

The Axe Laid to the Root

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- [0 : 00] It's the only heart I shed, and I shine on their cell, That when thou speakst, thou mayst be just, and the earth in judging still.
- Behold, I am in it which ye was formed above and then, My Father, who stole me from sin, in guiltiness and sin.
- Behold, I am in the inward hearts, with truth delighted art, And wisdom thou shalt make me know within thy hidden heart.
- To thy wisdom of strength of me, I shall be cleansed so.
- Ye wash of me, and then I shall be whiter than the snow.
- [2 : 22] Let us join together in prayer. O Lord our God, as we continue before, The God who is a great God, A God who is holy, A God who is high and lifted up.
- May we do so with a genuine, felt appreciation Of who you are as God.
- That we would know that when we come before you, Our Creator, that we do so, With a sense of our creaturehood. Mankind, by nature, Is aware of an elevated position, By virtue of the place that you gave to him, As your favoured creature.
- Favoured in the sense that you created man in your own image, In knowledge, righteousness and holiness, With dominion over the creatures.
- And yet, having been created in that image, And having an insight into the privileges that are disposed, Man fell, And departed from that created glory.
- [3 : 58] And yet, Lives on with A perverse view Of the privilege that belongs To mankind.
- Disregarding the truth That your word says before us, That all have sinned And come short Of your glory.
- And any vestiges Of the former glory that That belonged Are purely Retained by the virtue Of your measure.
- And we acknowledge That when we lose sight Of the true place That belongs to us In our fallenness, That we are Deluded And misled.
- And that we need to Re-establish Any relationship That Should be Out of right By reason of Embracing Your mercy And that alone.
- [5 : 05] We cannot Believe that we have any right That Flows from Our own Status No matter What we believe it to be.
- For Only By way of Christ Jesus Have we any right Even to Access A throne Of grace. We have No Virtue Of our own To present.
- We have No No claim Upon The ear Of the most high Except What is In and through The The purchased Possession That belongs To your people.
- By reason of What Christ Has done On the cross. As we worship Today Lord Help us To do so Thankful For the privilege.

Thankful That we are Met under the Teaching of Your word. That we are Required To be instructed Through it And by it.

[6 : 16] And that we are Dependent upon The Leading of Your own spirit. That the eyes Of our understanding Be opened. And that the Heart that is Our which Your word Teaches us Is a heart Of flesh.

That You Need to Indelibly Imprint upon It. That word That is Your own. So that we would Receive it And receive it Gladly.

And that we would Respond to it In faith. We pray for Your people. Thankful for Each and Every one Of them. We bless Your name That through The work Done by Christ.

That they are One with You. Through him. And that they Are numbered Amongst your People. Because Through your Word they have Been brought Near.

Who were Once far Off. That they Have been Quickened. Who were Dead in Trespasses And sin. That they Have been Brought into The family Of God.

[7 : 29] Through the Power of The Spirit. Adopting them Into that Family. And making Them to Be one In that Family.

And with The glory Of the Heavenly Father in You at All times. We pray That you Would add To their Number. Even from Our own Midst.

Throughout This community May the Voice of The glad Tidings Of salvation Through Christ Be heard And that Each and Every one In need Of a Saviour Would realise That there Is a Saviour To be Found in Christ.

We pray That you Would magnify Your name Amongst us By taking From here And there Such as Would believe To the Savings Of their Soul.

We pray For the Church of Christ Worldwide Beginning With our Villages and Townships Here. Our Island Our Island Our Nation The United Kingdom And all The rest Of the World.

