

A Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness

Mark 1:2-8

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 21, 2024

Good morning, everyone. Before we begin, I'd like to go to the Lord in a word of prayer. So we can get our hearts in the right place to hear the Word of God, would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, Lord, we want to come to You this morning and really just say, Thank You for the Word of God, the inspired, inerrant, perfect word that has been given to us by the Holy Spirit. The reason we say this Father is because the story we're going to talk about this morning is really so bizarre that no one could have come up with this but You. You would send a man like John the Baptist to announce the greatest person who has ever walked the face of the earth. We wouldn't have done it this way. Our plans are not Your plans; we would have had a totally different method. And yet You're God. Your ways are perfect. Everything You choose is right. And so Father, I just come to You this morning, thanking You for putting this story, this true story in the Word of God. May our hearts change as we hear it, may our priorities change. And we pray this in the name of our Saviour, the One who did come, Jesus Christ, amen.

This morning, I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark. If you have a copy of the Word of God, please turn to the Gospel of Mark for the second time today. Second time in a row. We are starting our series in this book, as I told you last time, it's the shortest gospel in the Bible. It's also the busiest; there's a lot of information in here. And it's the most unusual, one of the most unusual anyway, because it doesn't start with Jesus' birth or His genealogy like Matthew and Luke do. It starts by telling us about a very special person and that is John the Baptist.

Just to introduce him to you if you've not familiar with him. Several years ago, I had the privilege of listening to Josh Buice. He's the founder of G3 ministries. He was speaking at the Master's Seminary about the time he went on a reformation tour in Germany. To see all the hotspots there. He got to see where Luther nailed the 95 theses on the door in Wittenberg. He got to see where he preached some of his sermons, the castle where he translated the New Testament. But he said while he was there, he was in an art museum that was kind of boring at first. There wasn't much to look at; pastors and art museums don't exactly go well together. Until he came into one room that had a massive drawing in it that stopped him dead in his tracks. It was several feet tall, several feet wide, it filled up the entire room; and on it was a picture of a little girl in a nice dress with a sweet smile, very happy; and in her arm she was holding the severed head of John the Baptist. Josh Buice said that the contrast between that girl's sweet smile and that mutilated skull was enough to make your skin crawl because it raised the question why? What on earth did you do to make her so mad that she would do that? And I think the answer is found in one word you see in the passage that we're looking at this morning, and that is the word "repent."

If you look in the Bible here in the Gospel of Mark, Mark 1:4 says John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of what? Repentance. In other words, he came to tell people that they could not live however they wanted to and be saved. He came to say you can't do whatever you want and go to heaven; you need to change. And that little girl didn't like that. It made her so angry that she killed him or rather, she had him killed along with the help of Herod and her mother and so forth. And I mention that because this morning, we are in our second sermon in the Gospel of Mark, which is all about Christ, and the fact that He came to save sinners. But it starts off with John the Baptist to tell you that the salvation Christ brings is not cheap. It comes at a cost. You have to repent. In order to receive this, you can't just please God by being religious. That little girl in that painting was religious; everybody was religious at that time. And it wasn't enough to save her; there had to be a renewal of the heart. The reason John says this is because he's going to be the forerunner of the Messiah. It's his job to tell the world that Jesus Christ was coming. But he didn't do it with the feelgood message. He told the people to *metanoia* in Greek which means to turn. The people of Israel we're going this way; John told them to turn that way. They were heading in one direction with their lust and their lies. He said, "You need to stop and twist, turn, change. Because if there's one thing religious people forget, it's this: God doesn't care if you're religious, if you're living in sin. There needs to be a time when you put an end to it.

This is important to remember because by all accounts, listen, friends, you live in a religious town, don't you? There are churches everywhere. And many of them think they're saved simply because they're Dutch. Or they think they're saved because they're Mennonite. Their parents were Mennonite, grandparents were Mennonite, great-grandparents were Mennonite. If you were in Tennessee, it'd be because you're Baptist. And listen, you may be Baptist or Mennonite, but that doesn't get you into heaven, just makes you Baptist.

