

The Beginning of the Ministry of John

Looking into the Face of Jesus
The Life of Christ, 1: Pages 93-99

Outline: Lesson Plan 9

Introduction

- A. The texts for this lesson: Matthew 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 3:1–18
- B. Isaiah described the coming of John by revealing the character of His ministry (Isaiah 40:3–5; cf. Malachi 3:1; 4:5, 6). He was a voice crying:

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 40:3–5).

- C. Zacharias, the priest, was told that his son would be the one prophesied (Luke 1:17).
 - 1. Example: When a king traveled in those times, a crew of people would go before the king and work on the roads to ensure a smooth pathway.
 - 2. This is the imagery being used by Isaiah.
 - 3. When we last saw John, he was “in the deserts” (Luke 1:80).
 - 4. Matthew 3:4 explained how he wore rough clothing and ate locusts and wild honey.
 - 5. Now his purpose in the world began.

I. The Beginning of His Ministry

- A. The importance of John’s work
 - 1. Mark begins with John’s ministry. Mark 1:1 said it was “the beginning of the gospel.”
 - 2. Acts 1:21, 22 states the formal beginning of Jesus’ ministry starts with the baptism of John.
 - 3. The whole Jewish people had a misunderstanding of the purpose of Jesus’ life. John had the challenge of introducing the idea that the Messiah’s kingdom would be spiritual.
- B. His ministry started.
 - 1. Luke 3:2 says, “The word of God came to John.” This is when John knew it was time.
 - 2. This start date was so important that the Bible uses the following to denote the time:
 - a. Five political leaders and
 - b. Two religious leaders.
 - 3. “Repent” was the key word to his message (Matthew 3:2).
 - 4. What does it mean to repent? It means a change of mind and life.

5. He would explain who was to repent, what it meant, and what would happen if you did not.

II. The Message of His Ministry

- A. It was message of change.
 1. Matthew 3:8 describes it: "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."
 - a. This is a key verse to help you explain to others what repentance really means.
 - b. Repentance is not just being sorry.
 - c. Bible says, "Godly sorrow brings forth repentance."
 - d. Repentance brings about actions or fruits that differ from the life that you were living.
 2. He gave examples of the change expected.
 - a. Luke 3:11—quit being selfish and share.
 - b. Luke 3:13—he told the public officials to be honest.
 - c. Luke 3:14—he told those with power not to misuse it.
 - d. Mark 1:5—he called on people to confess their sins.
 - e. Matthew 3:7—he called those who did not confess a "brood of vipers" (snakes in the grass).
 3. Even with this strong message (maybe because of it), Mark 1:5 says he attracted "all the people of Jerusalem."

III. The Baptism of His Ministry

- A. John became known as the "the Baptist" (Matthew 3:1).
 1. Some claim his baptism was a Jewish ceremonial washing.
 2. There are too many differences in the ceremonial washings in Jewish times and John's baptism. Their purpose and administration were different.
- B. But one reason we know it was not ceremonial washings was because this became his vocation.
 1. If many others were doing it (if it was the same as ceremonial washings), John would not have been given such an identifying title.
 2. Some other considerations. . .
 - a. "Baptist" is a transliterated Greek word.
 - b. An ending "-tes" is added to the word "baptize."
 - c. Similar to "-tor" (cf. actor, doctor, etc.)
 - d. Baptist literally means "one who baptizes."
 - e. That is why you will hear many people call John, the "baptizer."
- C. John's baptism was one of immersion.
 1. The Greek word for baptism means, "to immerse."
 2. Luke 3:3 says he baptized in the Jordan River (cf. John 1:28; 3:23).
 3. We know also from the Greek word used that John's baptism was immersion.
 4. This thought goes with it. John 3:23 said he baptized in Aenon "because there was much water there."

5. John and Jesus came “up out of the water” (Mark 1:10).
- D. John’s baptism was “for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4).
- E. How was John’s baptism for the remission of sins without Christ’s death?
 1. The answer is seen in the fact that it anticipated Christ’s death.
 2. We must not forget his purpose—to prepare the hearts and minds for the Messiah.

IV. The Preparation of His Ministry

- A. John said, “He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals” (Matthew 3:11).
 1. Removing sandals was the work of a servant.
John was saying I’m not worthy to be His slave.
 2. Matthew 3:11 said, “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance. . . but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”
- B. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire?
 1. What was each? Were they the same thing?
 2. Remember, he was talking to two groups of people—receptive and unreceptive.
 3. The apostles were immersed with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.
 4. The ungodly will be immersed in fire on the Day of Judgment.

Conclusion:

- A. John had a purpose; He understood it and performed it according to God’s word.
- B. How about your purpose? How are you doing in preparing the way for the Lord’s return?