[8 : 39] We give Thanks That in In all Of these Places You have Those Who bear Your Name Who bear Witness To the Loving Kindness Of Christ And that The day Will come When you Will take Them From the Four Corners And they Will bear Testimony To the Saving Grace Of Christ Jesus And they Will be In one Chorus United Before the Throne Praising The Name Of One Who Is Lord Over All We pray Your Blessing Upon Those Amongst Us Who Cannot Be Here For Whatever Reason Those Who Have Been Denied By Reason Of Her Circumstances Who Delight In Attending The Courts Of Your House May They Be Blessed Where They Are Remember Those Who Are Under Your Hand In Providence Because Of Illness Or Whatever It Is That Has Kept Them Away From The Place Of

Worship Remember Them Lord And Especially Those Amongst Us Who May Be Careful And Cautious About Their Own Health And Well Being Be With Them As They Engage With This Particular Providence That Has Assailed Us In The Last Few Months We Ask Lord For Those Who Have Other Illnesses To Contend With That Are Major Hypnises And For Which They Need Your Own Hand To Be Upon Them Mercifully Sustaining Them And Upholding Them And Enabling Them And By And By To Look To Look Upon Jesus The One Who Is Spoken Of In Your Word As The Great Physician He He Heals Not Just The Body And The Mind But The Soul And We Give Thanks That All Who Have Ever Turned To Him He Would Turn None Away And This

Is True At All Times So Here Are Petitions On Behalf Of Our Peoples Here Remembering Our Nation And Those Who Govern Us May They Be Turned From Foolishness To The Wisdom That Is Divine May The Decisions That Are Taken At The Highest Level Where They Are Opposite To The Wisdom That Is Prevailing In Your Word May We Understand That There Is A God Who Is All Wise And He Is Willing To Hear Our Petitions On Behalf Of Those Who Do Not Pray For Themselves Even Those Who Would Hold Themselves To Have Power And Yet In Comparison To The Almighty They Have None So Hear Our Petitions Watch Over Is Remembering The Nations Of The Earth Especially The Places In The World That Have Been Experiencing

Terrible Damage Because Of The Elements Sometimes Through Great Heat Sometimes Through Flood And Fire Sometimes Through Disease And Poverty And Want All All Of These Things Are In The World At Any Given Moment And We We Know That Under Your Sovereign Hand These Things Can Work To The Good Of Those That You Have Purposed It For So Hear Our Petitions Guard Us Keep Us And Protect Us Watching Over Us Each One In Jesus Name We Would Ask Amen I'm Going To Read From The Scriptures Of The New Testament And The Gospel Of Jesus Christ According To Luke Chapter 3 Luke Chapter 3 And

We're Going To Read Down To Verse 24 From The Beginning Of The Chapter Now In The Fifteenth Year Of The Reign Of Tiberius Caesar Pontius Pilate Being Governor Of Judea And Herod Being Tetrarch Of Galilee And His Brother Philip Tetrarch Of Utheria And Of The Region Of Trachontes And Lysanius The Tetrarch Of Apeline Annas And Caiaphas Being The High Priest The Word Of God Came And To John Son Of Zacharias In The Wilderness And He Came Into All The Country About Jordan Preaching The Baptism Of Repentance For The Remission Of Sins As As deeper Amongst The Trail Sins Is Favorite Before You Perhaps make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth, and all the flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptised of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come.

[14 : 13] Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father. For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise our children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees. Every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answered and said unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptised, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed.

And the soldiers likewise demanded of him. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.

And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not, John answered, saying unto them, All, I indeed baptise you with water, but one mightier than I cometh, the lachet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn, with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.

But Herod the Tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias' brother, Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet, This above all, that he shut up John in prison.

And so on. May the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word. Before we sing our next psalm, just a word to the children.

[16 : 42] I think I spoke of the change that man experienced when in our first parents we experienced the fall we sinned against God.

It became something that we were not before sin entered into our experience. So one thing that men to this day do not understand is that there is a difference between what we once were, as God created us, and what we are now.

Even though on the surface we appear to be the same, and in all respects, outwardly, we look as if everything is as it should be.

And we look at others and we think of others and we think of them as just being very much like ourselves. But even today, just for example, I did something very silly.

I was going to get this recorder and I usually have it ready and just to take with me. But when the thought came into my mind, it disappeared.

[18 : 08] And instead of acting on it instantly, I didn't. So therein begins the story. Without a recorder, there's no recording.

But then as you saw at the beginning of the service, shall we run that? I sent a messenger away. And he came with a recorder. And the recorder is here and it's a recording.