If you want to go to heaven, there has to be a work of God inside your soul. Has anyone ever told you that before? Have you ever heard that to go to heaven, God has to do something in here? You have to repent. I'm not talking to the people out there. I'm talking to the people in here. And I'm not saying that's all the drunks and the drug users and all the terrible stuff going on. I'm saying it to the one sitting in here. Grace Fellowship Church, you have to repent to be saved. Elders, deacons, and ushers, you have to repent. If you haven't, come talk to me. Sound team, worship team, young lady in the pew, old man in the corner, teenagers who have grown up in this congregation your entire lives, it doesn't matter. If you want to be right with God, you see yourself the way He does, as a sinner and you turn from it.

You say, "That's a hard message, Pastor Jeremy." It is. That's offensive. I know, John the Baptist lost his head over it. This is very offensive stuff to our flesh. But I have to say it this way because that's what he did. John is going to tell the Jews, the most spiritual people on the planet, that they have to do this if they want to be converted. And if he said that to them, he would say to us. Listen, if John the Baptist was in this room right here, and he preached to you, some of you might want to cut his head off. He was that kind of guy. He was the least seeker sensitive person on earth.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, I wanted to give you maybe a softer introduction, but there's no way to soften the blow with this guy. He hits you like a ton of bricks. Let's talk about that. This morning, we're gonna look at four things the Gospel of Mark tells you about John the Baptist. So just to get us started here, this is our outline: four things we're going to learn about John the Baptist.

The first one is that this guy was prophesied about in the Old Testament. So the first thing Mark tells us about John the Baptist, this extraordinary person, is that he was talked about in the Old Testament, which means he doesn't appear out of nowhere. He was mentioned long ago.

If you look in your Bibles, in verse one of the gospel of Mark, it says, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah, the prophet." And you can just stop there, because if you notice, Mark begins by quoting the Old Testament. And the reason he does that is because he's writing to Jews, people who had grown up with the Old Testament. And what he's doing is he's reminding them that what I'm about to say is not unusual. You've heard it before in the synagogues, in the temple, that a foreigner would precede the Messiah.

If you want to write these verses down in order to do this, he quotes from two passages: Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, but he only mentions Isaiah's name because he's the greater of the two prophets. And that was a very common practice at the time. If the Jews were quoting several things, they would put the greatest prophet out there only. And he starts off here by saying, "Behold, I will send my messenger ahead of you, [Christ,] who will prepare your way."

Now, the word "messenger", this is a good term for John, comes from a Greek word that means envoy. It refers to someone who was commissioned to go ahead of the king and announce his arrival. Whenever a king showed up somewhere in the ancient world, we don't really have this in our country, but it was a big deal. So you wouldn't just come in unannounced. He would send a messenger of the court to show up early and go into the town square, and stand up on a pillar and say, "Here ye, hear ye, the king is coming. Listen up, listen up. The Lord of your country is on the way. Get ready, put your house in order." That's what John would do for Christ.

Not only that, but the end of the verse says that he would prepare the way. That means he would fix the roads, not just when it snowed. The roads in the first century were generally pretty bad. They had potholes and debris in them, they were crooked, they went this way, and that all over the place. And so to give the king safe passage, it was a messenger's job not just to announce the king coming, but to go out ahead of time with a team of slaves and deal with that problem. And he would repair the potholes by filling them in. And he would straighten out the roads by making them do this. And that was part of John's assignment as well. He would be the one who would tell the people of Israel to stop getting distracted with their sin and fix their eyes straight on your way The King is coming.

And I want you to notice in your Bibles where he does this, this is very interesting. I spent a lot of time on this this week. Verse three says he wouldn't do it in a town or city or palace, or a capitol, or a mansion. He would be the voice of one crying in the what? Wilderness. Now that doesn't refer to Hope, that was a joke, a bad joke, I guess. But if you want to write this verse down, John 1:28 says, this ministry would occur in a place called Bethany beyond the Jordan. But that place was so remote scholars don't even know where it was. The early church father Origen said he tried to find it in the third century but couldn't. But they all agree it was in the area around the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is a body of water 20 miles east of Jerusalem, that was 25 miles long and 11 miles wide, way bigger than the Sea of Galilee. It's called dead because nothing grows in it. It's 34% salt, saltier than the ocean. If you're in the Dead Sea, you guys have seen pictures, you float. You can't really sink in it. It's so heavy with salt. The surrounding air is also, get this, 95 degrees Fahrenheit annually. It's hotter than the Sahara, making it really almost uninhabitable. If you've ever visited there, it looks like the surface of the moon. And there's only one reason why you would have chosen to live around that area at this time. And that is because something was wrong in your life. You didn't move to the Dead Sea because you wanted to. You did it because you couldn't help it. You were poor or drunk or derelict. You went out there because you were broke or impoverished or destitute.

