jesus said to them, truly I say to you, some of you who are standing here will not die until you see the kingdom of God come in power.

Do you think any of them are living today? Not even one. But Jesus said, some of you standing right here in front of me right now, before you die, you'll see the kingdom of God come in power. And that word power tells me what the kingdom of God is.

Because Jesus said before he went up to heaven, you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. In the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 1, we read that what Jesus preached for the 40 days after his resurrection. Do you know that Jesus preached during those 40 days after his resurrection? Do you know what was his subject? It's written there.

He rose up from the dead. Verse 3, Acts 1, 3. He presented himself alive after his suffering. And he appeared to them, to his disciples over a period of 40 days.

And for 40 days he spoke only on one subject. The kingdom of God that's coming. It's coming.

It's coming. It's coming. It's coming every day.

One subject. 40 days. Bible study.

Kingdom of God is coming. Kingdom of God is coming. Kingdom of God is coming.

Then he said, you know what that means? John baptized you with water, verse 5, but you'll be baptized in the Holy Spirit. That's how the kingdom of God is going to come. And verse 8, then power will come upon you.

That is the fulfillment of what you read in Mark chapter 9, verse 1. Some of you standing here will not taste death till you see the kingdom of God come in power. That happened on the day of Pentecost. The kingdom of heaven.

On the day of Pentecost, the kingdom of heaven came to earth. Today we don't preach like John the Baptist saying the kingdom of God is near. We say the kingdom of God has come.

The kingdom of heaven has come. You can enter into it now. How do you enter into it? By being born again.

Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. When you are born again, you enter into God's kingdom. If you are really born again, and when you're really born, you can't be really born again without repentance.

The tragedy is today we have a whole lot of people who imagine that they are born again, who never radically turn from sin. That is why I have sometimes had to tell some people in CFC, brother, you're not born again. Sister, you're not born again, because I don't see any evidence of repentance in you.

When the Pharisees came to John the Baptist for baptism, he said, bring forth fruits in keeping with your repentance. Matthew 3,8. He said, I don't see any fruit of repentance in you.

I don't consider you as having repented at all. He wasn't like those elders who just wanted to increase their congregation and baptize everybody some Sunday to keep an unbroken record. Every Sunday in our church we have baptized some people.

Such churches will baptize a whole lot of people who are not born again. I'm not interested in any such unbroken record, and neither was John the Baptist. When some people came to him for baptism, he said, sorry, I don't see any evidence of repentance in you, and I'm not going to baptize you.

That's what I've told some people too. Go to some other church, they'll baptize you, not me. I don't see any evidence of repentance in you.

John the Baptist was like that. I tell you, if you want to be a church having the ministry of John the Baptist, you're not going to be very popular. You're going to be very unpopular.

Some people will think you're very hard. Some people will say, like they have said to us, Brother Zach, your standard is too high. You can say what you like.

It's not higher than Jesus' standard, is it? We just preach the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5,6 and 7. It looks high because everybody else is sitting in the kindergarten. But the first standard itself looks pretty tough.

That's the tragedy. So he said, I'm not going to baptize you. You think you can just come here and get dipped in the water and go around saying, John the Baptist baptized me? Get some honor from that? I'm sorry, I'm not going to give you that honor.

Repent and turn from your sin and don't say, we are connected to such and such a man of God, Abraham. God couldn't care less for what your connections. The axe has been laid, Matthew 3,10, to the root of the tree.

In the Old Testament, they only had scissors, not an axe. You know the difference between scissors and an axe? If your tree is bad, producing bad mangoes, you have a pair of scissors. Every time the bad mango comes, you snip it off.

And the tree looks pretty good because there's no bad fruit. I don't smoke. I don't gamble.

I don't dance. I don't go to the movies. It's all snip, snip, snip, snip, snip.

What about the root? Corrupt, selfish, proud, self-centered, just the same old tree. Only thing, we snip off things so that people don't see anything bad in us. This is life under the law.

The law gives us a pair of scissors to cut off things so that everybody thinks, hey, he's a good brother, I don't see any bad habits in him. Some people don't use the scissors carefully, so sometimes some of these bad fruits pop out. But Jesus did not come with a pair of scissors.

John the Baptist says He has come with an axe, and He's not going to snip off these fruits because He's not bothered about your reputation before men. He's going to deal with the root of the problem deep inside, lay the axe to the root and root out that tree and plant another tree, a tree which seeks the things of heaven more than the things of earth. I want to ask you, has the Lord done that in your life? If you are still seeking earthly things primarily, I want to say to you in Jesus' name, your repentance is not complete.

