

The Voice In The Wilderness (2)

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[0 : 00] The following sermon is made available by Lakeside Bible Church in Cornelius, North Carolina.

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Secondly, we see the voice personified. The voice personified. Let's go back to Mark chapter 1. I won't make you turn anymore now. Mark chapter 1.

Let's look at verses 4 through 8. John did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

[1 : 08] And John was clothed with camel's hair and with a girdle of skin about his loins. And he did eat locust and wild honey and preach, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

I indeed have baptized you with water, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. Now it's here that we learn exactly who this voice is.

Mark's purpose in verses 2 and 3 is just to say that there is a voice. It has been prophesied and he would come. And now we get to verse 3 and Mark says, Here's who the voice was in the flesh.

Now a more literal translation of this first phrase in verse 4 is given in the New American Standard Bible. I think this says it in a probably most appropriate way.

Here's how it reads. John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching. Now John is a common name in Israel. It means God is gracious.

[2 : 08] Baptist literally means the baptizer. And was probably used to distinguish him from others that had the same name. Mark doesn't tell us a lot about John's background.

But Luke actually speaks to it in a lot of depth and in great length. He tells us about John's parents. He tells us that similar to Jesus, he had a miraculous conception.

That he had a unique experience of the moving of the Holy Spirit as he was a baby in the womb of his mother. And that there were other prophecies about who this boy would be.

You can go to Luke chapter 1 and read that on your own. But let me just read an excerpt at the very end of Luke chapter 1. This is what John's dad said through the power of the Holy Spirit.

He said, What do we know about John?

[3 : 44] Well, the very next phrase in verse number 3 really tells us a lot about it. Or excuse me, verse number 4. John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness. Who was John?

He was a wilderness man. There was nothing spectacular about John. There was no accolade that any of us would give John. But this is who he was.

And everything after this statement in verse 4 is Mark's support that John is indeed this voice. So follow with me in the text.

What's Mark's primary purpose for the whole book? We're identifying Jesus, proving that he's the Messiah, the Son of God. And then he says, John is a part of this evidence that gives proof to who Jesus is.

Now he says, now let me prove to you that John really is this guy. So these next verses here are Mark's evidence that John is the voice in order that he may prove that John is actually the forerunner of Christ who is the Messiah and the Son of God.

[4 : 48] Let's look at three things in these verses. We'll look at John's ministry, John's manner, and then John's message. We'll do that quickly and move on, okay? Mark communicates John's ministry in terms of its distinctive features and its distinctive audience.

Let's look at his distinctive features. Verse 4. John did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. There were two distinctive features to John's ministry, preaching and baptism.

Let's look at his preaching. I think it would be safe to say that John is probably one of the greatest preachers to have ever lived. John didn't have to ask anybody to come to him.

He didn't have to build his own synagogue and invite people to come and put signs out on the street like I have to do. That's not what John had to do. John went to the place that nobody wanted to go.

And what was it that drew the people there? Well, we understand it was the Holy Spirit that drew the people there. But it was his preaching. It was distinctive. That's not to say that other people in his day didn't preach.

[6 : 00] But there was something that was unique that marked John's ministry that was his preaching. Jesus himself regarded John as the greatest of all the prophets. Not because of his particular manner, but because of his connection to the ministry of Christ.

There was a passion and an urgency to John's preaching that was fitting of the herald of the Messiah. He was bold.

He was unashamedly insistent on repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins. And Mark doesn't give us a lot about John's boldness, but the other gospel writers do.

John was known and the other gospel writers for not pulling any punches, so to speak. Whenever the religious elite of the day would come out to hear John, he called him a brood of vipers.

And he says, who warned you to come out and to hear this and to escape the wrath to come? He was bold. We find out later in the gospel of Mark, we'll get there eventually, maybe in a year or two.

[7 : 07] We find out that it was actually the boldness of John's preaching that ultimately got him arrested and executed. John not only was unashamed to preach the gospel and the truth of repentance to the religious elite, but he preached that same truth of repentance and faith to King Herod.

And he condemned King Herod for an immoral marriage. And so King Herod had him arrested and thrown into prison. And his immoral marriage, his wife, eventually had him beheaded.

He was a passionate preacher. A far cry from the other preachers of his day. A far cry from many of the preachers in our day. Didn't matter to him whose feelings might get hurt.