And this prophecy is implying or alluding to the fact that that's why God sent John the Baptist there because that's the kind of person the Messiah is going to save. God didn't send Him to look for those who have it all together. And He didn't put Him in a place so He could find those who are righteous in their own eyes. If He was, He would have sent them to Jerusalem to talk to the Pharisees. Instead, He only sent Him to those who are humble.

In fact, if you want a little background about this, to give you some perspective, the Pharisees actually had a word to describe the people who lived in the wilderness. They call them the *Am ha'aretz*, which means people of the land. In other words, people who are dirty, smelly, stinky. And while they, the Pharisees were the *Am ha'sefer*, people of the book, who are godly, and holy and clean. You see we're up here, you're down here, which is why Pharisees never went out there. The wilderness was 20 miles from Jerusalem, they never ministered there, never preached there, avoided it at all costs. But God flips the whole thing on its head. And He says, "I'm sending my messenger to them, not you."

And let me just stop here and say that when you're looking at the story of John the Baptist, just the environment of it is shocking. And I mean, that's not what you would expect to read in the Bible. God's about to send the Messiah. He's about to give Israel the one they've been waiting for all these years, the prophets have been talking about Him, the people have been talking about Him, they're anxiously waiting and where does He send him? In the middle of nowhere. Where does He put him? In the wilderness? Where would you send him? You would put him in a palace, you would put him in the temple with all the glamour of that place. But God sends him here to remind you that God is not interested in the things that we are. He just wants to find those who are broken in heart. As you're going to find in a moment, the people in the wilderness didn't have a lot going for them, but they were broken.

They ate locusts and wild honey; how would you like to hang out with those people? They wore camel's hair in the sun, but that was a good thing because it put them in the right place to hear the gospel. And this is why God sent the Pharisees to them, so the Pharisees can learn the lesson. Because as the Pharisees or the people in Jerusalem would go sit in the wilderness with the poor and drunks and derelicts and as they would listen to John with the broken and impoverished, it would remind them of the fact that they're no better. My spiritual condition is just as bad as those people's because John said the same thing to everybody. You need to repent. Whether you're drunk or not, you need to repent. Whether you're a Pharisee or not, you need to repent. Whether you grew up in the synagogue, grew up in the temple, grew up holy in your own eyes, repent. Because you all have the same problem, it's your sin.

And to be honest, I think we've got to go back to that in the beginning of Mark because we have a tendency to think like the Pharisees, don't we? Anybody in here have a habit of dividing the world into two people? Us and them. And we think God has a message for us and that is good job. Way to go. And He has a message for them. Bad job, repent, sinner. Listen, friends, we're all sinners in the eyes of God. You may be saved by grace, but that's the point. You're saved by grace. I mean, how many lies have you told? Even if you grew up in a church, how many wicked thoughts have gone into your head? As someone who's now a Christian, that means you belong in the category with all the worldly people were it not for the mercy of God. And the only thing that keeps you from remembering that is your pride. Don't buy the lie that you're saved because you go to church. God sent this messenger into the wilderness to remind us of that.

By the way, my wife and I have visited that part of Israel before when we went on our trip about 15 years ago, and I couldn't wait to get out of there. When you're traveling around the Dead Sea, I mean, you're just thinking the whole time who would ever want to go here? There's nothing out there, dirt and rocks and snakes, but it's a great illustration of redemption. If you want to be saved, you've got to be desperate. You've got to be a broken person. That's what John was going to tell us.

And it brings it to the next thing Mark tells us about this man, and that is that he baptized. Not only was he prophesied about, but he's also the first person in the Bible that you're going to learn about who baptizes anybody. We baptize so much we don't even think about it today. It's such a common thing in the Christian life now. Back then it wasn't. As the crowds came and repented of their sin, John immersed them in water.

