

Preparing the Way

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[0 : 00] Thank you to the choir for leading us in that time of worship.

! Thank you for that beautiful special there at the end.! If you would open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 3. Matthew chapter 3. Last week we were blessed to have Dr. Jeff Orge come and preach the word of God to us.

And now this week we're going to return to the gospel according to Matthew. The gospel according to Matthew. So we are picking up now in chapter 3 at the section heading normally called the Herald of the Messiah.

The Messiah's Herald. And we'll be talking about John the Baptist this morning. I'm going to read the text for us. If you would follow along with me in your Bibles.

It says, In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near. For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah who said, A voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord and make his paths straight.

[1 : 20] Now John had a camel hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, And his food was locusts and wild honey. Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, And they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, He said to them, Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, produce fruit consistent with repentance.

And don't presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. The axe is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, But the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing shovel is in his hand, And he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn.

[2 : 33] But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out. As I said, we're turning our attention now to John the Baptist. And now I know what you're thinking. But no, John the Baptist is not where we find our heritage as Southern Baptists.

Although that would be cool. That's not what we find here. Matter of fact, I don't know if you know this. There was a huge movement among Baptists in the 1800s, early 19th century. It was called secessionism.

The idea was that there was a line of Baptist theology and doctrine That was taught all the way from the time of Christ. Or sometimes they traced it back to John the Baptist. Unfortunately, they didn't really pan out too well historically.

So it didn't really hold up. But nonetheless, it's a cool thought, right? It's a cool thought. There's a book called The Trail of Blood, published in 1931 by J.M. Carroll. And he traced Baptist heritage all the way back to John the Baptist.

But it was a stretch. It was a stretch. Nonetheless, John the Baptist is an important figure And one that we need to take our time and study. We'll read about John here this week.

[3 : 42] We'll read about John next week in the baptism of Jesus. And then we'll talk about John in a few weeks when he's executed. But that'll be a while. So I say a few weeks.

It'll be maybe a few years. We'll get there eventually, though. Anyways, Matthew kind of drops us in here in the middle of John's ministry and doesn't really set the scene for us.

So in this gospel, we've looked at the line of Christ. Remember that? From Abraham to Jesus. We've looked also at the birth story from Joseph's perspective. And then we looked also even at the flight to Egypt and running from Herod and all of those things.

And then now, seemingly out of nowhere, there was a man, John the Baptist, who came preaching in the wilderness. You're kind of like, where in the world did this guy come from? It reminded me of a movie. And I'm going to show my age a little bit here in that I'm young.

Because it reminded me of this Disney movie. It was a great one. If you've seen it, you know it's great. Emperor's New Groove from 2000, right? Yeah, Emperor's New Groove.

[4 : 46] It was a fantastic movie. If you haven't seen it, you live a sad life. No, I'm just kidding. If you haven't seen it, you should. The movie starts with this llama sitting in the forest, and he looks really, really sad, and it's dark and dreary.

And you hear the narrator talking about, like, yeah, look at that. Isn't that sad? And then all of a sudden the rain pours, and the llama starts crying. And he's like, you know, that llama is me. I used to be the greatest emperor in the world. I was the nicest guy, too. Don't believe me? You have to go back and find out. You know, it zooms all the way back to when he's a baby. The point is, in order to understand where we are here with John the Baptist, we have to go back a little bit to understand how the scene got here, okay?

It doesn't make any sense to just drop in in the middle, but that's what Matthew does, and the reason for that is because Matthew didn't need to tell his audience about John the Baptist. He didn't need to tell his audience about John.

He was writing to a Jewish audience. They understood John's prophetic ministry. They knew about John. They were very well versed in John's teaching. So Matthew didn't need to go back. But if you look in Luke's gospel, you find that Luke did see it necessary to inform his audience about who John was.

[5 : 56] So Luke starts at the very beginning, before John was even born. If you go to Luke chapter 1, you see the angel Gabriel, and he appeared to the priest Zechariah. Zechariah was one of the priests in Jerusalem, in Judea, and he was called in for temple service, which meant he was the one who that year got chosen to go before the Lord in the Holy of Holies.

And he was burning an incense offering to the Lord when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared.

And as you can imagine, being in the Holy of Holies, an angel appears, Zechariah was terrified. Zechariah was terrified. Because if you were unholy in the Holy of Holies, you would die. Okay?

That was a clear precedent set in the Old Testament by Aaron's sons, Nadab and Bihu.

