

Bear Fruits in Keeping with Repentance

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Preacher: Julian Dobbs

[0:00] In the book of his books, on the title page of several of his books, he wrote the words from the Gospel of Matthew, quoting the Father, this is my beloved son, listen to him.

! And you can go on the internet today and you can type in Bollinger, you can type in that passage and you can see it there, the top of some of his books. This is my beloved son, listen to him. Or as the King James says, hear ye him. Sounds much more authoritative, doesn't it, when we say it like that?

Hear ye him. I wonder why Bollinger did that. Why did he put that specific text on the title page of some of his works? He did so, I believe, because he wanted to make a point. And the point was that the authority to which he and all who would be reading his books must bow was to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the most important thing that he wanted those who read his books to know were those words. Listen to him. Not listen to me, but listen to him.

And that's why I prayed earlier that great prayer. May the Holy Spirit be our teacher. It's a minister of the Spirit. Hear ye him. Hear Christ. Hear the word of the Lord.

[1:41] Hear the word of the Lord.

The Lord.

Christ on Jesus. Isn't it wonderful? Say yes, Bishop. It's wonderful, isn't it? It makes me recall those, the words of those, that great worship song we used to sing when I was much younger.

I'm still young, but when I was much younger than I am now. Do you recall it? Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Sing with me. Most of you have gray here.

Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim.

[3:22] In the light of his glory and grace. Hear ye him.

Listen to him. Fix your eyes upon him. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

That's it. And we're going to see it in three ways in this passage this morning, I trust. Firstly, I want to look at the ministry of Jesus from this passage. Then secondly, the baptism of Jesus.

And then thirdly, should we have enough time? And I've got my eye on the clock. We'll look very briefly at the genealogy of Jesus. And we'll find something very important there. So if you would, open your Bibles with me.

Luke chapter 3. It was read to us by Ephraim. Now, it's on page 1020 of the New Testament in your pew Bible. And let's look firstly at the ministry of Jesus.

[4:21] Because this passage really marks the separation between our Lord's private life and his public ministry.

Jesus is being brought out into public by God the Father. And look in verse 23 of Luke's Gospel. We read that Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about 30 years old.

If you want to do some extra study, you can go back to the book of Numbers chapter 8. And there you discover that in the Old Testament, a man, when he entered the priesthood, was to be about, it says, 30 years old.

25, 26, about 30 years old. Jesus, very interestingly, we're told here. Do you see? The continuance in the scripture. About 30 years old. Begins his ministry.

And here he is. And who's there with him? John the Baptist. And the vast majority of all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is devoted to these three years of Jesus' public ministry.

[5:25] He's been launched here. And the crowds are gathering around John. This was a happening moment. If you were the person that kept the church attendance, you would be excited.

There were crowds gathering, multitudes listening. Who is this man, John? Why is he here? What's the purpose that God has sent him to fulfill? Somewhere in the midst of that, there's Jesus.

Look back in verse 15 of the same chapter. John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus' ministry on earth. And no doubt, I picked this up with you last week as we looked at those early verses. His is a message of repentance. Crowds coming. Wondering if John was the Messiah. John says, verse 15, Look, I baptize you with water.

But he who is mightier than I is coming. The strap of whose sandals. The latchet of the sandals. I am not worthy to untie it. Of this one.

[6:26] But he's got all the crowds. Incredible. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. And fire. There is one that is infinitely superior to me.

He says, John, he's coming after me, the coming one. And he is described in terms mightier, in rank, and in authority from this great John the Baptist.

And John says, he's coming, he's coming, he's coming. Prepare your hearts. Prepare your hearts. I was about to sing again. I won't do that. My wife is frowning. Prepare your hearts.

Well, there's a great song about preparing the way and all of that. But we'll go there later. John the Baptist is looked on as something of a hero by these crowds. I mean, can you picture it? I mean, he's wearing camel's hair.

You smell camel's hair? I was on the top of the Mount of Olives once, and a local man thrust camel hair and mouth into my mouth. It was one of the most unpleasant experiences of my life.