And if you notice, Mark calls him something interesting in verse four. This is where his name pops up. He calls him, John the Baptist, not John the Southern Baptist, or John the Missionary Baptist, although he does dress like some Missionary Baptists I knew growing up. If you've ever met those people, you know what I'm talking about. If you're a translator, literally, it really means John the Baptizer. There's a lot of Johns in the first century: John, the apostles, John Mark. But in order to distinguish this man from them, they call him John, the one who does this in water. Verse four says he appeared in the wilderness,

preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And this is John's method of ministry is what he's saying. He would preach and then baptize, preach and baptize, preach and baptize. Not a lot of water out there, but there was the Dead Sea, you wouldn't want to baptize anybody in that. But there was the Jordan river that ran through there. And that's where he was doing it. All those who repented.

And the way this phrase in verse four is written, it's a little bit confusing, but let me say it's not intended to say John baptized people so they would repent. Nobody did that in the Bible. He didn't place them in the water to coerce them. He's baptizing them after the repentance has taken place. Because as these Jews hear the message that he's preaching, and feel convicted over it, John tells them to make a confession of their faith in Christ, by undergoing this ceremony. Baptism is an outward thing. Repentance is an inward thing. When the inward thing takes place, you express it outwardly this way.

Now, that sounds pretty straightforward, but if you put yourself in the context of where it was said, it kind of wasn't. Because remember, these people are Jews. They're not Christians yet; the church hasn't begun. So this was a custom they were familiar with, but not the way we would think of it. The Jews would baptize themselves before making a sacrifice in the temple. If you were to go to Israel today, and you would go to Jerusalem, you would see the first century streets where they've excavated and below that farther down in the ground, they had some caves down there. And they would, what they would do is they would go and immerse themselves in the water, clean themselves off, change clothes, go get their sacrifice, and go up and give it to the priests. The temple was way up at a very high location. Baptistries or caves are way down there. But there was only one time when the Jews would let someone else baptize you, they were baptizing themselves, just going by yourself, dunk, come out. There's only one time when someone else would do it, and that is if a Gentile wanted to become Jewish. If they did that, the Jews had a whole system of steps to take, which culminated with the rabbi telling you to go down one side of a cave, in order to be immersed in water by him. You didn't do it yourself, the rabbi did it. And then when you came out, they said, "You are a child of God now." You went down a child of the devil, you came out a child of Yahweh, died to the old way of life, born again to the new. But if you're remembering all this, and looking back in Mark 1, what is baffling about John's behavior, is that he's baptizing who? Jews. Not baptizing Gentiles. He's doing this to the people of Israel to say you need it too. You're so used to the Gentiles being the lost ones. And the people outside of Israel being condemned. You're condemned as well if you don't repent.

It seems like it would have turned them off, but if you look in verse five, it doesn't. Because verse five says all the country of Judea was going out to him and all the people of Jerusalem, which is another way of saying, Jerusalem, remember is 20 miles away. It's about a day's walk. It's a rough day's walk. Because Jerusalem sits over 1,000 feet above sea level. The Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth. It's 1,300 feet below sea level. They're doing this the whole way. And then they're doing that the whole way back, but they came. So many came that you couldn't even count them all is the idea of this to undergo this ceremony. This was a revival. God was doing a work among them.



But let me say a few more words about what is taking place here. The word baptism here, it comes from a Greek word that means to immerse something. That's what John's doing. Some translations could be rendered to drown. The idea is that John is not baptizing these people with a little bit of water, he's doing it with a lot. He's plunging them over their heads in the Jordan River, to symbolize the full commitment they're making to the Lord Jesus Christ. I know some people say today that the mode of baptism doesn't matter very much, whether you do it like this or not, but I really think it does. Because when you sprinkle someone, it doesn't convey this idea. And when you do this over their heads, it's not illustrating the concept of a total surrendering to Christ. But immersion does. I don't know about you, but when I see someone being immersed, it looks to me like they're going into a grave; and when I see them doing this, it's like, they're dying to their old way of life, and they're coming up to a new way of life. That's what John is communicating to the Jews here. That's what it looks like to repent. When you repent, you're taking your sins and killing them at the cross. And when you turn away, like we're talking about, you're putting them in the grave with Christ, and letting them die.