But you see Zechariah terrified when the angel Gabriel, but he shows up and he says, Hey look, don't be scared. He says, Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord.

And then the angel Gabriel appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard.

[7 : 13] Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer.

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. So we see a few things here about John.

Number one, his birth is going to cause a lot of rejoicing. Zechariah and Elizabeth were old. They were too old to have kids, it seems like. Elizabeth was barren. She had never given birth. And then the Lord miraculously provides for them this child.

Kind of similar to some of the Old Testament patriarch stories, right? Abraham and Sarah. Rebecca and Isaac. Rachel and Jacob. The Lord provides a child for them.

And this child would be special. He would cause great rejoicing. He would be considered great in the sight of the Lord. He'd be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. By the way, I will say this just as a quick comment.

[8 : 15] If you ever want a biblical argument for the sanctity of human life at every stage of development, look no further than the birth stories of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

We would never presume to say that Jesus was any less God than when he was in the womb of Mary. Right? And John, in the womb of Elizabeth, the Bible says that he would have the Holy Spirit.

He would be filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb. You see this play out, by the way, when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth. And John, the infant, the fetus, does a front flip in her belly. Right? It's an amazing sight. So I just, real quick, I want to point that out. If you want a great biblical argument for the sanctity of human life at every stage of development, look no further than Luke's gospel, the first two chapters.

But back to the text. This guy, John, is going to be extremely important. Okay? And then once he was born, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and he began to prophesy about his son.

[9 : 13] And in that prophecy, we learn a little bit more about who this baby John would be. So in Luke chapter 1, verses 76 and 77, it says, And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High.

For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. So from this we learn that John will be called a prophet of the Most High.

And that's significant. Because at this point in time, they are at the tail end. They didn't know they were at the tail end. But they were at the tail end of the 400 years of silence. The intertestamental period, between the Old and the New Testament, after Malachi the prophet, God stopped speaking through prophets for 400 years.

So the people were longing for a prophet. And they knew that God was going to send a prophet.

That he was going to send someone to go before the Lord. To prepare the way of the Lord. And so you see that in this prophecy from Zechariah, first time he spoke in nine months, by the way, you see this amazing promise that John is going to be that prophet.

The one who would go before the Lord and prepare the people. So God hadn't sent his people a prophet in a long time, yet here Zechariah spoke of what his son would come. You also learn that John would be a forerunner for the Lord.

[10 : 30] That he would give God's people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. All of that to say, John had a special calling. And if you just jump in here, in Matthew chapter 3, you might miss some of that.

You might not understand all of that. Like if you were reading the New Testament for the first time, and you started in Matthew, and you read about Jesus as a baby, and then Jesus' family going to Egypt, and then returning to Nazareth.

And then you read all of a sudden, there was a man named John, and he preached. Like what in the world? You wouldn't necessarily understand it. So I want to give you a quick pastoral note here.

And it's just a simple reminder that when you find yourself studying Scripture and lost, right?

Anybody ever do that? Like you're reading, and you're like, I don't know what I just read. You ever do that? Sometimes I read things like eight times, and I'm still like, I got to listen to it. You know what I mean? I don't know. Maybe I can't read very well.

Anyways, but if you are reading Scripture, and you find yourself lost or confused about what you're reading, maybe a character has all of a sudden appeared, and it seems out of place.

[11 : 31] You know, the Bible's not a storybook. We don't have to have backgrounds for everybody whenever the author drops a character in. But what we can do is we can stop, and we can search for the answer. And so I want to encourage you.

The way that I just did that there was, we see John the Baptist. We don't know all of the details about John. So we look. Where do we find this? Well, in Luke chapter 1, Luke chapter 3. We also see some things in John's Gospel, in John 1 and John 3.

So my point here that I'm making for you is, if you ever find yourself confused about what you're reading in Scripture, look for more Scripture that helps you understand what you're reading. Okay? Sound good?

Okay, back to the text again. So John, remember, he's the first prophetic voice in 400 years. And now they're going to see this messianic hope be fulfilled.

And when he arrived, he had a message that was unpopular, it was hard to receive, and it had a sense of urgency. And I want you to understand that his message came to him from the Lord.

[12 : 34] John prepared for his ministry. John prepared for his prophetic calling. Luke chapter 1, verse 8, he says, The child grew up and became strong in spirit, or strong in the spirit.