You have not turned around 180 degrees. The best definition of repentance is, you know, repentance is in our Indian languages, it's better. In Malayalam it's manasandram, in Tamil it's manantirambal, which means the turning of the mind.

In English it doesn't come out so clearly. What John the Baptist preaches was, turn your mind around, turn your mind around, change your attitude towards sin, change your attitude towards the world. That's the meaning of repentance.

Very clear in our Indian languages, but not so clear in English. In military terms it is about turn. Now you know, do you know the difference between right turn and about turn? Lot of difference.

And in the military they'll teach you that. If you turn only right when they say about turn, you'll never make that mistake again for the rest of your life. They'll teach you so thoroughly that you'll never do it again.

But God says about turn, and most Christians do a right turn. They like to look at God's kingdom. Once in a while look at the world as well.

And they wonder, Brother Zach, why am I not growing in the Christian life? Because you did a right turn. You didn't do an about turn at the beginning of your Christian life. Some preacher saw you do a right turn and said, you're okay, come I'll baptize you.

You're not properly converted because you never properly repented. You never turned away completely from the world. Like Lot's wife, you turned like this so that you could look back now and then.

And that's why you don't make any progress. Lot's wife became stationary as a pillar of salt, like many believers, with no progress at all, because he had that backward look. The mark of a person who has not entered Canaan is the backward look towards Egypt.

That's why they lived in the wilderness for 40 years. Always that backward look. Oh, we had this in Egypt.

John the Baptist said, you fellows haven't repented. I'm not fooled by your right turn and left turn. It's an about turn.

Repentance. Turn right around. Once upon a time, your back was to God and your front was to the sin and the world.

Now you turn right around. It doesn't mean you've given up all your sinful nature and overcome it all. That may take many years.

But your attitude has changed. You haven't reached the finishing line. No.

But you're facing the right direction. Repentance doesn't mean you've become perfect. Repentance just means that you're now facing in the right direction.

It may take you years to reach the finishing line. It does. But at least you're moving in the right direction now.

Till then you were moving in the wrong direction. I want to ask all of you sitting here, have you turned around from all that you know to be sin? Thank God for that. There were a hundred things in my life when I was born again 47 years ago, which I did not know to be sin.

And God did not demand it of me because he saw my attitude was right. Whatever I knew to be sin, I turned from. And initially that was only the cinemas and, you know, some bad habits, few things.

But as I walked with the Lord, I discovered hundreds of things which are sin, which I never knew in 1959 when I was born again. And God did not expect me to know. As we grow, we get more and more light.

So repentance doesn't mean that I have turned from everything on Christ like in my life. I don't believe I can even say that today. No.

There will be on Christ. I know there are on Christ like things in me today, but I can turn from it only when I get light on it. How can I kill a snake which is running around inside my house, which I haven't even seen? I don't even know that snake is there.

Once I see it, I can kill it. Otherwise, I can't get rid of it. Men may demand it of me.

Ah, look at him behaving in that on Christ like way. Maybe I don't see it yet. God is very merciful, much more merciful than men.

Men are very hard on us. God is not hard. God knows what standard we have reached.

Are you in second standard? You will only get a second standard question paper. You can be sure of that. Men may give you a ten standard question paper and say you're failure, failure, failure, failure because men are stupid.

But God gives second standard examination papers to those who are in second standard. When you go to third standard, He'll give you a little tougher examination. When you go to fourth standard, He'll give you still tougher.

But men are not like that. They expect you to get a PhD when you're in the kindergarten. And if you don't get everything right, they judge you.

Why in the world do you bother about the opinion of these stupid men and women around you? God is merciful. When He tells you to repent, He only asks you to repent from what you know to be sin. And when you're first born again, that knowledge is very, very little like a child who has just joined kindergarten and learned A, B, C. Perhaps your knowledge of sin is C-A-T is cat, B-A-T is bat.

Okay, that's enough for the time being. That's all God wants. Men may demand knowledge of calculus and physics and trigonometry and all, forget them.

It's wonderful to live with God. He's so merciful, He's so compassionate, He's so understanding. So when I talk about repentance, it's a progressive thing.

That's why we've been talking in these days about continual repentance. It's like continuing education. Don't you want your children to continue education or just join school and that's it.

It doesn't matter if they remain in the kindergarten forever. No, I don't want my child to remain in the kindergarten forever. I want him to have a continuing education, to discover new things.

Some of you boys and girls who are in 10th standard, I hope you pass when you do the ICSE examination. And I hope you'll go to 11th standard or PUC and learn something new which you have not learned up all these 16 years of your life. Progressive, continuing education.