John would not be the only one to do this in the Bible, by the way. Others would baptize as well. The disciples of Christ would do it. Peter and Paul would do it. Philip would do it, the early church in Ephesus, and Corinth did it. But the method was always the same. And leads me to ask, have you ever done this before as a Christian? Have you ever been baptized as a way to express your personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? I'm not asking you if you've been baptized to be placed into a covenant, or to express someone else's faith in Christ. The Jews had a ceremony for that it was called circumcision. They would circumcise someone to put them in the Old Covenant. This is different from that. In this ceremony, a believer gives his testimony of repentance. And he stands up here while everyone symbolically watches him die. It takes it to another level. Have you ever experienced that before? If not, you need to. It's important.

The reason I'm making a big deal of this is because you've got to keep in mind the background here. John is telling these Jews, your faith must be a personal thing. He's trying to take people who are steeped in their parents' faith, steeped in their parents' religion, steeped in their parents' covenant and telling them that's not enough. You have to make it your own. You need to believe; you need to repent. You need to come to the place where you trust Christ yourself, or else it's all for nothing. This was the whole issue with the Jewish religion. They were going through the motions. If you asked a Jew, "Why are you saved?" They would say, "Because I'm Jewish." "Why are you going to heaven?" "It's because I'm Hebrew. My parents were Hebrews, my grandparents were Hebrew." John is saying, "No, you're not. You have to be born again." There needs to be a miracle of God inside your soul. And baptism is supposed to reflect that miracle.

Let me also add to this as a point of shepherding. If you're wrestling with this issue, don't feel bad about that. We've all been there. I bet if we went around this room and asked our people, how many of you have struggled with the issue of baptism, I think just about everybody's hand would go up. Because this is a religious town. And I've talked to people in our church who have been baptized multiple times,

some three or four, maybe even five times because it's so confusing. They can't figure out when was I saved. We can show grace in that. We can be patient with each other. But I would also say you don't want to stay in that same place forever. You want to come out of that because this is an issue of obedience.

In Matthew 28 Jesus told us to go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and Son and Holy Spirit. And there's three commands in that passage. Go. Make disciples. Baptize, and it's in that order. You don't baptize them before they're a disciple. You do it afterwards.

And I want to say more about that, but I'm going to move on to the next point. I will say I'm going to be in the Fireside Room after church if anybody would like to talk some more about that. I would love to answer any questions you have about baptism. It's very important. I think it's important for you as a Christian to consider this.

It brings us to one another thing that Mark tells us about John. He's prophesied about. He baptizes. He also has an unusual appearance. Got to talk about this. A third thing about John is that he had an unusual appearance.

If you've ever studied John the Baptist, you'll know there was something strange about this guy. He's not what you would expect to think of a preacher. He dressed like a Bedouin, a nomad in the desert. Verse six says he was clothed with camel's hair, which means he had a long flowing robe made out of that stuff, like a big loose jacket. It would have been coarse and itchy in the hot sun. If you think of a woolen jacket, it might be a little similar to that. Maybe a burlap jacket. Says he had a leather belt around his waist, and that sounds very normal, but it wasn't because this word really indicates a sash, not a belt like we would wear. But this was something that the men in the first century had to keep their long flowing robes from flapping in the wind, they would hold them up with some kind of band that was colorful and shiny and typically made out of silk it was it was done in a way to indicate your wealth. John has a sash made out of rawhide, nothing wealthy about this. It was ugly, nothing pretty. And it gets even worse when it says that he ate locusts and wild honey. This was not the kind of guy you would want to invite to a picnic, but this was his diet.

And I read some fascinating stuff about this this week; I want to share with you because it pointed out that there wasn't much that grew near the Dead Sea. So if you wanted to eat, you weren't going to have sheep, you weren't going to have cattle, and you weren't going to go fishing. Nobody fishes in the Dead Sea because it's dead. Nothing in there. Twenty miles of water, nothing in there. So what they would do to keep from starving, is they would go out at night and find where the bugs were and herd them into a net and take them home. Why are you looking at me like that? This is biblical. If you want to be judgmental, Canadians eat poutine; just make a comparison. I like poutine; I think it's wonderful. But to prepare the locusts, what they would do is they would put them on the table, kill them somehow wash them off and remove their legs. Then roll the bodies in flour with a little bit of salt before cooking them



in boiling water. And then eat them like French fries. Leviticus 11 says that this was permissible according to the law.

