

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Preparing for the Unexpected” (from the Advent sermon series)

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Matthew, we read about the ministry and mission of John the Baptist, and his confrontation with the religious leaders of his day.
- In the first few verses we read about John the Baptist appearing in the wilderness of Judea and preaching of repentance, saying “...for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”
- In verses 3-6, John harkens to the words of the Prophet Isaiah (Isa 40:3) which speak of God’s coming to lead His people out of their exile (in this case, leading them out of sin’s exile).
 - We see John as a prophet, similar to Elijah in the Old Testament (2 Kings 1:8 and Mal 4:5-6) in appearance and in his mission is to prepare the way for the coming of the LORD. The people are going to John to be “baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”
- In verses 7-8, John calls out the Pharisees and Sadducees that had come to be baptized, either to observe what was happening or as a public show of faith. John calls them out as “brood of vipers,” most likely doubting their intentions for being there. A viper is known for its shrewdness and being a threatening presence in antiquity.
- In verses 9-10, John explains that the people should not think that they can rely on their descent from Abraham “as our ancestor” for their salvation. Many people of that time believed that Israel would be saved because of God’s choice of Israel in Abraham.
- In verses 11-12, John is baptizing with water and explains “the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Being baptized with water denotes the ritual customs used by the Jewish people and being baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire is meant to signify judgement and salvation.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- All four Gospels begin with the preaching of John the Baptist. The early church saw in John a harbinger to Jesus, like Elijah, preparing the way for the Messiah.
- The last two verses in the Old Testament (Malachi 4:5-6) predict John's ministry! A key part of the text is: "And he will *turn* the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers...". The word *turn* is key in the verse, and the Greek word for this is *Metanoia* which means a change of mind or heart.
 - *Metanoia* is not just about feeling sorry for our sin but turning away from sin and turning to God. This leads to a complete change in life!
- During the season of Advent, the preparation that is necessary for the coming of God begins with *repentance*!
- "U turns" are a pivotal part of our faith journey...we must allow ourselves to pivot in life in order to halt going in the wrong direction.
- John was an "old school" preacher and looked more like an Old Testament Prophet than a New Testament Priest and was always wiser than his years.
- John Wesley used to tell the early ministers of the Methodist church that their primary task is to save as many souls as you can and bring as many sinners as you can to repentance. In short, U-turns are mandatory for our salvation!
- In this text, Matthew notes that among those coming to see John were the Pharisees (lay leaders of the Synagogue) and the Sadducees (the clergy). These two groups were historically in competition with each other for the loyalty of the Jewish people. In John the Baptist, we see these two groups have a common enemy. John was not part of the "system." These two groups came to John, not to be baptized, but to judge and inspect what he was doing.
- John called them snakes and vipers and warned that just because they are descendants of Abraham that they cannot escape judgement. It is all about *ethics* and not *ethnics*! We must bear fruit that befits repentance. Doctrine is necessary but doing is essential!
- Entropy: the tendency for all things to deteriorate over time. It is possible to intercept spiritual entropy through repentance and point ourselves and others to Christ. John saw an institution that was more preoccupied with temple maintenance than the souls of the people.
- As we get ready for Christmas, we must add to our list the gift of repentance. It will change our mind and how we live, so that we reflect Christ with our fruits.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- What does it mean to repent? Why is it necessary?
- Why is baptism so important? What does being baptized signify for us as Christians?
- Why is it significant that John's ministry is in the wilderness? (See Numbers 11-12; 1 Kings 19:4; and Hoseah 2:14)
- What does Rev. Dr. Chappell mean by "doctrine is necessary but doing is essential"?
- How can we find balance in our church (as an institution) between our public mission and our private mission? Is it possible to? (Refer to Rev. Dr. Chappell's discussion of *Jacob's Bones: On the Church's Institutional Future* by Gil Rendle).
- Think of the ways that you can make a "U-turn" in your life and your faith journey. In other words, what can you do to repent and change your heart and mind to focus on Christ this Advent season? How can we help each other with this?