Or even if his life was endangered, John was going to preach the word faithfully and passionately. And it was a distinctive feature of his ministry.

So we see his preaching. Then we see probably the thing that he's known for most is baptism. This is the most distinctive feature of John's ministry, which gives rise to the designation that was given to him, John the Baptizer or John the Baptist as we know him.

[8 : 19] The baptism of John was not exactly Christian baptism, as it would come to be understood after the resurrection of Jesus. Let me explain that. John's baptism was representative of repentance, of spiritual cleansing from sin and a turning to God.

That's salvation. We repent. We turn away from self. We turn away from sin. We turn to God in faith. That's really what John's baptism represented. Though similar in nature, Christian baptism has the distinct representation of the gospel of Jesus.

That is his death, burial, and resurrection. This is one of the reasons we baptize by immersion. So that when a person stands perpendicular in the water, they are representative in that moment of Jesus' crucifixion.

As they are put into the water, they are symbolic there of his death and burial. And as they are risen out of the water, it is symbolic of his resurrection to new life.

And therefore, we receive, we are put to death with Christ, and then we are risen with Christ to new life. Jesus hadn't died and risen from the grave whenever John was preaching on the banks of the Jordan.

[9 : 35] His baptism wasn't exactly Christian baptism. It was representative of repentance. As the individual that would come into the water with John, acknowledged their sinfulness and need for God's mercy.

Now, some people have mistaken John's and Christian baptism as providing salvation. But that cannot be so. Mark doesn't say that at all.

Look with me again at the verse. Verse 4, John did baptize in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Mark doesn't say that it was the baptism that gave remission of sins.

He said it was the repentance that gave the remission of sins. The baptism was just the symbol that showed the repentance had taken place. John MacArthur helps us here.

He says, What was John's baptism all about?

[11 : 04] John's baptism was all about acknowledging that we are all in our sin. That we are all in need of God's mercy. And his baptism was symbolizing repentance and cleansing and a turning to God.

Now, he was the voice in the wilderness preparing the way. The voice was his preaching. Preparing the way was his baptism. Now, let's look at his distinctive audience.

Look with me at verse 5. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

Now, further supporting the fact that John was the forerunner of the Jews' Messiah is Mark's description of his distinct audience. John's ministry wasn't directed at the world at large, though there were people outside of the Jewish community that came to faith as a result of his preaching.

The distinct audience of John's ministry is seen in verse 5 as the nation of Israel. All is used here in the generic sense.

[12 : 16] Mark doesn't mean that every single individual from Judea and Jerusalem came to the desert. That's not what he means. He just means that people from all of Judea and all of Jerusalem did go to the desert to hear John.

It's not an all-inclusive term here, but it's meant to communicate the vast popularity of John the Baptist and the extent of his witness in Israel. This was necessary for the herald, right?

John's ministry wasn't conducted in a little pocket or corner of Israel where just a few people came out to see what he was going on about. His ministry had a far-reaching impact all across Judea and Jerusalem, so much so that people from all over the place, some estimate, some 300,000 people might have come to hear John preach on the riverbanks of the Jordan and be baptized by him.

This is not a specific little location. This is spread throughout the nation of Israel. People are hearing of John. They're hearing of what John is saying, and they're hearing of what John is doing.

Now, the fact that John's audience was made up almost exclusively of Jews is why his ministry of baptism was so distinct and important.

[13 : 31] Now, hang with me. The Jews would have had no problem at all for Gentiles to be baptized. That was a part of their process, actually.

For a Gentile person to be a proselyte to Judaism, there was a one-time baptism that would identify them as turning away from their pagan, heathen ways and converting specifically to Judaism.

This is the baptism that John is doing in the river. Except John's not preaching to Gentiles. He's not telling Gentile people on the riverbank of the Jordan, come into the water, be baptized in repentance, and turn toward God.

This is important. He's speaking to Jews. Now, the Jews, the prevalent thought of the day was that citizenship within the nation was salvific.

That as long as I was part of Abraham's seed, that I was safe and that all I'm waiting for the Messiah to do is deliver me from Rome. But John says a different message.

[14 : 35] No, we're not waiting for the Messiah to deliver us from Rome. We're waiting for the Messiah to deliver us from sin. And so he doesn't preach to Gentiles to come into the water to identify in baptism.

He preached to Jews to do this. People who didn't think that they needed this salvation. Not in the way that John was preaching it. And again, MacArthur helps us. For a Gentile proselyte to be baptized was nothing extraordinary.