There were three types of insects the Jews could eat, including crickets, and grasshoppers and locusts, so John was well within his rights as a Jew to do this; but it still indicates the fact that this guy was just poor. You don't eat locusts if you have other options. You don't wear camel's hair if you can shop at Kohl's. I mean, everything about this guy just comes from the desert. His robe is from the desert. His belt is from the desert. His food is out there.

But even so it really makes you wonder why did God do this? Well, there's a couple of answers to that scholars have come up with. Some believe John did this because he was a Nazirite. Luke 1:15 says the angel Gabriel showed up to his father, Zacharias in the temple and told him he would have a son, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord and He will drink no wine or liquor, which sounds reminiscent of a Nazirite vow in Numbers 6, where you would separate yourself under certain things for God like alcohol. And so one thing scholars speculated is that John acted this way because he was supposed to keep all of that as a Nazirite. We don't really know that. The Bible doesn't come out and say it.

Another idea, I think might even be better than that is that he dressed this way and acted this way as a rebuke to the leaders of Israel for their worldliness. As you're going to find out when you get farther into Mark's gospel, the leaders of the Jews were very worldly people. Greedy. Proud. Herod was so bad, he murdered John. And John does this as a way to scold them for that because this is a guy that's living for one thing, and one thing only, and that's the glory of God, do you see that? He exists for Christ. He doesn't live for money; he has no money. He's not living for power. There's none of that going on here. The only thing that had any meaning for the world for him was the coming of the Messiah. This is what makes his ministry so remarkable.

Nobody would have looked at John and said, "He looks cool. I want to follow that guy." Nobody would have heard about him and said, "I like his clothes. Let's follow him on YouTube." He's a rebuke to a lot of churches today. I mean, so many ministries are trying to win people over with that kind of stuff. I heard of one church in the states that was giving away iPads to the first 500 people that came through their doors. What would John the Baptist do with an iPad? There's no outlets in the desert. That's not what ministry is about. And to be honest, of all the things that we're talking about this morning, this one really had a lot of significance to me. I was out at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, when the seeker sensitive movement was in full swing. You guys remember that? Where people were trying to get people through the doors with iPads, and they were trying to get them in with their clothes. Rick Warren was a name that was thrown out there a lot. He would wear Hawaiian shirts and try to be cool to influence people to get saved that type of thing.

And I remember John MacArthur talking about that. And in preaching on this passage and telling us that John the Baptist was the total opposite of a seeker sensitive pastor. Everything about him was culturally

off. He doesn't fit in anywhere. You can put him in any room, he's going to stand out. And yet, Matthew 11, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, among those born of women, there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist." Of all the preachers out there, of all the prophets, there's ever been, Jesus said this is the best. And it shows you that God just doesn't prioritize the things that we do. We look at some men and say, "That guy is cool." God doesn't do that. And we look at some churches and say they've got it all together because their parking lot is big, and their numbers are growing, and their budget is high. That's not the way with Yahweh. There are churches today that would never let a man like John the Baptist through their doors. And there are congregations and Christians that would never invite him to speak at a conference. Shame on them. The Lord said, "This is my guy." Because God just cares about the things of the heart.

That brings us to one more thing that Mark tells us about John here. Just to review these other ones, the first one is that he's prophesied about. Second, he baptizes and baptized. And then thirdly, he has an unusual appearance. And that's an understatement. Nobody who eats locusts is usual. It was weird in that world, but it's a reminder that the Lord still uses him. Look, if you ever think because I'm weird, God can't use me, you're wrong. And if you think because my hair or clothes or diet is off, I can't do anything for the kingdom of God, read about this man. No one did anything like he did.

And it brings you to one more thing Mark tells us about him, and that is that he pointed to the One who will baptize in the Spirit. The fourth thing Mark tells us about the ministry of John the Baptist is that he pointed to the One who will baptize in the Spirit. Which means he pointed to Christ as we've already mentioned, but he didn't just point to Christ in this passage. He tells us about the One who would come and immerse us in the third member of the Trinity.