And he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. There's a little note here about this spiritual discipline of getting alone with God and waiting for God to send you out and waiting for God to prepare you.

John was alone with God, and he waited. And Luke chapter 3, verse 2, says, God's word came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan proclaiming baptism, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

So John's message that he preached, his ministry, his prophetic ministry, all of it, it came from God. Right? He was sent out by God. And so that brings us to what I want us to look at today. I want us to think about three aspects of John's life.

His message, his ministry, his mission, and his ministry. His message, his mission, and his ministry. Before we go any further, let's pray together again. Lord Jesus, as we study your text now, as we look at your word, God, I pray that you would open our hearts to receive, open our minds to understand, give us eyes to see how you are speaking to us today.

[13:51] We love you, Jesus, and it's in your name that we pray. Amen. Is anybody else, like, really thirsty today, or is it just me? Okay.

Now, as we look back here at Matthew chapter 3, I want you to imagine a scene with me. There's a man dressed in camel skin clothes, snacking on locusts, standing in the heat of the wilderness with a crowd leaning in to hear what it is he has to say.

And then you hear it. Repent. Repent. We're talking about John's message here, which is a call to repentance.

It's simple. Repent. That word repent, what it means is to turn away. To turn away or to change your mind. It's as if you're walking one way, going the way that you want, and then you turn around and you go the opposite direction.

It's a 180, not a 360. You don't want to go full 360, okay? It's a 180. Repenting is turning and going another way. And in this case, John's message of repentance was that the people of Israel would stop going in their sinful ways and instead turn and walk in the ways of God and be ready for what he is about to unveil, what he's about to reveal.

[15:18] And as I mentioned before, John's message wasn't particularly popular. It wasn't easy to hear. It put him at great risk to preach. And he didn't just preach repentance to people who knew they needed to repent either, right?

That's almost easy. It's like if someone is aware of the fact that they're messed up and you tell them, you gotta, dude, you gotta fix yourself. You gotta change this. You gotta turn around. You know, you gotta, you need to repent.

You need to turn and go the opposite. That's almost easy. But John didn't just preach to those who knew they needed to repent. John preached this message, repent because the kingdom of heaven has come near, to those who never suspected they had a need.

He preached this to the religious elite, the ones who counted on their heritage, their education, and their own personal holiness to have themselves right with God.

John preached this same message of repentance to them. It says in Matthew 3, verses 7 through 10, when he saw many of the Pharisees and the Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, brood of vipers.

[16:19] By the way, I'm a pastor, I'm a preacher. If you showed up here for the first time and I looked at you and said, brood of vipers, you probably wouldn't feel too good about yourself, would you? I'd be a little bit harsh.

It's a harsh message. John had a harsh message. Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, produce fruit consistent with repentance and don't presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father.

For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. The axe is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

This was not an easy message to preach. But John, like the prophets of the Old Testament, stood firm on God's word and declared the truth that the people needed to hear.

Whether they were aware of their need or not, they needed to hear it. John's message has an urgency behind it. There's an urgency here. Why? Why is it urgent?

[17:19] Because if you don't repent, if you don't produce fruit consistent with repentance, then what is waiting for you? Judgment. The axe is already at the root of the trees.

If you cut at the root of the tree, there's nothing that's going to grow back there. If you remove the root, it's gone. There's a limited time. The axe is ready. It's there. And if the tree gets chopped

down, then it goes into the fire.

You see the urgency? There's a real need. Repent. Humble yourself before the Lord. And I want you to see that when someone has a message from God, that there are three things that come out of that.

When someone has been given a message from God, a prophetic message even, there are three things that will happen. Number one, they believe that message completely. Someone has a message from God, they are convinced thoroughly that this is truly from God, which means that it trumps every other message, every other word, every other good thing that you might have ever heard, because this is from God.

Number two, they declare that message boldly. John declared his message of repentance boldly. Boldly. So boldly, in fact, that he was particularly unpopular with the religious elite and also Herod, because he called Herod out for his sinful relationship with his sister-in-law.

[18:39] Then number three, you call people to respond urgently. If the message from God calls for a response, then there must be a sense of urgency. And guys, I want you to understand today that you have a message from God.

Did you know that? You have been given a message from God. It's called the gospel. We have a message of repentance and reconciliation, and it's too urgent to dismiss or ignore.

This is the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 5, verse 20, Paul pleads with the people of Corinth to be reconciled to God. He says, therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.