[7:36] John's wearing this camel's hair. Locusts eating them. That doesn't sound very nice. Honey, well, that's probably okay. If it was Bishop's honey, it would be even better.

I mean, he's a bit of a dude. A religious dude, right? Probably had a man bun and all of that. I'm getting carried away. But I want you to paint a picture for you.

This was a happening moment. And there were crowds. There were crowds. And what does John do in the midst of this incredible moment?

He's got crowds. He's got attendance. He's got a following. He's got people coming. I mean, the baptism register is getting as full as possible. We're probably running out of pages. And John takes the posture of less than a slave.

Less than a slave. In John's day, a servant would have taken off the shoes of his master and washed his master's feet.

[8:37] But here, speaking of Jesus, John says, I'm not even worthy to do that. Me with the crowds. Me with the baptisms.

Me with the camels here. Not worthy even to untie the strap of his sandals. He is the great coming one. Brothers and sisters, what he's underscoring here is the supremacy of Jesus.

Don't look at me. Even though I'm popular. No, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth. What an incredible privilege.

They'll grow strangely dim when we look to Jesus. Be less than a slave. That's John's posture. That's his posture. And surely it should be true of every single one of us at Holy Trinity Syracuse. Because our greatest privilege is to take the posture of pointing people to Jesus. Is it not? It's something that's not only required of us.

[9:42] It's not only required of each and every one of us who are baptized. It's something that we want to do deep within us, within our Christian DNA. What a privilege to point people to the Savior in our lives and marriages and families and our speech and our actions and our eyes and hearts and minds.

Point them to Jesus. Point them to him. He's the Lord of glory. It's beautiful, isn't it? Say yes, Bishop. Yes. It's beautiful. It's beautiful.

It points people to Jesus. So I ask you this morning, will you make John the Baptist's greatest privilege your agenda? His privilege was pointing people to Jesus.

Will you make that your agenda? Will you make pointing people to Jesus your priority here in the way that you live your life, to be about Christ?

And you know, when you point people to Jesus, we've begun a conversation in the diocese about pointing people to Jesus. And we said in that first conversation, we need to do that with our lives. But we also, and this makes it uncomfortable for us, we need to do it with our words.

[10:51] Yes, we point people to Jesus by the way we live, but we are actually commissioned to tell people about Jesus. To go and tell. So that's John the Baptist's priority here.

But look, there's more. John the Baptist, in fact, describes this Jesus to whom we point people. Verse 17. Do you see with me? How does John describe him?

With his winnowing fork in his hand. To clear his threshing floor. And to gather wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Forgive me, Lisa, but this isn't the Scandinavian Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes, is it? That we see often on our Christmas cards. This is the Jesus with his winnowing fork.

I mean, do you send that out on your Christmas cards? I don't send it out on, do we still send Christmas cards? You see my point here. Jesus has been described as an inescapable judge.

[11:55] And here again the language of our Lord's ministry. Winnowing fork in his hand. Clearing his threshing floor. Burning with unquenchable fire.

The picture of a fork tossing the wheat up in the air. Most of us will have seen that done at some time. The light husk outside. The chaff blown away. And the grain falling to the ground.

And John is saying that Jesus will come as one who will polarize humanity. Yes. Separating chaff and wheat. Disposing of the chaff.

And gathering the wheat into his barn. Notice it's his barn. As it is his church. His barn. Which is in his heaven. Set into contrast.

To the unquenchable fire. The fire of hell. Yes he comes. John the Baptist with a call of repentance. He points us to Jesus. Jesus who is the inescapable judge with his winnowing fork in his hand.

[12:58] It's so unpopular to preach this today. I get it. It's almost uncomfortable for me to preach it. You know there's often a little voice in a preacher's air when you get to passages like this that say.

Tell them that doubt Jesus meek and mild in the manger. Well that's important too. But it's not what we see here. It's so unpopular. It was unpopular in Jesus' day in fact.