If you look in verse seven, it says, "And he was preaching." Now, the word "preaching" here, it's in the continuous tense, which means John is preaching and preaching and preaching. He's doing it continually. And I want to point out that what follows in these verses is not the totality of John's message. It's just a summary. These are just some snippets of it. If you want to hear more of what John said, you can read in the Gospel of Luke. You can go back in Mark and hear about his words there. But here's just a condensed version. It says, "After me, one is coming," which means He's on the way, Jesus will be here soon; that was John's message. "And He's mightier than I because I'm not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals."

And that sounds kind of strange to our ears, but the Jews walked everywhere they went in sandals. Not because it was necessarily always warm in that world. It's just all they had. So when they would come to someone's house, their feet were dirty, especially in the rainy season. And it was the job of the lowest slave to wash them by getting down on his hands and knees and untying the laces of the sandals to start the process, slide them off, and then just begin to bathe them. That's what this is referring to. It was a humiliating job, ugly and embarrassing. And John says, "I'm not worthy of that privilege when it comes to Christ." John looked like a guy who would wash people's feet. But he says, "I'm not worthy of it."

And here's why because in the verse, "I baptize with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." The way that's written, it means He will immerse you in the Spirit, He will dunk you in the Spirit, He will plunge you in the Spirit from the top of your head to the soles of your feet, just like John has been doing this with people's bodies, the Messiah when He comes, will do that to people's souls.

Now, I don't have to go any further in this verse without saying right off the bat, you can tell that's a controversial subject today. If you've been in church very long, you'll know you don't have to go very far in Canada or the U.S. before you hear somebody say they got baptized in the Spirit. I got touched by the Spirit, so I started speaking in tongues or something like that. Some churches say that it happens to them every week, every Sunday, they show up, they get baptized in the Spirit. Some of you come from those churches, you'll know it does get a little bit repetitive. Well, let me tell you, that's not what John is referring to here because whereas the church in the book of Acts would speak in tongues. There's no evidence that's in his mind because the context for this is repentance. So what he's saying here is that when the Messiah comes, He will baptize you with someone who will do what I could never do. And that is to make you repent completely from the bottom of your heart. He will, the Spirit will reach inside of you touch you in the deepest place, and make you turn from your sin. John can't do that. I'll say, as a fellow as a preacher of the gospel, I can't do that. I can stand up here and talk till I'm blue in the face. I cannot make anyone repent. I wish I could. There's times I plead to God for that. I can't do it. But when Christ comes, and He gives the spirit on the day of Pentecost, everything is going to be different because He will, which is why John says, "He is mightier than I."

There's a comparison being made here. Thousand or maybe thousands, we don't know how many there were, but lots of people were coming to hear John and see his baptism. And John is making a contrast between his work and Christ's work. And he's saying whereas John baptizes you externally, Jesus will baptize you internally. And whereas John cleansed you off physically, Jesus will do it spiritually. John puts you in water. Christ will put you in the third part of the Godhead, the Spirit. And you can't get any greater than that. Remember, what baptism is, it's a drowning into something, touches every part of you. And the verse is reminding you, when the Messiah comes, He will do that with the presence of Yahweh.

And to be honest, when you read verse eight, at least when I read it, I got a lot of questions in my mind, what does this look like? I think a lot of us steer away from learning about the baptism of the Spirit because we don't want to be too charismatic and get into some of the wrong ideas that are out there. But when you look in the Scriptures, you find there's a lot of things the Spirit does that you need to be a Christian. For example, when it comes upon believers, the Spirit brings conviction of sins. Some of you were in church your entire life, you were never convicted of sin until the Spirit came on you. You listened to sermons; they didn't mean anything. You prayed; it was just a hollow noise coming out of your mouth. What changed that? It was the power of God. He also helps us in our weakness, so we can believe in Christ and respond in faith. Can't do that on your own either. He unites us to Christ, makes us one with Him, gives us His righteousness. A long list here, He'll seal us, call us, and comfort us. He fills

us, sanctifies us, and purifies us, and He gives us a new birth. Anybody here say, “I birthed myself?” You can't. The power of God does that. But the idea John is expressing is that all that comes with the arrival of the Messiah.