But John's call for Jews to be baptized was radical. In essence, it required them to see themselves as outsiders who must acknowledge that they were no more fit for the Messiah's kingdom than the Gentiles.

Now, if you've studied the Bible at all, you know there was a great prejudice between Jews and Gentiles. For one of those Jews to step into that water meant I'm identifying as a Gentile in God's eyes.

And that my only hope is to repent of my sin and turn in faith to God. This was not just a religious ritual for them to go through. This was a statement that was being made.

[15 : 41] What made John's baptism so significant? What was it all about? We all need Jesus. That's the point. How is he preparing the way?

He's preparing the hearts of these Jews to recognize, Hey, citizenship in Abraham's seed isn't enough. Just because I'm an Israelite isn't enough.

He's telling these Jews, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He's preparing their hearts. He's turning their hearts away from their own mindset of salvation. And then he's going to take them once they're prepared.

He's going to say, now look at Jesus. Look at the Lamb of God. This is the one you need. Abraham's not what you need. This is the one that you need. That's what John's baptism was.

That we all need salvation no matter who you are. Matthew chapter 3. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, John said to them, you brood of vipers.

[16 : 40] Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. He's even calling the religious teachers of the day to repent. And do not suppose, he says, that you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham for our father.

For I say to you, John says, of these rocks, God is able to raise up children to Abraham. He said, when it comes to the kingdom, it doesn't matter who your father is.

It matters what you're going to do with Jesus, is what John says. So we see his ministry. Much more quickly than that, we'll see his manner. Look at his manner in verse 6.

John was clothed with camel's hair and with a girdle about his loins, a girdle of skin. And he did eat locust and wild honey. Now this sounds like a lot of what Andy has told me he wants to spend his life doing.

Living out in the country on a cattle farm, eating locust and wild honey. Milking cows and riding horses. This is the kind of man John was.

[17 : 47] But isn't this strange? It's not only strange that this was his manner of life, that he's just kind of a wilderness man, but we know people like that, right? We live in the South. We know enough people that like to live in the wilderness.

They're a little strange, but they like to do that. Why is John, or Mark, and all the other gospel writers for that matter, why is he writing this?

What does his purpose have? This is a part of his proof. It's a part of his evidence that John is indeed the voice. Not only did John's ministry match the prophecies, but his manner of life was completely on par with all the other Old Testament prophets and what he did.

But part of the prophecy of this voice, and of John in particular, that he would be a prophet that came in the spirit and strength of Elijah. Now listen to how 2 Kings 1 describes Elijah.

They answered him. He was a hairy man. That means he was clothed in hairy garments, kind of like camel's hair. He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins.

[18 : 56] And they said it is Elijah the Tishbite. Why is it that Mark, and Matthew, and Luke, and John, and Jesus even said this about John, that he was the one in the spirit of Elijah?

Why are they acknowledging this about the way he lived his life? Because this is proof that he was the voice. The reigning Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes of the day couldn't have fit the description of the voice.

They didn't match the description of a prophet. It's not the way that they dressed. It's not the way that they acted. But then there's a second tier to this. Not only strengthens the claim that John was indeed the voice, but it speaks to his personal integrity as a minister of the gospel.

Standing in contrast to the ministers of the day, John wasn't the least bit interested in prominence. He wasn't interested in power.

He wasn't interested in money. He wasn't interested in fame. He was a wilderness man in every sense of the word. People came to him. He didn't gather his own crowd.

[20 : 07] He preached the gospel. He didn't try to take their money. There were no collections. There were no prayer cloths to send in after they watched the commercial. There was no prominence or power.

This was strange. Because all the other religious leaders, that's what they wanted. Power. Prominence. Fame. Money. That wasn't John at all.

To be honest, pastors and ministry leaders today would do well to pattern their own ministries after John. Rather than lusting after prominence and power and money.

We must commit to fulfilling our calling with integrity. I don't want you to come to church on Sunday so that I can get something from you. I want you to come to church on Sunday so that we can worship together.

So we can hear from the word. We need more pastors who will look at John and say, I'm willing to live in the wilderness if I have to live in the wilderness. I'm willing to wear the camel's hair if I've got to wear the camel's hair.

[21 : 16] I don't know if Julie is, but I will. It was his manner. It was just another proof that this is actually who John was. Finally, we see his message.