And we'll see this in a moment. And it's still unpopular to now. If you have for example the internal fortitude to turn on so-called Christian television. And listen to messages on our screens.

You will listen until your ears go deaf. And you will almost never hear the call to repentance. There is a great deal about happiness and prosperity and health.

And all those wonderful things. There is very very little said in terms of the call to repentance. And repentance is what is needed in times of civil and ecclesiastical darkness.

[13:59] They were dark days. We looked at this at the Bible study. They were dark days when Jesus was launched into his public ministry. Learn about the readers.

Learn about the leaders. Learn about Herod. Learn about those that were mentioned there. They weren't great people. This was a time of political upheaval.

And John's thrown into prison because he preaches Jesus and points people to Jesus and tells people to repent. You read it in the passage, I feel. He called them a brood of vipers.

Repent. Repent. They don't like it. But repent. John's thrown into prison because of his faithfulness to Jesus. You know when John came in the midst of this situation here that launches the ministry of Jesus.

He did not say we need to be culturally relevant. He didn't say we need to be careful to adapt and accommodate to all the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

[15:00] He came with the word of God in his mouth and pointed people to Jesus. May that be our priority. Yes? Pointing people to Jesus. It's all about the Lord's ministry.

The indescribable judge. So we have the ministry of Jesus. Secondly, we have the baptism of Jesus. I want us just to look at this. This is fascinating that it's here in the passage.

Look with me in verses 21 and 22. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens opened.

It's hard for us to picture it, isn't it? But the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son.

With you, I am well pleased. Now think about baptism. Baptism. John's baptism and Christian baptism are similar, yes, but they are different.

[16:02] Yes, there are similarities. They both used water. They were both ordained of God. But there were striking differences. And it's important that we note this in this passage.

John the Baptist is functioning as an Old Testament prophet. And baptism, although it wasn't called that, was not unfamiliar in Old Testament days. John is functioning in a way that is pointing people to Jesus in a ceremonial capacity, a baptism of repentance.

It was ceremonial. It was primarily for Jewish people. And you can still go, and some of you have been there with Brenda and me, and we've looked at those mitzvah baptismal baths there outside

the Western Wall.

Still there for us to see. Christian baptism, in contrast, is not pointing people to something ceremonial.

Although there often is a ceremonial portion to it, isn't there? But it's not pointing to the ceremonial. And this is where we make the big mistake in baptism, in Christianity. We've got to get the baby done because Aunt Lucy's in town.

[17:09] We've got to have the ceremony. That's not what Christian baptism ever should become. We made a big mistake.

For those of us who uphold what's called covenantal theology, when we baptize infants, when we started calling baptism christening. No. That's not. It's not what Christian baptism is.

Christian baptism is not pointing, whether for an infant or an adult, to something ceremonial.

Ceremonial. Christian baptism is Trinitarian. As is the name of this church.

Go baptize them, said Jesus. Not into ceremony. Baptize them into God. The name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christian baptism functions within the New Testament as a sign and a seal of God's grace to his people.

That's what it is. And those coming for confirmation today are saying, I was baptized and I'm confirming that. I'm saying that to the church. Because here's an incredible thing in our passage.

[18:13] John is preaching repentance to the crowds. Picture it if you can. And Jesus comes and he also is baptized by John. Jesus, of course, was not a sinner.

He didn't need to be baptized with a baptism of repentance as a sinner. And yet, here it is, baptism. Jesus identifies with sinners like me.

And it's beautiful, isn't it? You're catching on. But there's something even more significant that's taking place here.

Look in verse 21. When Jesus also had been baptized, he's identifying with sinners and was praying. Look, the heavens opened.

And the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven.

You are my beloved Son. With you, I am well pleased. What a beautiful, incredible picture.

[19:12] We're seeing something of the intimacy in the Godhead here. The relationship between God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in their incredible ministry relationship.