There are several Old Testament prophets that would talk about this, and they told us that when the Christ came, He would bring the Spirit with him to demonstrate that He would be a ruler unlike the world has ever seen before. He would do miracles, signs, wonders. And I think the greatest wonder He would do is this one. He would come into your heart and make you do this. It's a bigger miracle than speaking in tongues any day.

It brings us back to where we started the sermon. You remember what it was that got John in so much trouble? He told the people to do this. What was it that caused that little girl to want to kill him? John looked at people and he told them you can't live however you want to. There needs to be a change in you.

You have to repent, turn from your sins, which sounds simple, but it's not, is it? It seems so easy, the idea of it. But as many of you know, when you try to repent, it's just almost impossible sometimes. How do you do this, John? It's in my nature to sin. We drink iniquity like water as Job says. I wake up and I sin; I go to bed, and I sin. I sin for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. What's the answer? The answer is you need to call out to God and ask for the baptism of the Spirit. You need to pray, and He will give you victory. You can't do this on your own. How can you? You can't repent by yourself. What are you going to do? You're going to work harder? That won't work. Go to church more? That won't do it. There are churches full of people that have never repented. You need to ask the Lord to do a supernatural act inside your soul.

In fact, if you want to see why this is so important, in the context of what's been said here, I would encourage you to do something for me this morning, go home and try to stop sinning on your own. And then send me a text message around three o'clock and tell me how it's going. You can't. You get home. The spouse says something you don't like, and you blow up, don't you? Kids do something you don't want, and you lose your temper. It's just the way of man. But pray first and it changes everything. Cry out to God before you go through that door, and it will make you do this. That's the work of the Spirit. It's not a charismatic thing. It's Biblical. It's written right here in the pages of this book.

One commentator said, “The church without the Spirit is dead. There can be no life without the Life Giver. No understanding without His truth, no forgiveness without His grace, and no witness without His power. But it all goes back to Him.” And I would say this is a wonderful way to wrap things up this morning because I feel like I started out the sermon being hard on you. I basically went around the room and said, “You need to repent, you need to repent, and you need to do it.” But now I want to give you the good news. You don't have to do it alone. God's not asking you to repent by yourself, you have the Holy Spirit to help you, Amen. This is the Spirit that created the world. This is the Spirit that raised

Christ from the dead. This is the Spirit that did the miracles in the book of Acts: speaking in tongues, prophesying, healing. It's the same Spirit that inspired the Word of God. And if you have Him, you have all you need. I don't know what sins you're struggling with this morning. And I don't know what's going on in your heart, but it's not too much for Him. It's too much for you, but He can help you turn away from it.

The story is told of the time, a man visited an old business associate of his, and he brought him a gold watch. And he said, "You recognize this?" The man said, "I do. That's the watch somebody stole from me eight years ago." The man said, "I know. I stole it. I'm bringing it back." And the owner of the watch kind of was taken aback. And he said, "Why would you do that?" And the man said, "Because I got saved last night, and I wanted to bring it to you then, but it was too late, so I brought it first thing this morning."

Friends, what makes somebody want to do that? It's not science, not politics, not philosophy, not all the works of psychology. That's the power of God. Have you experienced that power this morning? You can if you call out to Him. And let me pray that we all would, and the Lord would help us repent.

Heavenly Father, we are blown away by what we've learned from the ministry of John the Baptist. There is only one thing in the universe that would explain how a man like this could have such an impression on such a hard-hearted people and that is Your power. And Lord, we need Your power this morning as a church. We need Your power as a town here in Chilliwack because there are so many hard-hearted people among us. We struggle with our own hard heartedness. And we need Your work to come in and break it up. Lord, would You do that this morning?

Father, for any of us here, young or old, would You help us turn from our sins, help us to repent of the act of thinking that there are two categories: us and them, and we're better. Lord, that's because we haven't studied our heart. Our heart is evil. We are wicked sinners. If anyone taught us that it's this man. But he also taught us what will help us to change.

Thank You for what we've studied today. Would You help us go now and live in light of it? And may we give our sins to You on the cross? And may You give us victory in Christ, through the Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.