

A CHARACTER STUDY OF  
JOHN THE BAPTIST

Lesson 4

THE PREACHING OF JOHN

John 1:19-34

Matthew 3:1-17

Luke 3:18

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Adult Sunday school Class

## THE PREACHING OF JOHN

*“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”*

Matthew 3:1-3

The spiritual leaders in Jerusalem sent a delegation into the wilderness to examine this strange prophet of God. As John the Baptist began his work, two things stood out to them as being remarkable. Those who visited, “were of the Pharisees. Two things prompted the deputation: the strong preaching of John which captivated the multitudes (Mt. 3:5), and his baptizing activity (Jn. 1:6). Such a person excited so much concern in these leaders that they asked, Who art thou?” (Wycliffe. P. 1074) In answering their questions John preached about his purpose and about who Jesus was. *“In those days came John the Baptist,*

*preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”* (Matt. 1:1-3) The man John was especially chosen by God to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of His son, the Lord Jesus. God uses *“the foolishness of preaching”* (I Corinthians 1:21) to accomplish this task. John came to Israel preaching first of all, that the people should repent of their sins and to begin following the Law of God. They should live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

It is an interesting study to look at those to whom John preached. In Matthew chapter three the writer notes that the first group to whom John preaches is the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They were the spiritual leaders of the community but were noted for their hypocrisy. John demands to know *“O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”* In doing so he is pointing out their double standard of living. They were sinful but

appeared before the people to be righteous. If they were so pure, why did they need to be baptized by John? He called them, “vipers” or snakes pointing out their true sinful nature. His preaching also told them that God was not impressed by their ancestry. They needed to do good works of their own and not depend on the deeds of their fathers. He reminded them that God will examine them and bring judgment to the unrepentant.

In Luke chapter three we see that John was also preaching to several others that day. Each of the three groups asked the question when they were presented with their sinfulness. “*What shall we do then?*” (Luke 3:10,12,14) The people came to him first and he told them that God expected them to practice charity to those who are not as well off as they were. If you have two coats or have food, share with the one who has none. (Vs. Luke 3:11) The Tax collectors, or Publicans, asked him how they should live. He preached to them that they should do their work with honesty and fairness. (Vs. 13) The soldiers asked him how to live. He encourages them to testify

truthfully, to do no violence and to live with contentment. (Vs. 14) Looking at the preaching of John to the people of that day, these qualities of peace, fairness, charity, honesty and contentment are important and lacking in their society. Would God not also be pleased if His people in this modern world would live by these ideas as well?

The people were very curious about who John was. They asked him if he was the prophet Elijah, come back to preach to them. Malachi 4:5 told them that Elijah would someday come to them. "Though John was not Elijah in person, he was that one in function (Mt. 17:10-13)" (Wycliffe. P.1074) They thought that he might be the Messiah. They guessed that he was a special prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:15,18. John answered clearly that he was none of these. John's only goal was to point them to Jesus, the Messiah. John preached Jesus to them. He preached to them, "*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) When John finally saw the Lord Jesus he cried out to the people, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of*

*the world.*" (Vs. 29) John had no ego of his own. He knew that his purpose was to point people to Jesus. What a wonderful example is to the church today. The world needs Jesus.

The questioners asked John, that if he was not the Messiah, why did he baptize the people. His answer, *"that he [Jesus] should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water."* (Vs. 29) John said that Messiah was walking among them but they, (even John, himself) did not realize who He was. It was not until John saw the Spirit of God rest upon Him, did he realize that his cousin, Jesus was the chosen of God.

"Before the Saviour began His public appearance for the redemption of souls and the establishment of His kingdom, God so ordered it that John the Baptist first appeared with his powerful message of repentance. First, men had to be shown their terrible spiritual plight, the fact that they stood before God full of sin and guilt and that they should repent without delay. They were to realize that they were in danger of being visited by

the judgment of God and that it was in vain for them to try to rely on their own dignity of descent or outward piety.

This preaching of repentance must always be an inherent element in the Gospel-preaching of the church. Firstly, the sinfulness of sin should be pointed out, as well as God's wrath against it, followed by the inexorable demand for true repentance, and then there should be a summons to have faith in Jesus, the Saviour. Without the preaching of the need for repentance the message of the church would degenerate into sentiment. The Biblical balance between the two sides of the preaching of the Gospel must be preserved." (Geldenhuys. P. 142.)

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