

## The Fiery Forerunner

**Text:** Mark 1:1-8

### Introduction:

1. Context: 400 silent years have passed without any direct revelation from God. John the Baptist, enters the scene abruptly as a fiery herald of the Son of God.
2. John's ministry was a ministry of transition (Luke 16:16). Like Samuel who concluded the era of the judges and ushered in the era of the kings, John concluded the age of the law and prophets and ushered in the N.T. age of grace. "He was ordained to be the clasp of two covenants." (F.B. Meyer)
3. John's ministry was for about 6 months to a year at most.
4. John's mission was to be a herald, a voice, a messenger and a preacher of the Christ to prepare the way for the public ministry of Messiah.
5. We will study John's ministry as forerunner of Christ under three headings:

### I. **The Prediction of the Forerunner (the mandate) (Vs. 1-3)**

#### A. **The Person for which he was forerunner (Vs. 1)**

1. 'beginning' = origin, the person or thing that commences. A kind of title. Each Evangelist has a different starting point. Matthew begins with the ancestry and birth of the Messiah, Luke with the birth of the Baptist and John with the preincarnate Word. (Wuest)
2. 'Gospel' = the good news. Word found in 9 B.C. subscription as "glad tidings" referring to the birth and reign of Caesar Augustus
3. "Son of God" = he did not become a son in time but rather is the eternal Son, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father; He is the Son by nature. "He proceeds from God the Father in a birth which never took place because it always was." (Wuest)

#### B. **The Prophecy of the Forerunner (Vs. 2-3)**

1. Mark quotes from Malachi 3:1 written 400 years before (Vs. 2) and Isaiah 40:3 written 700 years before (Vs. 3) (Butler)
2. The role of a forerunner in the ancient world: "The idea of preparing the way for someone comes from the ancient practice of heralds going before royalty, or other important people, and telling folk to prepare the way for the coming dignitary by clearing the roads and making them smooth and safe. Today, we see this principle practiced by the Secret Service who go before the president and prepare the routes he will travel on to make sure they are safe and secure." (John Butler)
3. He prepared the way for Christ by calling on men to prepare their hearts. He prepared the way for Christ by proclamation. This is still the way hearts are prepared to receive Christ.

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### II. The Profile of the Forerunner (the man) (Vs. 4, 6)

#### A. His Abode – the wilderness (Vs. 3 & 4; Luke 1:80)

1. The place of his preparation (Luke 1:80)
  - a. Private communion with God is the key to public usefulness in ministry. John had a solitary place where he met with God.
  - b. He was a man prepared and trained by God in obscurity. God often uses the unnoticed and unknown to do great things for Him. Some suggest John spent up to 10 years in the wilderness before his public ministry. God is not in a rush with preparing his servants.
2. The place of his preaching (Vs. 3 & 4)

#### B. His Attire – coat of camel's hair (Vs. 6a)

1. The material of his clothing
  - a. "camels hair" = rough cloth woven of camel's hair
  - b. "girdle of a skin" = a leathern belt or sash
2. The message of his clothing
  - a. He was a prophet of God
    - i. 2 Kings 1:8 *"And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite."* (See also Mal. 4:5-6; Luke 1:17))
    - ii. Zechariah 13:4 indicates a "rough garment" was the typical attire of a prophet
  - b. He was separated unto God

#### C. His Appetite – locusts & wild honey (Vs. 6b)

1. Locusts allowed under O.T. law (Lev. 11:22) and wild honey found readily in rocky outcrops and crevices of the wilderness.
2. This was the diet of the poor. John was not a worldly man given over to the ideals and appetites of the flesh. He knew what it meant to have his body under subjection.

### III. The Preaching of the Forerunner (the message) (Vs. 4, 7-8)

#### A. The Style of his preaching (Vs. 3 & 4b)

1. Passionate preaching (3)
  - a. 'crying' = to cry out for a purpose, manifesting feeling
  - b. Christ described John as a burning and shining light. His preaching was aglow! (John 5:35)
2. Pointed preaching (Vs. 4; Matt. 3:7-8)
  - a. 'preach' = to proclaim or herald with authority. John's message came with the backing of heaven and was to be heeded and obeyed.
  - b. John was bold and uncompromising in his declaration of the truth. He preached hard against sin.

