

## Lesson 2 – 8 August 2010

### The Forerunner of the King

**Lesson Scope:** [Matthew 3 and 11:1-15](#)

#### Lesson Focus

The story of John the Baptist is an interesting account of the promised forerunner of Christ (Isaiah 40:3). His person and manner of life set him apart from other Bible characters. He lived as a recluse and ate very common food. But he came to fulfill the purpose God had designed for him. John the Baptist received his title because of his work. He was not ashamed of his calling, but he faithfully and zealously proclaimed the message of repentance. His forthright denunciation of evil eventually cost him his life.

John's message of repentance remains the very essence of Christianity today. He proclaimed the beginning of Christ's ministry. He introduced the Son and Lamb of God. He revealed the requirements for salvation and the manner of life of the repentant. John was truly faithful in being Christ's forerunner. His life is a testimony of the Christian's responsibility today in preparing the way for Christ's Second Coming.

God progressively reveals His plans to prepare men for further revelation. In the fullness of time, God sent John the Baptist to introduce the Messiah.

John the Baptist stands out as a special messenger of God. He had a special work to do to prepare the way for Jesus' coming. There are many lessons the people of God can learn from his life today.

The church has been called to prepare for Jesus' Second Coming to earth. We are here to call sinners to repentance in preparation for that coming. Emphasize the importance of God's messengers to be separated from the world as those who are pilgrims and strangers. We cannot be effective messengers for God if we are becoming like the earth dwellers around us.

Another important emphasis in this lesson for us should be that the messengers of God cannot expect an easy life or one that we will please many people in the world. It is, however, a truly satisfying life, as we seek to please the Lord.

**Lesson Aim:** To learn lessons from the person and work of John the Baptist.

**Theme Verse:** [Matthew 3:3](#). “For this is lie 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.”

## **Lesson Text**

### **The Person**

[Matthew 3:1-4](#)

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, <sup>2</sup>And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

### **The Message**

[Matthew 3:5-12](#)

Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, <sup>6</sup>And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: <sup>12</sup>Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

### **The Meeting**

[Matthew 3:13-15](#)

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. <sup>14</sup>But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and

comest thou to me? <sup>15</sup>And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

### **The Influence**

#### [Matthew 11:2-4](#)

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, <sup>3</sup>And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

#### [Matthew 11:7-15](#)

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? <sup>8</sup>But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. <sup>9</sup>But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. <sup>11</sup>Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup>And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. <sup>15</sup>He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **The Person**

1. How did John the Baptist's lifestyle complement his work?
2. List some areas in which we must be careful to live simply.

#### **The Message**

3. Why did John the Baptist use such strong language when he spoke to the Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7)?
4. What fruits are necessary before baptism?

#### **The Meeting**

5. What are some reasons Jesus desired to be baptized?
6. What is the significance of baptism?

## **The Influence**

7. What strengths of character did Jesus indicate about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:7-11?
8. What is included in the violent taking the kingdom of heaven by force Matthew 11: 12?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

The time frame of this lesson—"in those days" (Matthew 3:1)—was a dark yet momentous time. After the birth of John and Jesus, Herod had desperately sought to kill Jesus by destroying the children under two years old. Beginning with John's ministry, however, the light was beginning to dawn. John's message was "Repent ye." He was calling for a change—a change of heart that would effect a change in their lives. Even though he preached out in the countryside, he had a large following who responded by confessing their sins and submitting to baptism.

John's raiment of camel's hair and leather girdle indicated a lowly or common person. Locusts and wild honey was the diet of the poor people. The prophetic reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11) speaks of a power unknown heretofore. John's prophetic preaching indicated that the power of Christ would go far beyond his own preaching. Jesus' baptism became a public announcement of who He was and of the beginning of His earthly ministry. Jesus' baptism also indicated His surrender to God the Father (John 1:29-36).

"The violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12) speaks of the effort in securing the kingdom of heaven. The person who is committed to being a part of the kingdom chooses or takes it to himself by energy, effort, and persistence. This spiritual effort is in cooperation with the provision God has made for salvation. No one can secure salvation by his own energy, but neither energy, salvation be realized without persistent effort.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **The Person**

1. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance and its involvements (Matthew 3:1-2). The message of repentance, if heeded, would bring those in spiritual need to the Messiah.

The message of repentance and its involvements must be primary in our church life today. The goal of the church is to bring souls to the One who

will save them from their sins.

2. John the Baptist exemplified a simple and self-denying lifestyle (Matthew 3:3-4). He voluntarily chose this way as a servant of the meek and lowly Jesus. God's servants in every age have chosen this way as pilgrims and strangers in this world, thus preparing themselves and helping others to prepare for the eternal realm.

### **The Message**

3. John the Baptist zealously and courageously confronted sin and proclaimed the way to deliverance (Matthew 3:7). John clearly showed the Pharisees and Sadducees their condition before God. Unless they would genuinely repent, they would face the wrath of God.

