

10. John Was Sent to Prepare the Way for Jesus

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children grow in the same ways that Jesus grew in His life. We saw that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. When the time drew close for Jesus to begin His public ministry, John the son of Zacharias began to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. The message of John was a message of repentance as he told people to prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah.

Luke 3:1-3 says, “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Tiberius Caesar was the ruler of the entire Roman Empire. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor in the region of Judea. Herod Antipas was the governor of Galilee and Perea and the one who would later put John to death. His brother Herod Philip II was the governor of the area north of Galilee. Lysanias was governor of the area north of Damascus.

We also see that Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. The Roman government did not like Annas as the high priest. As a result, they removed him and appointed his son-in-law, Caiaphas, as the high priest. Even though Caiaphas was officially the high priest as far as the Romans were concerned, the Jews still recognized Annas as the high priest. This is illustrated in the book of John. John 18:13-14 says, “And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.” Then, John 18:19 says, “The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.” This verse and verse 22 show us that the Jews recognized Annas as the high priest. Finally, John 18:24 says, “Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.” The Jews knew that only Caiaphas could turn Jesus over to the Romans because the Romans did not recognize Annas as the high priest.

It was when these various leaders were ruling the places that are mentioned and Annas and Caiaphas were both considered the high priest that John began his ministry to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. We see that the main part of the ministry of John was in the area along the Jordan River. John was preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. The word translated “baptism” means *to submerge*. It is the form of the word most commonly used to refer to the baptism of John. John 3:23 says, “Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.” Here, we see that John baptized by submerging people in water. The word translated “repentance” means *a change of mind or purpose*. The word translated “remission” means *release from bondage or imprisonment* and is used to speak of the forgiveness or pardon of sin.

Luke then quoted from Isaiah 40 to describe the ministry of John. Luke 3:4-6 says, “As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every

mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” In the time of Isaiah, when a king was going to travel to another area, the king would send workers ahead to prepare the road. They would smooth out the bumps and fill in the holes. This made it possible for a king to ride on a smooth road. Isaiah used that example as an illustration of the fact that John would go ahead of Jesus to tell people to prepare their hearts for the coming of Jesus.

We see one very important part of this message. This message included the thought that “All flesh would see the salvation of God.” This is key because God revealed to the world that Jesus would come to pay the penalty to make salvation available for all people including both Jews and Gentiles. The concern of God has always been for all nations. Psalm 67:5-7 says, “Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” Luke was the writer who wrote about the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles and so he included this part of the statement from Isaiah.

Luke 3:7-10 says, “Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as *our* father.” For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’ So the people asked him, saying, ‘What shall we do then?’” Crowds of people from both Judea and Galilee came to the area where John was preaching to be baptized by him.

As John spoke to the crowds, he gave them a warning. In fact, John called the crowds by a very unusual title because he called them a “brood of vipers”. In Acts 28:3, we see that a viper is a poisonous snake whose bite is deadly because the people on the island of Malta expected Paul to drop dead after he was bitten by a viper. However, we see that Jesus also used this title to show the sinful heart of mankind. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus said, “‘Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.’” The use of this title by John shows that he recognized that the hearts of many of the people who came to him were filled with evil.

As a result, John asked the people who came to him, “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Here, we see that John was warning the people about eternal judgment. After writing this same warning, Matthew added the thoughts that showed John was talking about eternal judgment. Matthew 3:11-12 says, “‘I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’” John made it clear that the wrath to come is the judgment of eternal fire.

John clearly taught that the people must repent of their sin of unbelief and turn to God. He also

pointed out the fact that true repentance will produce fruit in the lives of those who repent. Paul explained why repentance produces fruit in Philippians 2:12-13, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.” God will produce godly fruit in the lives of all who repent because God works in our lives to do His will.

The people thought that God would accept them because they were the descendants of Abraham. John pointed out the fact that God could create children of Abraham from the stones. People cannot depend on the belief of their parents for salvation. As someone has said, “God has no grandchildren”. John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” All people must either become children of God, by receiving Christ, or they are still facing eternal judgment. John made it clear that every person that does not bear good fruit is still facing that eternal judgment. We then see the question of the people.

Luke 3:10-14 says, “So the people asked him, saying, ‘What shall we do then?’ He answered and said to them, ‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.’ Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what is appointed for you.’ Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, ‘And what shall we do?’ So he said to them, ‘Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.’” John answered their question by describing some of the actions that will be the result of true repentance.

For the crowds who came, John said that God gives people who repent of their sin of unbelief a concern for others. John said that a good way to show this love for others is to share food and clothing with those who lack these basic necessities of life. John also spoke to the tax collectors who were known for their dishonesty by telling them that they would show true repentance by becoming honest in their work as tax collectors. Like the tax collectors, the soldiers were also known for doing certain things. John said that true repentance would cause them to stop intimidating people. Repentance would also cause them to stop accusing others falsely. Then, repentance would cause them to learn to be content with their wages instead of complaining.

John shows us how to explain to our physical and spiritual children the meaning of repentance so that they can explain this same thing to others. All those who repent of their sin of unbelief and place their faith in Christ are given a new nature with new desires. Here, we see that these new desires will produce love for others and godly character in our own lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain that repentance will give people a desire to obey the Lord.