The same way in the Christian life, repentance means progressive, continuing discovery of what is sin, of what is unchrist-like. That is the education. That's what John was saying.

Repent. The kingdom of heaven now we preach is already here. Brothers and sisters, the kingdom of heaven is here.

You're not supposed to live for earthly things anymore. Because Christ has died and risen from the dead. You say, well, how does that affect me? Because if you're a true Christian, you died with Christ.

You say, how can that be? I live in the 21st century. Well, how did Jesus die for the sins you committed in the 21st century? You tell me that first. How did he die for sins in the 1st century which you are going to commit in the 21st century? With God, there is no past, present and future.

His name is I am, not I was or I will be. He lives in the present. 21st century, 1st century, 21st century BC are all the same to him.

He could see all humanity in one stretch. He took all of man's sins and put it on Christ. He took all Christians and dumped them on the cross in Christ and they were crucified, all of them.

You died with Christ and when he rose up from the dead, God raised you up with him, whether you knew it or not. So what? I'll tell you so what. Colossians chapter 3. Verse 1, if you have been raised with Christ, in other words, it's just like saying if you have been really born again, like you hear me say many times in this church, if you have been really born again, it's unfortunate that we have to say that, if you have really been born again, if you have really been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things that are in heaven.

Not bigger cars and houses. God will give you all that you need on this earth, but you shouldn't be seeking for them. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Seek the king's heavenly things. The other earthly things that you need will be added to you. You will not suffer lack.

I can honestly say before God what I've said many times, that for 47 years of my life since I was born again, my turning was radical. I didn't make a right turn. I turned an about turn.

Such an about turn that as soon as I gave my life to Christ, I said, Lord, if you want me to serve you, I'll quit my earthly ambition to be a naval officer and quit all that. And I'll serve you if you want me. I turned around and as far as I can remember, I never sought earthly things after that.

Have I suffered? I've never starved. My children have never starved. God's taken care of me.

He's taken care of my family. Because I wanted to be a living demonstration that if you seek God's kingdom first and his righteousness, the other things will be added to you. Every one of you in your town, in your village must be a living demonstration to the non-Christians around you that you spent your life seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness first.

And the other earthly things God just threw it into your lap, you didn't even seek for it. God can do that. He gave you a job and you didn't seek for it.

He gave you more than enough for your family's needs even though you didn't seek for it. Your heart was devoted to God's kingdom. Imagine if all of you sitting here, at least from today onwards, start living like that.

I tell you, we'll have a revival in our churches. The kingdom of God will come with power into our local churches. And those who don't like it, they will leave.

Thank God they will leave and not waste our time. They will go and join some other church where they can listen to the prosperity gospel and make money on the earth and they're welcome to go. But we're determined to be a witness for Christ.

We are determined to progress in likeness to Christ. If you are risen with Christ, we want people in our midst who are seeking the things that are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God, setting their mind, look at this verse, setting their mind on the things above and not on the things of earth. And here is my favorite illustration of that, the rubber band.

Many of you have heard me use that. You know, if I tie a rubber band here, assume this is heavenly things and down here, the top of this pulpit is earthly things. I tie the rubber band here, but I need to stretch it to touch earthly things many times a day.

I have to eat, drink, get my children educated, feed them, clothe them. A mother has got many, many things where she has to stretch it and mind about throughout the day. But once all those earthly things are done, eight hours a day, the rubber band is stretched to do our earthly work.

But once it's all done and we have finished our day's work, the rubber band is released. It goes springs back up here to heavenly things. That is the true disciple of Jesus Christ.

And tomorrow, again, you'll have to stretch it down to 101 earthly things for many, many hours a day. But once all that is over, springs back to earthly things, to heavenly again. But do you know how most believers lives are, their mind? The rubber band is down here, down on earthly things.

On Sunday morning, it is stretched for two hours to heavenly things and then released back to the earthly. By the time they've reached home, it's already okay. In fact, on the way home on their scooter or autorickshaw, it's already gone down to the earthly things.

The husband and wife are quarreling inside the autorickshaw on their way home about something. It was only for two hours it was stretched there. They thought they were very heavenly people, back again.

This is not Christianity. This is old covenant. Set your mind on the things above and stretch it down to earthly things.

Maybe for 15 hours a day, stretch it. Sure, mothers with small children have to stretch it for many hours of the day. Middle of the night, they have to stretch it to earthly things because their babies need so much.

But when it's released from that, let it spring back to the things of heaven. That's how I want my mind to be. I have to earn my living.