Which is a miracle in itself. Because when he came with a recorder, he came without a battery. And whatever you can do, you can't record without a battery. So I had to run down into the back and take a battery out of the clock.

And although the battery is in the recorder, it looks as if it's not going to last the distance. But I think there's a story there about how we are by nature.

We think on the surface that we're the way we should be. But when we are not in a live connection to God, when we're not in a right relationship with God, everything may appear to be the way it should be.

[19 : 24] Until we actually do what we're meant to do. Or try to. And we can't do it. Because sin has created a breach.

A breach. It has made us whatever we are, but without the power to do what we should be.

The power to live our lives as God's creatures, living for him, for his glory, is no longer something we can do.

And the only way that can be recovered, that relationship can be restored, is in and through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not as simple as a battery, which can fail, or which needs to be replaced. But it is as simple as the Gospel makes it.

[20 : 25] It tells us, the Word of God tells us, that the only way to God is through Christ. And if we come to Christ and put our trust in Christ Jesus, then our relationship with God becomes what it should be.

And harmony is restored. Fellowship is restored. We have the ability to commune with and heed with us.

But without Christ, outwardly, all might be well. And we think that our relationship with God is the way it should be, or the way we want it to be.

But, unfortunately, the Bible tells us otherwise. So you make sure, whenever and as soon as you can, that you come to God through Christ, and make sure that your relationship with Christ is all it ought to be, so that your relationship to him should be as it ought to be.

God bless these thoughts. We're going to sing from Psalm 103. Psalm 103. And we're going to sing from verse 3.

[21 : 49] All thine iniquities who doeth most graciously forgive, who thy diseases all and pains doeth heal and dearly, who doeth redeem thy life, that thou to death misnought for thou, who thee with lovingkindness doeth and tender messes grow, who with abundance of good things doeth suffer thy mouth, so that even as the evil sage reneweth thy youth.

God righteous judgment executes for all oppressed ones. So is to Moses he his acts made known to Israel's sons. The Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious, longsuffering and slow to wrath, in mercy plenteous.

He will not chide continually, nor keep his anger still. With us he dealt not as we sinned, nor did required our ill.

And so on. We're going to sing from verse 3 of Psalm 103. All thine iniquities who doeth most graciously forgive. All thine iniquities who doeth most graciously forgive.

Who thy diseases all and pain, doth heal and dearly leave.

[23 : 31] Who doth redeem thy life, that thou to death may be.

Christ not, O God, could he with lovingkindness doeth and tender mercies come, who with abundance of good things, who with abundance of good things, does satisfy thy love, so that he does the evil sage, renew his life.

God righteous judgment executes for all oppressive ones.

His ways to hostessly, His acts made known to Israel's sons.

The Lord our God is merciful, and he is gracious, and he is gracious, long suffering and slow to wrath, in mercy plentious.

[25 : 49] He will not shine continually, nor keep his anger still.

with us he delved not as we sinned, nor if required of hell.

I'd like us now to turn to the passage of the scripture that we were reading together, the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Luke chapter 3.

We can read again at verse 7. And then said he, that is John, to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come.

And then, bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father. For I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise our children unto Abraham.

[27 : 20] And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees. Every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees.

Today I'd like us to think for this short while we're together about a person who spoke these words.

John the Baptist, who many of you will have read about and heard about. Although I have to say that there are a great many people today, even within our own communities, who are quite well informed about many of the people that the Bible speaks about.

It's quite surprising how little we take with us of what the Bible speaks about. But John the Baptist is a person that many of us heard about when we were young.

[28 : 45] And there's just two things I want us to think about. The passion of John, first of all, the man, John the Baptist.

And then the message of the man. The man, John the Baptist, and the message of John.

Now I would suggest to you that, as a man, the last thing that John would want anybody to talk about would be John the Baptist.

Because he understood better than anybody that the reason for any significance concerning John was the message that he had to convey.

And the last thing he wanted was to attract attention to himself. He wanted rather to direct people to the person that he was given this task to speak of.

[29 : 57] But having said that, we must pay attention to who he is. Because it is significant. There is a significant attach to the person of John the Baptist.

