

Pastor Jon's Dec 4, 2022 Sermon. A verse-by-verse sermon.

Text: Matthew 3:1-12.

“Bear Fruit Worthy of Repentance”

Tonight's sermon will be a little different than my normal preaching style. We will do a verse by verse study of our Gospel. Then I will sum it up at the end.

In Matthew 3:1, in those days, after King Herod massacred all the children 2 years old and under in and around Bethlehem because he was threatened by this talk of a new king, we meet a character named John the Baptist. We know from Luke's Gospel, chapter 1, that John was Jesus' cousin. He was a prophet, proclaimer or herald, who set up shop in the wilderness urging people to repent for the coming reign of God, which we know commenced with Jesus' birth. The sign of a changed life that John uses is baptism, a ceremonial washing in water, where John dunks them under... symbolic of drowning to the old life of sin and rising to the new life.

Why the wilderness? The wilderness was a dry desert place, it would be the opposite place of the elite's control in the city. It was away from the powers of the Roman Empire and the Jewish religious elite. It was a place of liberation for the Israelites, who in the book of Exodus wandered in the wilderness for 40 years after their slavery in Egypt. There God provided for them and made promises to them, even though they didn't always fulfill their end of the bargain.

Verse 2 uses the word “Repent”. In Greek the word is *Metanoia*. To change one's thinking. To turn around. To do a 180 in life. To change your attitude towards God and your conduct in life. It involved confession of sin and prayers of remorse. Do you have any remorse over something you have done or left undone? What sins do you need to confess? If anything came to mind, and you truly have a broken heart over it, I can say to you in the name of Jesus you are forgiven.

John is really urging all people here to reform their lives, to turn back to faithful living, as they wait for the Messiah. That is why we have this text in the 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend of Advent.

Verse 3 Quotes the prophet Isaiah 40:3 and that John is fulfilling the role of a voice crying out in the wilderness, who in that context proclaimed a safe return of the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity. It is about a return from really difficult times in Babylon, of tyrants and slavery. Isaiah proclaimed a restoration. He speaks of a smooth highway through mountainous territory. A sign that God is the excavator as this seemed impossible. Now John is proclaiming a Messiah that will come and give hope to people living under the Roman occupation.

Verse 4 goes into John's diet and wardrobe. Why is so much made of that? He wore camel's fur with a leather belt around his waist. So what? This signifies poverty and subsistence living as compared to the long flowing robes and rich food of the elite in the city. John ate locusts and wild honey, suggesting a simple diet and reliance on God's provision in his ascetic lifestyle.

In verses 5 and 6, the people of the city in Jerusalem and all Judea kept going out to John. We are talking large crowds going out to see John confessing their sins and being baptized, again symbolic of putting away the old life and preparing for the Messiah. The people longed for a new way forward with hope.

Then in verse 7, conflict shows up. The Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious elite and lawyers, were coming out for baptism too. But John calls them a brood of vipers. Children born of poisonous snakes. Who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Snakes used to flee the fields when the harvest began. John was really questioning their motivation and reasoning for going through his baptism.

Verse 8 really gets to the crux of the matter. Coming out to be baptized isn't about going through the motions. It is about a new way of life... a life that bears fruit. To bear fruit worthy of repentance. To show the proof of a changed heart and mind. The fruit for us would be like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. To demonstrate more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in all our relationships. The fruit of our faith would be our actions or our works as a result of our faith and

baptism in Jesus Christ. Our Christian walk is growing into beautiful trees that bear fruit.

In verse 9, John preempts an argument from the Pharisees and Sadducees about their lineage to Abraham as their calling card to a right relationship with God. John is saying you depend too much on who you descended from and are not living faithfully to the call to extend God's blessing to all. They were more concerned about preserving their own salvation and business model of the temple than taking the call of scripture seriously like in our first lesson that describes a messiah figure who will come that cares for the poor and lifts up the meek.

Verse 10 is about judgement. There is an ax lying at the base of the tree ready to cut any tree down that doesn't bear good fruit. Do you feel you are bearing good fruit in your life? The warning to us is that our faith isn't meant just us. It is about bearing good fruit for the common good. It is about turning our confession of faith into action.

Finally in verses 11 and 12, John knows his role. His church is full, but he points beyond himself. He isn't all puffed up by attendance numbers. His job is to prepare the way for Jesus to come. He knows he is not worthy to even carry his sandals. That was a slave's role in ancient Rome and Greece. He says Jesus will come baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire.

In our baptism we proclaim that the Holy Spirit seals us with the cross of Christ forever. And we light a candle representing the cleansing power of fire. Here, John also describes Jesus as a farmer at harvest separating the wheat from chaff. I did this once with a farmer in a wheat field. He had me pick a head of ripe wheat, put it in my hand and roll it around. Then he said, blow on it, and the chaff blew away and I was left with kernels of wheat. It was not completely dry, but he called it farmer's chewing gum.

Wind blew the chaff away. Another name for wind in scripture is breath or spirit. The wind of God, the Holy Spirit, cleanses us through the Word of God. It awakens and creates faith in us when we hear the Gospel. The Word also prunes us of the ways or actions that don't produce fruit in our lives. The idea is to identify the chaff in our lives,

that parts that aren't producing fruit, and trust the Holy Spirit to blow it away. This will happen in communion today and in our corporate confession and forgiveness.