Since God is making His appeal through us, we plead on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God. You can feel the urgency in Paul's words.

He understood that if people weren't reconciled to God, if they did not repent and turn to Christ, he understood what that meant. It meant eternal separation.

[19:44] It meant punishment. It meant they were not in Christ. Christ. And because Paul was so convinced of this message from God, he was so convinced that he begged people to repent and to be reconciled to God, he would not be shut up.

And trust me, guys, people tried to shut Paul up. They stoned him. They beat him. They whipped him. He was shipwrecked. He was arrested over and over and over and he would not stop boldly declaring the truth that God had delivered once for all the saints and that is repent and be reconciled to God.

You can feel the urgency. If you have a message from the Lord and you do, then you will declare it boldly. You'll call people to respond urgently.

It's crazy to me that we live in a world where Christians, people who claim to be Christians, will tell other people I don't really want to like, I don't really want to get my hands dirty.

I don't want to mess up what they have going on. They have their beliefs and I have mine and that's fine. Is it? Is that fine? Really? If you believe what God's word says, if you believe that if someone does not repent and turn to Christ, that they will spend eternity separated from him, how much do you have to hate a person to not share the gospel with them?

[21:17] I'm not talking only to you, I'm talking to myself too. I have to be more consistent in sharing the gospel, in preaching this message, in declaring the truth that God has given to us.

We don't preach about repentance enough. We don't talk about repentance enough. We talk about asking Jesus into your heart. We talk about getting your life right with God.

We talk about figuring things out with Jesus one day. but we don't tell people what the Bible says, which is repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.

There's an urgency there. There's an urgency. And if you are in Christ and are an ambassador for Christ, and you are if you're in Christ, then you are also a messenger for Christ.

And you see in this example of John, that messengers for Christ sometimes have uncomfortable and hard truths that they are called to declare.

[22:17] There's nothing more loving that you can do than to tell someone of their need for Jesus. And I want you also to see the point that John made to the Pharisees and Sadducees.

That point still stands today as a reminder, a really important reminder for us. He said, produce fruit consistent with repentance and don't presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father, for I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.

Don't presume that you're right with God because you've been a Baptist your whole life. Don't presume that you're right with God because you've always done good things in life.

Don't presume that you're right with God because, you know, you're pretty friendly. The only way a person is right with God is if they trust in Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice for your sins. That's the only way you can be right with God. So don't count on being baptized. Tyler, I'm so glad that you were baptized today. What an amazing celebration.

[23 : 30] What an amazing thing. When you give your life to Christ, you should follow through with believer's baptism. But that baptism didn't save Tyler. Tyler gave his life to Jesus. Jesus saved Tyler.

Baptism is the fruit. It's obedience. It's fruit consistent with repentance. So produce fruit consistent with repentance. There is an urgency to this message.

But the reality of judgment, which is what made it so urgent, should not make us assume that John's boldness means that he's an arrogant pastor or preacher.

Because while he was heavy on the message, his heart was incredibly humble. So that brings us to our second point here, John's mission, the humble forerunner.

Matthew 3, verse 3 says, he is the one spoken of to the prophet Isaiah who said, a voice of one crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord and make his paths straight. You know, in John's gospel, Matthew just tells us this is who John is.

[24 : 30] He's the fulfillment of that prophecy in the Old Testament. But in John's gospel, we actually see that John himself, John the Baptist, I should clarify real quick. When I say John's gospel, I mean the evangelist John, the disciple of Jesus.

John the evangelist and John the Baptist, two different guys. Okay? It would be kind of hard for John the Baptist to have written John's gospel because he dies. But anyways, in John's gospel, John chapter 1, you see that John was aware of his mission as a prophet.

It says, this was John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, who are you? He didn't deny it, but he confessed, I am not the Messiah. What then?

They asked, are you Elijah? I am not, he said. Are you the prophet? No, he answered. Who are you then? They asked, we need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself? He said, I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, just as Isaiah the prophet said.

See, John was fully aware of his mission as a prophet, as this forerunner for the Holy One of God, the Messiah. He knew that. He was comfortable with his mission. He was the forerunner, the trailblazer, the one preparing the people for the Messiah.

[25 : 41] He recognized that his calling was from God, and I want you to notice that John didn't try to extend himself beyond his calling for greater self-glory or praise. John was comfortable where God called him, and he served faithfully.