And the Bible wants us to understand that. For the simple reason that it forms part of the elaborate provision that God has made for this world.

Who lies in a state of sin. And the minute detail that he goes into in order to bring to fruition the purposes that he has in the salvation of his own people.

Or for the salvation of his own people. We know that in his own day, John had a significance amongst the people that he was sent to speak to.

He is described by some of the theologians as the most famous man of his own day. We have no way of knowing how accurate that description is.

[31 : 19] Certainly based on the scripture, we know that John, because of who he was and how he behaved, people knew about him, people heard about him, people went out of their way to hear what John had to say.

So he could well have been the most famous person. If he was in our day, he would probably be heralded and highlighted through the news agencies of our generation.

R.C. Sproul, the American theologian, says about John that he was the greatest Old Testament prophet.

And when you read that, you say to yourself, well surely that's not right. The greatest Old Testament prophet would have been Isaiah or Jeremiah or even one of the minor prophets.

Here we discover all we get to know about John in the New Testament, not the Old. But R.C. Sproul's argument is that John comes out of a tradition of the Old Testament prophets.

[32 : 40] And that how he lived and how he worked, he was still under the Old Testament dispensation.

And that invites the question, where does the line fall? Where do we draw the line between what is Old Testament and New Testament?

And the answer to that question is a simple one. The New Testament era begins with the introduction of the new covenant.

And the end of the Old Covenant in its fulfillment by the Lord Jesus Christ. So at the point at which John appears on the scene of time, about 400 years have passed since God spoke through his prophets in the Old Testament.

And at this point, he begins to speak again to men and women of that generation.

[33 : 54] And his message through John is a simple message. He wants people to repent of their sins.

And to believe that this New Testament era is about to commence. To believe that there is someone who is about to come.

Or that is already there that they must look to. So with that understanding, we see that John has a spectacular significance in the part that he plays in introducing to that generation, and through the word of God to our generation, the fact that God purposed the arrival of John in order to declare the arrival of one who was greater than John.

Now not just can we look to what the Bible says about the significance of John to his own generation. But that significance is highlighted for us in the scripture.

Because the scripture anticipated John's coming. In the book of the prophet Isaiah chapter 40, there is a passage there that speaks to us of the kind of person John was, and the kind of ministry that he was going to carry out.

[35 : 36] And we know that it spoke about John, because the scripture itself helps us understand who John was and what John was to do.

When we read in the gospel of John, Jesus identifies John on more than one occasion as someone who is going to speak to the world about himself.

The passage that we have here is a passage that helps us understand that the words that are spoken are actually a fulfilment of prophecy.

John's actions, John's actions, John's ministry, John's threat of judgment even, has already been declared as something that will be true when he comes, and God has ordained it so.

So that's something you have to keep in mind. Again, in the prophecy of Malachi, there is a passage there, Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.

[37 : 03] And the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in. Behold, ye shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

There again, you may read these words, and as words they may allow us to have a flexible understanding of what they mean, of who they are speaking about.

But we know that the Lord Jesus takes these words, and he explains them, and applies them to the passion of John.

No one else. He takes these words of the scripture, these words of prophecy, and he applies them to the passion of John, in his role with regard to himself.

If you go to Matthew's Gospel, and you find there the account that we have given of the time that John has been sent to prison.

[38 : 15] And when he is in prison, he sends a message to Jesus, or through his disciples, to the Lord. And he asks a question, are you the one that should come, or do we look for someone else, or do we look for another?

And then we are given the testimony of the Lord concerning John. He clearly identifies John as someone who is the forerunner, someone who is to come before himself and declare who he is to the world.

So when we read what Jesus has to say about John, there is no doubt in the mind of the scripture. God has revealed them to us in the scripture.

The Old Testament prophets anticipated his coming by virtue of the Spirit's guiding, the God of heaven revealing to them, declaring the time will come when such a one will be in the world.

And his ministry will be a ministry directed to revealing somebody, revealing my purposes, revealing the salvation that the world lies in need of.

[39 : 40] And when Jesus speaks of him, he gives a remarkable declaration about John that seldom applies to any other event.

