

“John the Baptist”
Mark 1:1-6
(Preached at Trinity, March 25, 2009)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last time I began a series of sermons from the Gospel of Mark. As I pointed out, Mark’s Gospel is the shortest of the four Gospels. It is compressed, tightly woven into a powerful account of the life of our Lord. Everything is fast paced and vivid.
2. This is one of the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This means these three Gospels are very similar in their content.

The term “synoptic” comes from two Greek words: σὺν (syn = together) and ὄψις (opsis = seeing) to indicate that the contents of these three Gospels can be viewed side-by-side

By viewing them side-by-side for a full picture of the Life of Christ.
3. Because Mark is one of the synoptic Gospels my method of preaching through this book will include material from both Matthew and Luke. While I will include this other material our focus will be distinctly upon Mark.
4. Tonight I want to direct your attention to the first six verses.

Mark begins: “As it was written in the prophets”

 - A. It had been over 300 years since there had been any prophetic activity.

(recount the blessing of the New Covenant believer – we have God’s completed revelation which is read under the illuminating grace of the the Holy Spirit who dwells in us)

It was a dark time. God had removed Himself from His people.
They continued the Temple activity but it was just empty ritual.
 - B. Now suddenly John the Baptist enters to prepare the way for Christ the King.
 1. The KJV says: “As it was written in the prophets”
Most modern translations specify: As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,
 2. Mark actually quotes from two OT passages:

Verse 2 is a quote from Malachi
Malachi 3:1 – “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me”

Verse 3 is a quote from Isaiah:
Isaiah 40:3 – “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”
 - C. Malachi also prophesied of the coming of John in Chapter 4
Malachi 4:5 – “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:”
 1. There was a widespread expectation in Judaism that Elijah would return to announce the Messiah’s Kingdom in the final day. John was the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy.

2. Jesus declared this:
Mark 9:11-13 – “And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? ¹² And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. ¹³ But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.”
5. “The voice of one crying in the wilderness”
 He came preaching in the wilderness – a perfect description of the spiritual condition of the world around him.
 - A. A desert is a place void of fertility – the lost man bears no fruit
 A desert is a place without paths; void of direction
 A desert is a dry place – only Christ can provide the living waters
 - B. John came proclaiming that the Omnipotent, Sovereign Lord was about to assert Himself both for salvation and for damnation.
Isaiah 9:2 – “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”
6. Tonight I want to set this man, John the Baptist, before you.
- I. The Man John
 - A. We have limited information on his life
 1. John was a young man
 Remember, he wasn’t but a little older than Jesus – at this point he was not much over 30 years old.
 2. We don’t know much about his life up to this point. We know his parents were Zacharias and Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin. We know that Elizabeth conceived miraculously well after her child bearing years. Luke records that while John was still in his mother’s womb Mary entered into their home and John leaped in his mother’s womb.
Luke 1:41 – “And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.”
 3. Luke’s Gospel makes it clear that John received his calling directly from God
Luke 3:2 – “. . . the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.”
 - B. He received a great commendation from Jesus
Matthew 11:11 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.
 Why was John considered great?
 1. First, John was greater because of his calling. He was not only a prophet, but arrived on the scene in fulfillment of prophecy as one who would prepare the way for Christ.

2. Second, John was great because of the manner in which he fulfilled his task.
 - a. He had singleness of purpose – to point men to Christ. He announced the arrival of the Messiah directing all attention to the Savior – none to himself.
 - b. He was not encumbered by the things of this world. He sought something greater.
 - c. He was great because of his message. He emphasized the necessity of repentance as the only way to enter into the Messiah’s kingdom. He knew that the Kingdom of Christ would be a kingdom of holiness.
Matthew 3:1 – “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.”
 - d. Finally, he was great in his humility - Jesus consistently equated true greatness with humility.
Mark 9:35 – “And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, *the same* shall be last of all, and servant of all.”
1 Peter 5:5-6 – “Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. ⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:”

II. John’s Manner

- A. **Verse 6** - Everything about John was strange: his sudden emergence, his manner of dress, his choice of food, his powerful preaching, and his baptizing.
 1. His garment was made from camel’s hair – a long flowing robe woven from the hair of a camel with a leather belt around the waist – simple clothing
 2. His food was locusts and wild honey
 3. The point in mentioning his clothing and diet was to stress his simple lifestyle. His life was free from self-indulgence, free from material distractions, free from frivolous behavior and carelessness which so characterize those heading for their doom. John the Baptist was concerned about one thing – pointing the way to Christ and His approaching Kingdom.
 4. Every servant of God should demonstrate that they are not tied to this world. This world is not our home. This world is not our reward. The most faithful and holy of the saints have been those who looked to heaven.
 5. John’s clothing also served to demonstrate the nature of the King of whom he was preparing the way. The one preparing the way for a king should have been clothed in royal apparel. But Jesus came in poverty and humility. John also came in poverty and humility.
Matthew 10:24 – “The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord.”