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### B. The Subjects of his preaching (Vs. 4b; 7-8)

1. He preached repentance (Vs. 4)
  - a. The best way to prepare the hearts of men for Christ is to preach repentance from sin.
  - b. 'repentance' = a radical change in one's mind and attitude towards sin and one's standing before God (Acts 20:21). It is a turning from sin to God (1 Thess. 1:9)
  - c. Christ preached the same message at the commencement of His public ministry (Vs. 14-15)
  - d. Ironside: "It is useless to preach the gospel of the grace of God to men who have no realization of their need of that grace."
2. He preached judgment (Matt. 3:7-12; Luke 3:7-17)
  - a. He preached on the wrath of God
  - b. He preached on the fire of judgment
3. He preached Christ (Vs. 7-8)
  - a. The exaltation of Christ (Vs. 7a)
    - i. "latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy..." = the shoes worn at that time where typically a sandal with a leather sole fastened in place with a leather thong or strap. The task of loosing the strap and removing the shoe was given to slaves. John places himself below the level of a slave, so high was his view of Christ. John had a strong sense of unworthiness. Christ declared that John was the greatest man to be born of women (Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28) yet he had a humble view of himself.
    - ii. The preaching God blesses to the salvation of souls is preaching that is Christ-centered and Christ-saturated.
    - iii. The men God uses those who make much of Christ and little of self. Refer John 3:26-31. In effect John says, "Christ needs to be made more of, I need to be made less of." (Vs. 30)
    - iv. When the self-life becomes intertwined and intermingled with our service for Christ, we become unusable. The 21<sup>st</sup> century obsession with all things 'self' is the complete antithesis to the heart and spirit of N.T. Christianity and the call to a crucified life. We are called to deny self and to die to self; not to self-obsession and self-promotion (i.e. the social media culture)
  - b. The salvation of Christ (Vs. 8)
    - i. Spiritual re-birth of Christ (baptism of the Holy Spirit) – John's baptism was a symbol of the spiritual baptism by Jesus (See 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3-4). His was ceremonial; Christ's was supernatural.
    - ii. Sacrifice of Christ – John 1:29 "*The next day John seeth*

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*Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.***” (also Vs. 36)

### C. The Sway (power) of His Preaching (Vs. 5)

## IV. The Practice of the Forerunner (Vs. 4a & 5)

### A. The Requirement for baptism – “baptism of repentance”

1. “of repentance” = a baptism arising out of repentance; a public declaration of their repentance; a baptism connected with the repentance of the individual.
2. ‘for’ = in this context has the idea of “because of” or “on account of” rather than “in order that”. Same word translated ‘because’ in Matt. 12:41. Remission of sins not the result of baptism but the occasion of it.
3. “If heaven could be secured by submitting to a rite, ‘multitudes’ would come for it, but the crowd thins quickly when the administrator of the rite becomes the vehement preacher of repentance.” (Maclaren)

### B. The Review for baptism – “fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8)

1. ‘meet’ = suitable, proper, fitting, worthy.
2. The Apostle Paul required the same thing – *“But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”* (Acts 26:20)
3. Note: John and Paul are not calling on them to reform their own lives through works but rather are looking for the **result** of repentance which is a changed life (2. Cor. 5:17) wrought in us by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.
4. John examined candidates for his baptism for genuine fruit of repentance, not just a verbal confession. Read Luke 3:7-14 where John addresses four distinct groups in society, requiring evidence from each of their repentance.
5. Religious leaders refused John’s baptism as they were merely interested in outward form and ceremony rather than genuine repentance of the heart (Luke 7:29-30)
6. Note: We would do well to follow this precedent and look for fruit of salvation before administering the ordinance of baptism.

### C. The Revealing before baptism – “confessing their sins”

## Conclusion:

1. Have you repented of your sin and turned in faith to Christ for salvation?
2. How much do we exalt the Lord Jesus in our service for Him? Is it all about Christ or all about us?