He was a remarkable man, raised up by God for an occasion such as this, to be the forerunner of Christ. To be someone who would speak almost exclusively about the role of Christ.

And yet, without the weakness as follows, a person that has given such an exclusive access to the will of God, and who is raised up in his own generation, he points to Christ and says above Christ that he is somebody who is mightier than he, and that he is not fit to tie the latchet of his shoes.

He is humble and extraordinarily so. Now, theologians tell us that at the heart of the imagery that John uses, that is descriptive of the role that he has, is this picture that we have of a king or a queen visiting their people in a foreign land perhaps, in a place that belongs to them.

They are sovereign of it, but they are sovereign of it, but they are going to visit it. And before their visit they send an ambassador or somebody to prepare the way before them.

[41 : 20] In our generation, if the queen wants to visit Lewis, she will probably fly in and fly out very quickly. But there is still a great deal of preparation to be done.

But in those days, it would be by horse and carriage or by foot. So, somebody was sent ahead to make sure that the path was clear.

Now that is the picture that is given to us of John. He is to prepare the way for the Lord. And God has given to him this ministry, this role.

Not to speak of himself. Not to embrace the celebration of his own identity. But to point people to Christ because Christ is the one they need to look to.

And in our day and generation, the cult of personality is so strong. And the idea that many have that if a person receives publicity, that that publicity makes that person important.

[42 : 34] Even preachers of the gospel. But the preacher of the gospel who is distracted by that is distracted from doing the very thing they are supposed to do.

Which is not point to themselves, but point to another. And that other is Christ. And that role was John's. And that was his great concern. That people would look for Jesus.

Look to Jesus. The scripture spoke of his ministry in that sense. And this was all God's doing. We need to remember that.

It's part of the whole package. If you want a picture of how God works, don't exclude anything that he does. Don't exclude the Old Testament as an irrelevance.

Because you're saying, what's written in the Old Testament is not really relevant to what goes on in the New. That's nonsense. The Old Testament is the precursor to the greater picture that is given to us of the Saviour that is Christ.

[43 : 40] It speaks to us clearly of Christ. And it speaks to us repeatedly of Christ by whatever way. Be the prophet, one of the more recognised ones, or John the Baptist who we mistakenly identify as a prophet of the New Testament.

So what was the message of this man? Well, we know one favourite declaration was this. Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Away from himself to another. But central to that message that John had was the message of repent and believe the gospel.

Charles Price, one of the modern preachers, says of John, and maybe people, when you read what he says, might think that John wasn't really a nice person.

And maybe he... One thing he did was this. He stirred people up by his preaching. He agitated people. He created discord.

[44 : 58] He created a sense of uncertainty in the minds of those that he spoke to. Because many of the people that he spoke to were so self-assured and so confident in their own possession of the favour of God.

And they were mistakenly so. And John came to disturb the nest that they had created for themselves. That made them think that, well, God is our God.

We are his people. We are favoured. We are assured of his blessing. When this Messiah we are anticipating comes. When this servant of the Lord comes with the message of the Messiah.

He will come and he will bless us and he will favour us and we will enjoy great things because of him. But when John comes, that's not the message that he has for his people.

They expected him to speak of things that would encourage them. That would delight them. That would tell them that God was their God. That would tell them that their enemies God would destroy.

[46 : 12] But John makes plain that he is going to deal with the enemies of God.

Not with those who think themselves to be God's friends. The Messiah was to come to deal with these enemies, whoever they may be.

In reference to the message of the Gospel. Speaking about what the general picture that we have of the minor prophets. Professor John L. Mackay used to say of these prophets that they were as one.

At the heart of what they had to say was that people needed to learn that their smug contentment in their own self-righteousness would not survive the scrutiny of the eye of a holy God.

And there are so many people and they are still around. And they have convinced themselves that whatever God comes looking for.

[47 : 31] Because of our piety. Because of our conviction that we are better than others. Because of our assurance that there are worse in the world who deserve the wrath of God.

We are not amongst them. We are not amongst them. But what John has to say to everyone. Without exception is this. Repent. Repent. Repent. And not just repent.