And that should serve as an example for us as well. Wherever God has called you, serve faithfully in that calling. Okay, so if you're a spouse, serve faithfully in your house. Love your wife or your husband well.

Serve them faithfully. If you're a parent, love your children well. Raise them in the ways of the Lord. And if you're a Christian, then you should be serving in the local church. Right?

You should be serving. God has gifted you in some way for the edification of his people and for his glory. So if you are a Christian, you should be serving faithfully. Now, that doesn't mean that we all have the same calling or the same gifts from God.

Okay? If you are a gifted host, then host. If you're a gifted teacher, then teach. If you're a gifted servant, then serve. You see what I'm saying? Don't assume or presume for yourself a position or authority or office that is not for you to choose for yourself.

[26 : 47] Right? Serve faithfully where God has called you and be comfortable in God, where God has called you. Because God uses each of us to bring honor to his name and to serve his purposes in the church.

So be comfortable and confident where God has placed you and don't seek your own honor. And when I say comfortable, I don't mean like life's going to be perfect, you're never going to face any challenge. I mean be satisfied.

Be satisfied where God has called you. All right? So be an ambassador for Christ wherever God has called you to serve. John was a great example of that in understanding his mission as the divine forerunner.

He called himself the friend of the groom. He knew that he wasn't the groom. And the wedding day, no matter how hard groomsmen try sometimes, the attention is not on them.

Right? Groomsmen always, they're always the ones that try to mess up the wedding, by the way. Aren't they? They're always trying to pull pranks and, you know, it's not about you groomsmen. It's about the groom. It's about the bride.

[27 : 41] Right? And John knew that. He knew his position. He knew where God had called him and he served faithfully where God had called him. And so the same thing should be said for us. The final thing I want us to look at is John's ministry and the significance of baptism.

Matthew also doesn't really explain to us why John was the baptizer. We don't really know why John's the baptizer from Matthew, Mark, or Luke actually. We just know that he baptized people for repentance and for the remission of sins.

But, again, the Gospel of John explains the why, provides the why. And the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Levites and the priests, they were confused and they asked them, they said, so why then do you baptize if you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the prophet?

Why do you do this? Right? Here's the thing. In Judaism, the baptism that John was doing was not completely out of the ordinary. There were some ritual cleansings that happened.

There were some people who practiced baptism, some sects of Judaism that practiced baptism. But what John was doing was completely different. John was baptizing and he was calling it a baptism of repentance.

[28 : 49] A baptism then of preparation for the coming kingdom of God. He also said that he was baptizing because God told him to. That's really important to understand. He was, his ministry was to be a baptizer because God sent him to do that.

John 1, 31 through 34 says, I didn't know him, talking about Jesus, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel. So there you go. He was sent to baptize so that the Messiah could be revealed to Israel.

And John testified, I saw the spirit descending from heaven like a dove and he rested on him. I didn't know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water told me, the one you see the spirit descending and resting on, he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God. So I have, I can think of four reasons why God would send John to baptize with water. And yes, I'm aware of the time. We'll wrap up soon, I promise, okay?

Four reasons why God would send John to baptize with water. Number one, as I already mentioned, this was how God would publicly reveal Christ as the Messiah. This was the launch of Jesus' ministry.

[29 : 58] Okay? So the public revelation. By baptizing in the Jordan, John was able to accumulate large crowds of people. So at the baptism of Jesus, when the Spirit descended like a dove, when the Father spoke from heaven, this was a public declaration of Christ as the Messiah.

Okay? Number two, it was a physical sign of an inward commitment. So just as we saw with Tyler today, baptism in the new covenant is still an outward sign, a physical sign of an inward reality, an inward regeneration.

In the case of John, the commitment that these individuals were making was to repent and prepare their hearts for the kingdom. Okay? So that was what you had in baptism.

Number three, it was symbolic of cleanliness. So ritual cleansings, baptisms in this way, symbolically show what it looks like to wash the dirt off.

So there's a symbolic cleansing as these people prepared their hearts for what God is going to do in the kingdom. They had to wash off the old and get ready for the new. And the fourth, I already kind of said it, but the launch of Christ's ministry.

[31 : 04] And in this launching of Christ's ministry, we'll talk about it next week at the baptism of Jesus, it provides for us a model that we still use today for the new covenant baptism. baptism. So I want you to also see how John's ministry of baptism can also provide for us an example of how we can serve in our own callings.

So Matthew tells us that people from all over, from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him. In other words, John was accumulating huge crowds of people.