When we encounter those who are serving Satan, our clear message to them must be to repent or face the wrath of God.

4. John the Baptist outlined the way of true repentance (Matthew 3:8-10). John made it clear to the Pharisees and Sadducees that repentance includes fruits that prove a person has a truly repentant attitude. Repentance includes a sorrow for sin and a definite turning away from sin. John indicated that trusting in one's background or heritage is not sufficient to be accepted of God. Everyone who does not prove a repentant attitude will surely be rejected by God at the time of Judgment.

### **The Meeting**

5. John the Baptist exemplified obedience by baptising Christ (Matthew 3:13-15). To be useful in the work of the Lord requires simple obedience to the commands of Christ. John undoubtedly did not fully understand why he should baptize the Son of God. Yet, at Christ's command, he obeyed.

Acts 2:41 says of the believers in the early church that they that gladly received the Word were baptized. After instruction, applicants for church membership are examined to learn whether they are willing to submit to the discipline of the church. This indicates an obedient spirit.

### **The Influence**

6. John the Baptist strength and courage in observing the work of Christ (Matthew 11:2-4). At this time John was imprisoned and perhaps had some questions about Christ's work, whether He truly was the Messiah. Jesus' confirmation to John, through the disciples, convinced him that Jesus was indeed the Christ.

We may have times of questions or even doubts about the Lord's work in our lives or the lives of others. As we go back to the Word, we can find the

rest that we need to proceed in faithfulness.

7. John the Baptist exemplified a life of strength and stability (Matthew 11:7-11). Jesus' commendation of John indicates these qualities.

The church today needs members who are spiritually strong and stable. Those who are grounded in the Word and are loyal to church discipline and direction can be counted on to build the church. May each of us rise to the challenge to be such members.

8. John the Baptist and all who follow his example aggressively pursue eternal life in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 11:12-14). This allows for no complacency or casualness in the Christian life. This is a life or death matter. If we hope to reach heaven, we will need to live as though our life depends on how we pursue spiritual issues and values, because it truly does.

### **Important Teachings**

1. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance and its involvements (Matthew 3:1-2).

2. John the Baptist exemplified a simple and self-denying lifestyle (Matthew 3:3-4).

3. John the Baptist zealously and courageously confronted sin and proclaimed the way to deliverance (Matthew 3:7).

4. John the Baptist outlined the way of true repentance (Matthew 3:8-10).

5. John the Baptist exemplified obedience by baptizing Christ (Matthew 3:13-15).

6. John the Baptist found strength and courage in observing the work of Christ (Matthew 11:2-4).

7. John the Baptist exemplified a life of strength and stability (Matthew 11:7-11).

8. John the Baptist and all who follow his example aggressively pursue eternal life in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 11:12-14).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. How did John the Baptist's lifestyle complement his work?

His lifestyle caused him to identify with the poorer, common people of his day. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Corinthians 1:26). John the Baptist did not identify with these, but with those who recognized their need.

2. List some areas in which we must be careful to live simply. Our houses and furnishings, our vehicles, our business image, and our use of technology should all reflect a simple lifestyle.

3. Why did John the Baptist use such strong language when he spoke to the Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7)?

Their motives for coming to hear his preaching were not sincere. Their attitude toward their background and heritage needed to be changed so that they could comprehend their personal need.

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4. What fruits are, necessary before baptism?

A repentant heart (sorrow for past sin), a turning away from sin an honest desire to follow the Lord in all things, a teachable spirit and the fruit of the Spirit must be in evidence.

5. What are, some reasons Jesus desired to be baptized?

He wanted to "fulfil all righteousness" (as an example of obedience) It was an announcement of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, and it showed that Jesus was identifying with mankind.

6. What is the significance of baptism?

It is the answer of a good conscience and an indication of a change of heart. It is the rite by which one enters into membership with the church. It is a sign of subjection to Christ and the church.

7. What strengths of character did Jesus indicate about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:7-11?

John was not unstable, He was not living an easy life as kings do and there was no greater prophet than he.

8. What is included in the violent taking the kingdom of heaven by force (Matthew 11:12)?

They will pursue righteousness at all cost. Those who have this determination will be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the details of life. This leading is always consistent with the Word. Also included is a loyalty to the church, to church discipline, and to special statements from church leaders. For those who are determined to be faithful, nothing is unthinkable that is consistent with truth.

## Summarizing the Lesson

Rise, O my soul, pursue the path  
By ancient worthies trod;  
Aspiring, view those holy men  
Who lived and walked with God.  
Lord, may I ever keep in view  
The patterns Thou hast giv' n.  
And ne'er forsake the blessed road  
That led them safe to heav' n.  
—John Needham

## Research Guide

1. Read and study the parallel passages in Luke 3:1-22; 7:19-29.
2. Read the article on John the Baptist in The New Ungers Bible Dictionary.
3. Read the chapter on repentance in Doctrines of the Bible.