But there is in that repent there is a need for a response right away. It is not repent someday soon. But repent in the here and now.

No. Repent he says. Because the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Now that might take out a strange expression that we are not really confident in interpreting.

Because what does it really mean for the axe to be laid at the root of the trees? And I read several interpretations of it.

[48 : 36] But I think it simply means this. That when a person is chopping down a tree. When he gets to the stage at which the axe is come to the root.

The tree is about ready to fall. It is about ready to tichter over. The actual chopping motions have been carried through.

And only one blow could be needed for making the tree fall. And that is the emphasis that John wants to place upon the message that he has.

For this generation that he preached to. For this generation that his word comes to now. Oh yes it is different for us. Because we are not looking to the coming Messiah.

In the way John was. In the way that generation was. The people of God were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. And they were waiting for him to come.

[49 : 42] And they were waiting whatever their thoughts were. In regard to what would happen when he would come. But just as surely. We live today.

In a generation. And God is speaking to us. About our coming Messiah. One who has come.

And who went to the cross. And who rose from the dead. And who went to glory. But who has promised to come again. And just as surely. The judgment.

That comes with the second coming of the Lord. Being imminent. That thought needs to accompany. The preaching of John.

And the preaching of any preacher. Of any generation. The confession of faith leaves us in no doubt. As to what repentance means.

[50 : 40] It means this anyway. That there is a necessity involved in it. It is not something you can do if you choose.

It is not something that you can do if you would like to do it. It is not something that you can choose not to do. There is a necessity.

In what John is saying here. That every person without exception. Is required to repent. To turn. Because all will have sinned we are told.

And repentance is just not. It is not just sorrow for sin. Although that is most importantly. A part of it. There is a turning from that sin.

To God. And there is an embracing of the salvation. That God has for us in Christ Jesus. John says about this tree.

[51 : 45] That it is about to be hewn down. And he says it often. Your tree is corrupt. Your tree is fruitless.

Your tree is not creating anything that is to God's glory. And there is only one possibility for your tree.

And that is that God will raise it to the ground. When you look at what John has to say. And when you see the preaching of Jesus that commences soon after.

You might be inclined to think. That Jesus was following the example of John. Because when Jesus preached. When Jesus brought the word of God.

To the people. It wasn't all that dissimilar to what John had to say. Whose message was a message of the need for repentance.

[52 : 50] Whose message was a message that had in it the element of urgency. And you could argue that Jesus was following John.

But that is not the order. Although John came before Jesus as the forerunner. The message that John proclaimed was the message that Jesus was to proclaim.

And that he had proclaimed through his servants the prophets throughout all the generations. One of his own parables.

You remember. He asks. The question. When a fruitless tree is presented. Cut it down we are told. Why cumbereth it the ground?

It's fruitless. There's no evidence of growth. Or evidence of interest in God. So. Cut it down. Christ is coming.

[53 : 52] And those who are still fruitless as to the relationship with God. The frank message of God's word to each and every one is this.

That when he comes he will look for fruit. When he comes he will search us out. And look for the evidence of life. And the evidence of life can only be seen in the fruit that we bear.

That is to the glory of God. God. John the Baptist doesn't mince his words. He doesn't pussyfoot around. He doesn't.

He doesn't. He doesn't. Use words that are mellow and soft. He wants to get people to think about where they stand with regard to God.

Because God is holy. And God has a holy displeasure against sin. And the sinner. And many don't want to hear that.