- B. Notice also that John came preaching – remember Mark’s Gospel is compressed
Mark 1:4 – “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”
1. From the beginning the message of entrance into the kingdom has come through preaching
 2. This is God’s method – and John made it his chief business
- C. John fearlessly denounced evil wherever it was to be found
1. The Bible consistently teaches the need for boldness among God’s people. We must not fear men.
 2. When Herod the king sinned by entering into an unlawful marriage John boldly rebuked him – imagine rebuking the king.
 3. John did not hesitate to condemn the religious leaders of his day whose religion had become nothing more than ritualistic formalism
Matthew 3:7 – “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?”
 4. He commanded the crowds to repent
 5. Without concern for his personal safety he boldly preached the message of repentance – to the king, to the religious leaders, to all who needed to receive Christ, the Lamb of God
- D. John would ultimately lose his life due to his bold preaching
 Jesus would say of John
Matthew 11:11 – “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: . . .”

III. Let’s look more closely at John’s Message

- A. John arrived as a herald – **Verses 1-2**
1. When a king was about to arrive he was preceded by a herald. The herald’s function is to prepare the way of the king and to announce his arrival.
 2. John came to announce the arrival of Christ and prepare the way for His Kingdom – a kingdom of righteousness.
- B. John’s message was blunt and to the point,
Matthew 3:2 – “. . . Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
1. It was not a flattering message but one that called upon his hearers to look within and turn from their wicked ways. In order to escape punishment and receive the blessings of the King it was necessary for men to undergo a radical change.
 2. Like Paul, he did not trust in soft words to win the favor of men
1 Corinthians 2:4-5 – “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: ⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”
 3. John the Baptist came preparing the way for the King. His message was submit to this King or be consumed by His wrath.
 This is our message
Mark 16:15-16 – “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

- C. **Verse 4** – John’s message of repentance
Mark 1:4 – “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”
1. The word in the original *μετάνοια* – The word points to a change of mind – it implies the radical change of life brought by conversion.
 2. Entrance into this kingdom demands this radical change. It demands a new birth which is the result of God's sovereign grace.
This conversion is a change in the entire being: emotions, mind, and will.
 3. Notice the multitudes were coming confessing their sins – but their confession had to come from a change of heart.
Verse 5 – “and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.”
 Merely confessing their sins was not sufficient. The Kingdom of Christ demanded a radical change of life. Remember what John said to the scribes.
Matthew 3:7-8 – “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? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”
- D. John is commanding his hearers to be converted
1. He was stressing that they were in great danger. The Kingdom of Christ demands that all men surrender and submit
 2. God calls upon every man to repent and has the duty to repent and will be held accountable. But no man can repent unless God changes him.
The natural man is hardened against such preaching
 3. Salvation demands a supernatural work of God – a miracle
 - a. Men do not hear because they cannot hear
It is contrary to their nature – a tiger cannot eat straw
 - b. It isn’t that they can’t hear the words spoken – they just cannot understand them..
1 Corinthians 2:14 – “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”
- E. Although John baptized so many he was called “the Baptist” he did not place any saving significance upon the act itself. His focus was upon the change of life.
- IV. What was John’s Baptism?
- A. It was customary for the Jews to baptize proselytes
 1. When a Gentile was brought in he was baptized symbolizing his cleansing
 2. Since Gentiles were considered unclean they needed this ceremonial cleansing.
 - B. John’s baptism was not the same as Jewish baptism. His baptism symbolized the cleansing of repentance – It was not the same thing as Christian baptism
 1. John’s Baptism was a baptism of repentance that pointed towards Christ
 2. Baptism in the name of Jesus looks back to His accomplished work

- C. Many who received John's Baptism were later re-baptized in the name of Jesus
See Acts 19:1-5

Conclusion:

1. John had but one ultimate goal: to direct all attention towards Christ
John 1:29 – “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”
John 3:30 – “He must increase, but I *must* decrease.”
2. That too should be our goal. To focus our entire life upon Christ. To live that others might see Christ.