And from the beginning of his ministry onwards, we see Jesus rising early for prayer, watching throughout the night in prayer, going away, praying by himself. His earthly ministry commences with Jesus setting his face towards heaven in this beautiful, prayerful communion with God the Father. God speaks. He speaks. What a beautiful relationship. I wonder if you make this part of our Lord's ministry a priority in your life as well.

The great priority of communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Will you make this beautiful, prayerful communion with your Heavenly Father your priority each morning?

The morning watch there's something incredibly significant that's taking place here and Jesus lets us see it and we can participate in it as well. Praying as he did.

[20:21] Responding to the Father's graciousness initiative. But there's something even more.

Look, while Jesus is praying, we're told that the heavens opened and that Jesus and those with him find themselves standing before this incomprehensible, unfathomable, almightiness of God.

Sometimes when I read this passage, I picture a little opening in the clouds. You know, that part of the Holy Land covered in clouds and there's this little opening, a little beam of light.

We see it in some of the pictures. Are you picturing it? See this little beam of light coming down upon Jesus at his baptism and then a dove, you know, beautifully fluttering down.

He was all very sweet and gentle. But the language is something quite different. The language that is used here is as of the heavens being torn.

Torn open. Torn open. Torn open wide. Can you think of where else we have the same image of being torn?

[21:41] When Jesus is on the cross and crucified, this huge, thick, think of it, large, heavy veil in the temple, it's torn.

It's torn from heaven. It's torn. It's the same language. The heavens are torn open, ripped open, and we see the triune God, all three persons of the Godhead, in the same place at the same time as Jesus is thrust out into his ministry.

It's an incredible thing. It's just incredible. And this is the same spirit that comes down on Jesus as a dove, in the form of a dove.

The same spirit who indwells us and carries us, us forward. we hear the voice of the Father, God's unique Son, unequaled by anyone else, and that spirit is still ministering to us today.

So we have the ministry of Jesus. We have the baptism of Jesus. I haven't got time, but I'm going to do it anyway.

[22:50] I just want to quickly look at the genealogy of Jesus. Look with me very quickly, because often we skip over these passages, right, and we think, nothing in there for me, can't even pronounce the names.

I had a friend back in my New Zealand days, who used to come and preach in our parish, and he used to say, suck every sweet like a candy until you get its meaning out. Well, there's meaning here for us.

Look, very quickly, in these passages today, the verse about baptism is followed about verses about the genealogy of Jesus, and the Bible is full of genealogies.

We have about 40 of them in the Scriptures, and when you read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, and you read the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's Gospel, what do you find?

Shall I tell you? The genealogies of Jesus are full of sinful people. Isn't it incredible?

[23:52] The Jesus family tree had skeletons. It had skeletons. And this is very good news for us today, because we have to reconcile with that in our own lives so often.

No matter what your past, no matter what your lineage, there is a family waiting for you when you come to Christ. It's a new family. A new lineage. You come to Him.

Do you have murderers, adulterers, prostitutes, liars, cheaters, hypocrites, and thieves in your family tree? No, we're not as bad as that.

Well, Jesus had them in His. They're there. You study it. Go and look at them. It's incredible. Jesus comes as the only Savior of sinners.

So here's my closing word. You and I see the supremacy of Jesus as the one who alone is capable, the one who alone is able, is able, as a real man and as the Messiah, born of a virgin, to be the only Savior of sinners.

[25:02] It's very powerful. And what a glorious blessing there is. It's Christ's supremacy. We see it in His ministry. We see it in His family. And we see it as His baptism.

What a gift to us. And so may the Lord help us as we with John the Baptist lift our eyes to this magnificent Savior. And we turn our eyes to Him.

Let's pray. Our gracious God, we come thankful for the Lord Jesus, the Savior of sinners. We're thankful that You sent Your messengers as the prophets to preach repentance, prepare the way for salvation.

Grant that the ministers and stewards of Your mysteries may likewise make ready the way by turning the hearts of the disobedient towards the wisdom of Christ.

And that at Your second coming to judge the world, we may be found a people acceptable to You because of Him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.