- [54 : 54] Many are aggrieved by that. And that was what happened with John the Baptist. You know. Many people like their preachers where they can see them.
- Within arm's distance. Keep away. Don't come too close. Whatever you have to say. Don't disturb my peace. Don't say anything that will grieve me.
- Don't say anything that will hurt my conscience. Don't say anything that will in any way move me to think about my soul. Or concern me about the eternity into which my face is set.
- Don't dare say anything that will be angry. Don't dare say that. But that's what we need. We need our peace to be disturbed. If we are comfortable where we are.
- And where we are is Christless. Then we're in a dangerous place. Our lostness testifies against us.
- [55 : 58] John doesn't want us to feel bad. For the sake of it. Jesus doesn't want us to feel bad for the sake of it.
- He wants us to understand that where we are without in. We are miserable. Whatever pleasures the world brings to us. In the scheme of things.
- They will evaporate. They will go their own way. And we will be left miserable. At the day when God says to us. Depart from me. I don't know you.
- I never knew you. However often you presented yourself before me. Even in prayer or praise. Or the reading of God's word.
- If you do not embrace me through Christ. Then this is what I have to say about you. John's message was a message that Jesus preached.
- [57 : 00] He preached a word about the fruitlessness of a life separated from God.
- The emptiness of a life. You know I have got a rose in my garden there. I don't know much about roses.
- This is the first year I came. I found the rose down at my mother's house. It had more or less died to death. But I put it into the ground.
- And I fertilized it. And I am seeing it divide into two parts. And one part has got roses on it.
- And the other part is covered in leaves. It comes from the same root. But one is flourishing. Doing what it should do.
- [57 : 58] It is producing flowers. It is lovely to look at. But the other is no flowers. Just leaves. Now I am useless at horticulture. I am trying and error thing.
- I stick something into the ground. If it grows good. If it doesn't. Then so what? Well I am sorry. But we cannot afford to be as lackadaisical with the soul that God has given to us.
- To care for. To nurture. To bring fruit to him. To bring the glory of our obedience to him. Of our walk to him.
- As those who love him. And would want to serve him. John saw the coming kingdom. And the passage as many say is heavy with judgment.
- A warning to all. That what will befall those who reject King Jesus. Is what we have here. That truth has not changed.
- [59 : 07] His reign will never end. And those who honour him as king. Will be subject to him as their king.
- And those who despise and reject him as king. Will find that. His kingdom. Will thrive. And his rule.
- Will be held out to them. As something. That will condemn them. For an eternity of all. Only those that. Hate the word.

Of imminent judgment. And do something about it. By turning from sin to Christ. Turning from a life that is empty.

And devoid of meaning. To a life that is more fulfilling. In the way that they. Address their need in him. And may you. If you are still.

[60 : 06] With the axe. Laid at your root. Christ saying to you. Are you hearing. Are you hearing. What I've got to say. Are you listening.

To what I've got to say. Are you taking it to heart. Because. The day will come. When. The judgment of which it speaks.

As imminent. Will actually. Come to pass. May you hear what he has. To say to us in his word. Let us pray. Lord God in heaven.

Be merciful. To each of us. As we hear your word. And as you. Direct us to think. Long and hard. About. Where we stand.

With regard to our God. You have people. Who bear your name. And they confess it. And they. Walk before you. And they have many concerns. About their lives.

[61 : 03] Being. Being fruitless. And they fear. That ups. With good cause. That they are not producing. What they should. By way of fruit.

For your glory. But there are so many. Who are in this world. And who have no care. Or concern. About their. Lack of fruit. For God.

Or for. Anything that God. Would have us do. Lord. Be merciful to all such. Direct them to yourself. Through Christ Jesus the Lord. Lord.

Go before us. Be merciful to us. In Jesus name. Amen. Our closing psalm is Psalm 17. Psalm 17.

And in verse 13. Arise and disappoint my foe. And cast him down O Lord. My soul save from the wicked man.

[62 : 01] The man which is thy sword. From men which are thy hand O Lord. From worldly men may say. Which only in this present life. That part and portion have.

Whose belly with the treasure lid. O fields. The children having plenty. Of their goods. The rest. They to their children leave. But as for me. I thine own face in righteousness will see.

And with thy likeness when I wake. I satisfied shall be. These verses arise and disappoint my foe. And cast him down O Lord. My soul save from the wicked man.

The one which is thy sword From men which are thy hand O Lord, from worldly men Be saved, which only In this present life That hard and fortunate how Whose belly wins Thy treasured In the field They children have

In plenty of Death groups of rest They took their children But as for me By the high-low faith That righteousness Will see And with thy kindness When I wait I satisfy shall be Now may grace, mission, and peace

[65 : 09] In God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit Rest in a light with you all, never, and always Amen Amen Amen