

A CHARACTER STUDY OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST

Lesson 2

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE
BAPTIST

Luke 3:1-20

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Adult Sunday school Class

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“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Luke 3:3-6

John, later known as ‘John the Baptist’, was a special man. It was said by Gabriel that He was to be a ‘great’ person. (Luke 1:14) Chapters one and two of Luke gives the reader the narrative of the birth announcements of both John and the Lord Jesus. It is said of Jesus that, *“the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.”* (Luke 2:40) In a like manner it was said of His cousin, John that, *“the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.”* (Luke 1:80) This verse suggests several things. John, as well as Jesus,

went through a period of time to gain maturity before they began their ministries. Of John particularly it is said that he was *“in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.”* God hid him away in the wilderness because the circumstances of his birth was so well known. His father had been in the public eye when the angel, Gabriel came to announce his birth. The people questioned, *“What manner of child shall this be”* (Luke 1:66) The people were looking expectantly for God to send the Messiah and many hoped that John might be that one. He was in an obscure place so he could get to know God before he began to preach. At the proper time *“the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.”* (Luke 3:2) Just as God came to the prophets of old so He came to John. It significant that the ‘Word’ of God came to him. His message was not his own but the message of God to the people of that day. No doubt the words of the Old Testament were thoroughly in to the heart of this young man. Zacharias said of him at his presentation at the Temple. *“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.”* (Luke 1:76-77) *“It was the word of God that came to him: God commissioned him in a clear and personal manner and also gave him the necessary equipment to undertake the work.”* (Geldenhuys. P. 136) Preachers of today would do well to wait till they

have a clear understanding of God's Word before they stand to preach.

This moving of God on the young man John came *"in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar"* (Luke 3:1) "Since he [Tiberius] succeeded to the throne in A.D. 14, his fifteenth year would be about A.D. 28 or 29." (Wycliffe. P. 1034) This was when John began his ministry. We must remember that the coming of Jesus marked the end of the Dispensation of the Law and the start of the Dispensation of Grace. Because of that John's baptism had a different meaning than baptism has for the New Testament believer today. Baptism, today is a symbol of our faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. "He preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.' This means that he called the people to repentance and then baptized those who confessed their sins and gave indications that they desired to lead a different and better life, in assurance that God grants pardon to those who sincerely repent." (Geldenhuis. P. 136.) John preached with power and without the fear of men. He preached against sinful living. He preached a dedication to God. The Spirit of God was upon him and great conviction fell on his hearers. They were moved to turn from their old sinful life styles and seek to follow a godly path of living. They asked him *"What shall we do then?"* (Luke 3:10) His answer was, to love as Jesus loved (Vs. 11) They were to deal fairly and honestly with their fellow Jews. (vs. 13)

They were to live in peace and honestly among others and seek contentment. (Vs. 14) When the people heard these words they *“were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.”* (Vs. 15) John had no time for hypocrisy. The spiritual leaders of the day, the pharisees and Sadducees, came out to see what he was doing. When they saw that so many people were following him they sought to be baptized of him as well. Seeing their hypocrisy and sinful life styles, John answered them, *“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our 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 unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”* (Matthew 3: 7-10) John’s ministry was to point out sin and cry out against it. The New Testament writers gave us a very brief description of John’s ministry. He obviously upset many of the ruling class of people. We learn that he was arrested for his words against Herod the king’s sin. (Luke 3:19) Yet, he had a profound impact on the people of his day. The results of his preaching were seen later when the multitudes followed the Lord Jesus. When asked if he was he the Messiah or, not his reaction was, *“I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not*

worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.” (Luke 3:16-17)

John knew that he was only a voice, the one who was to point out Jesus to the world. John the disciple records John the Baptist’s words in his gospel. The pharisees asked him if he was the Messiah. He *“confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. ... I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.”* (John 1:23) He understood that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. (Isaiah 40:3) When John saw the lord Jesus he said, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.”* (John 1:29-30)

“Although John with so much poignant earnestness called the attention of the Jews to their sins and to the impending judgment, Luke nevertheless declares that he “preached good tidings unto the people. John’s preaching is thus a true proclamation of the Gospel because he announces that the Messiah is coming who, while He will visit the unrepentant with His judgment, brings forgiveness of sins and inward renewal and purification through the Spirit to all who truly turn to God and sincerely await His coming and take refuge in Him. (Geldenhuys. P. 140-141)

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Notes