I mean, tons of people were coming to see, like they heard there's a prophet, finally the prophet is here, the one who knows that he's preparing the way for the Lord. I mean, how exciting, right? So

they went out to see John and to be baptized by him.

He had accumulated a large crowd, but it wasn't because he sought large crowds, it was because he was faithful and obedient to serve as God had called him to serve. Large crowds are not the telltale sign of success in ministry.

Large crowds are not a telltale sign of that. Did you know that today people, pastors included, will absolutely sell their souls to get famous, to have huge followings, to have massive crowds that come to hear them speak, to rack up massive bills when they go and they outsource themselves as a public speaker?

[32 : 25] I mean, that's a real thing that happens. People will do anything it takes to have a huge following today. But I want us to see in this example of John, it's not about having a huge following, it's about being faithful where God calls you.

Again, today, if someone wants a massive following, they're not going to preach the same message that John the Baptist preached, which is repent because the kingdom of heaven has come near. Success in your ministry is marked by an individual who is faithful and obedient in the place that God has called them.

John, he was not a copycat. He was an innovator and faithful to his specific calling. He didn't derive his own message. He preached what he received from God. He didn't presume a status.

He fulfilled a mission. You see in John an example of humility and one that we should have in our own hearts as well. This is why Jesus, by the way, said that of men born of women, there is none greater than John.

Jesus thought very highly of John the Baptist. I think it's because of John's humble heart and his willingness to serve wherever God called him. So that's John's message, John's ministry, and John's mission.

[33 : 39] I want to close today by reminding you about this message one more time. John called the average Joes to get ready, but he also called the religious elite to get ready.

He told those who relied on their heritage, their status, their background, that they needed to humble their hearts before the Lord and repent. And that message viewed through the lens of what Christ has done still applies today.

We have to stop playing the game of flirting with sin. Paul tells Timothy to flee from his youthful passions. Leave the sin behind.

Flee from sin and flee towards God. Completely turn. Repent and turn. Repent of not trusting Jesus as Lord.

Repent of not accepting him, not receiving him as the Savior. And turn to him and receive his offer of life. Because I want you to understand that this message and the urgency that John preached it with has the same urgency today.

[34 : 50] You don't know how long you have on this earth. We don't know how long this earth has left. If you watch the news, you might think only a few days. We don't know when Jesus is coming back.

There's an odds maker out there that tells you what the odds are of things. And I keep seeing it say that the odds of Jesus returning in 2026 keep going up. I don't know. I don't know.

That's a joke, guys. Someone is doing it, but I think it's a joke. Anyways, the point is, prepare for the return of Christ. Prepare for the return of Christ.

The way to prepare your heart for the kingdom of God is to repent of your sin and believe in Jesus.

The way to prepare your heart for the kingdom of God is to repent of your sin and turn to Jesus.

Trust in him for salvation. It's a simple message. It's the gospel truth. And that is what God calls you to do today. If you've never repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus, then don't leave here today without doing so.

[35 : 49] It's too urgent. Don't put it off for maybe one day. Respond today in obedience. In Acts chapter 17, this is the last thing I'll share, and Eric's going to play a song for us, and we'll have a time of response.

But Acts chapter 17, the apostle Paul is preaching in Athens to a group of pagan idolaters. And do you know what he told them? Hey, you guys are pretty religious, and that's great.

Keep doing you. Have a good day. I'm going to go to another town. Is that what Paul said? No. The answer is no. He preached to them about the grace of God, and he said, therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent.

Because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is all the proof we need. The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes the gospel message true. The resurrection of Jesus Christ places a sense of urgency on your need to respond in faith if you have not already done so.

[37 : 08] I'm going to pray. Eric's going to lead us in a song. And you respond as God leads you to respond today. But don't leave here without knowing that you have settled in your heart your relationship with Christ, that you have repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus for salvation.

Let me pray for us. Jesus, we thank you. We thank you that this message of repentance is still alive today. We thank you that the need for us to repent is still available to us today.

Lord Jesus, break our hearts where we need to be broken. God, let us live for you. Lord, for those in this room who have never repented and trusted you as Savior, God, I pray right now you would put on their heart a burning desire, an overwhelming need to respond in faith, to trust you for salvation. The cost of not responding is too great. So Jesus, please work right now in the lives of those who need to respond. We love you. We praise you. And we pray your blessings over the remainder of our time together.

In Jesus' name, amen.