I have to take care of my family. I have to pay taxes for my house and lots of things. I've got to pay tax for my car and scooter and I've got to do many, many things I have to think of.

I have to stretch my mind. But when it's released, I want to be hearing what God has to say to me. And the more we live like this, the more heavenly minded we'll be.

But not so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use. No. Our head will be in the clouds, but our feet will be on the earth.

Our mind is set on the things of earth, but we are down to earth practical. We can laugh and joke like we did this afternoon in those skits. We can enjoy it.

We're not so heavenly minded that we can't crack a joke or have any sense of humor. No, we can enjoy earthly things, but our mind is set on the things of heaven. Once that thing is over, we spring back to heavenly things.

And it's perfectly natural for us to have our mind. This is the message of John the Baptist. The kingdom of heaven is near.

What a short ministry he had. And we read there in Luke's gospel chapter three, amazing words. It's a lovely, I have been blessed by this passage in Luke chapter three, verse one.

Here are the greatest men in the history of the world at that time. And I like to hear this. In Rome, Tiberius Caesar was reigning for 15 years.

In Judea, Pontius Pilate was the greatest man in the world. In Judea, sorry. In Galilee, Herod was the greatest man there.

In Aitheria, Philip was the greatest man there. And in Abilene, Lysanias was the greatest man there. And in the temple, it was Annas and Caiaphas.

But the word of God bypassed all these people and came to that man John in the wilderness. Ah, I said, Lord, make me like that. That the word of God will bypass all these great scholars and prophets and Bible school professors and doctors of divinity and all that.

And it'll come to some poor man who's seeking you on his knees somewhere in the wilderness. God opened the word to me. I want to be like that till the end of my life.

And you can be like that. God doesn't care for degrees and all that type of stuff. He doesn't care for your earthly position.

The word of God bypasses all these people. Came to John in the wilderness. And that message was a message of repentance from sin.

He said, make ready the ways of the Lord. Every ravine will be filled up. We don't want any depression and discouragement among God's people.

Fill it up, John the Baptist says. And all you mountains, proud people, come down, humble yourself. And all you crooked people, you got to be straight.

And all you rough people, you got to learn to be smooth. Strong message. And then all flesh will see the glory of God and the salvation of God.

And we read that great crowds came to him from all over Judea to listen to him. He didn't have any advertising campaign. Message went round from place to place to place.

Hey, there's a prophet over there. Go and listen to him by word of mouth. And they went to hear him.

I'll tell you one thing. When God has a message through you, people will travel a thousand miles to listen to you. But if God doesn't have a message through you, the fellow next door will not want to listen to you.

Be a man of God. Be a woman of God. So that when people come to talk to you, you have a word that draws them to the things of heaven, that encourages them, that delivers them from the fears of earth, that makes them heavenly minded, that lifts up their spirit and delivers them from the oppression of the enemy, from discouragement, depression, gloom, delivers them from an unforgiving spirit and from sin in every form.

Do you want to be a man of God like that? Determine that you will have the spirit of John the Baptist in you. The Lord, Gabriel told Zechariah, he's going to be great in the sight of the Lord, this John the Baptist. And that's an expression that has come to me many times.

Great in the sight of the Lord. You read it in Luke chapter 1. Keep that before you. Lord, I want to be great in the sight of the Lord.

I want to preach a kingdom of heaven. I want to preach repentance. I want to preach a total about turn from the world and from sin.

I want to live like that every day in my life. I want to discover more and more of the things I need to repent of. I want my repentance to be continuous.

May God help us. I believe there is a word the Lord has for you in what you heard today. And when God begins to use you, remember the other word of John the Baptist.

Jesus must increase and I must decrease. Let people not see me, Lord. Let them see Christ.

I don't want to connect anybody to myself. I want to connect people to Jesus. If people get connected to me, I want to shake them off, push them off.

I've done that many a time. No, be connected to Jesus. I don't want people to be connected to CFC.

No, I want them to be connected to Jesus. Whichever church you go to, be connected to Jesus. That's our calling.

CFC must decrease. Christ must increase. Then God will honor us.

If you are concerned about the name of CFC or your local CFC, forget it. You won't have the ministry of John the Baptist. Make your goal that Christ will increase.

And God will support you all the way. Let's pray. While I head about in prayer, I want to invite you again to respond to the word you heard.

Turn from whatever you know that God spoke to you during this meeting. That's all he requires. One step at a time.

He doesn't ask you to take 20 steps. Just one step today. Tomorrow he'll show you another.

Heavenly Father, help us to be like these men. Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist. That we can be witnesses for you in this generation.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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