Look at verses 7 and 8. Here's what John preached. There comes one mightier than I after me. The latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

I indeed have baptized you with water. But he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. It's an interesting message. John's entire purpose was singular.

He had one purpose. Point people to Jesus. That was his calling. That's what he was supposed to do. And that's what he faithfully did.

He pointed people to Jesus. Because of his popularity, there were times that we read in the Gospels that there was an infatuation with who he is or who he was. Some people believed him to be the Messiah.

[22 : 16] He had his own set of disciples that wanted to follow him that even were upset at one point when Jesus' ministry became to be more prominent. They were confused about that. They were followers of John.

But John, over and over and over, did not point people to himself. He pointed people to Christ. He never wavered from that. He uses three statements in these two verses that prove it.

One, there cometh one mightier than I after me. There cometh one mightier than I after me, John says. Now, John had great power and authority and boldness in his preaching.

But he readily acknowledged that whatever it was that he had been gifted with by God to preach this message, it paled in comparison to the authority and the power and the boldness that Jesus would possess.

There was nothing about John and his manner, nothing about his gifts, nothing about who he was that could ever compare to Jesus. He was constantly pointing to people saying, Jesus is greater.

[23 : 20] Jesus is greater. Don't look at me. Look at Jesus. There cometh one mightier than I after me. Two, the latchet of whose shoe I am unworthy to stoop down and unloose.

This is interesting. This is a reference to washing feet. It was a custom that was set aside specifically for slaves. There were even in the Midrash, there are instructions that Jews are not even to command other Jews to do this because it was so degrading.

This was reserved for the lowliest of lows. The people that weren't considered human were the ones to do this. And John says, Jesus is so much greater than me, I am not even worthy to do the most degrading thing that in that culture a person could do.

I am not worthy to do that for him. What's he doing? He's saying, come to me, listen. Go to him. Come over here and listen to what I got to say. Go to Jesus. He's greater. I'm not even worthy to untie his shoe and wash his feet.

Three, I have baptized you with water. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time event.

[24 : 35] It occurs at the moment of conversion. A person receives Christ. All believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit. Everyone. One, you have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit today.

He was not himself the hero of the story, John. He wasn't pointing to the power of his own message or of his own practice. He was pointing to the power of what Jesus would do.

John's baptism merely symbolized the repentance of the heart. But Jesus would bring a spiritual baptism that would radically transform their hearts.

It's as if John is saying, all I can do is wash you on the outside with water. But he, Jesus, can transform and cleanse you on the inside.

I can't do that. Only he can do that. Go to Christ. The humility of John's preaching showed that he, too, was in desperate need of this Savior.

[25 : 36] He wasn't safe just because he was a preacher. He wasn't safe just because of his manner of life. He needed the grace and mercy of Christ as much as anybody else did.

And his humility shows that. As Jesus' ministry began, John's ministry faded away. Some people might would consider that tragic or maybe even depressing.

Not John. John knew his purpose. His purpose wasn't to exalt himself. His purpose was to exalt Christ. In fact, his disciples asked him about this one day.

As Jesus rose to prominence and John began to fade, they were bothered, a little jealous. Here's what John said to them. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said.

I am not the Christ. But I have been sent ahead of him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.

[26 : 38] And then John says, So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase. I must decrease. That was John's heart.

He knew and embraced his calling and purpose to point everyone to Jesus. And as people started following Jesus, he says, In this my joy is made full.

I don't want them following me. I want them following him. Why? All I can do is sprinkle some water on them. I can dunk them in the river. That's it. What he can do for them is give them eternal life.

He can give them the spirit that will transform their hearts and will transform all of their eternity. He can do so much more. He must increase. I must decrease.

John knew his job was to get out of the way and just point people to Jesus. Guess what? That's your job. Point people to Jesus and get out of the way.

[27 : 39] That's my job. To point you to Jesus and get out of the way. He must increase. I must decrease. And as that was literally fulfilled in John's life, he exulted in that fact.

My joy is full. Why? Because everybody left me. Praise the Lord. Everybody left me, John said. They're following Christ now.

Which is exactly what he was called to have them do. The life and ministry of John the baptizer is of incredible importance. But only as we understand it to be connected to Jesus.

He's included in each gospel book because he points us to Jesus Christ. That was his calling. And it's ours too. And let me close it this way.

We look at this passage primarily seeing Mark's evidence for pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. But that doesn't mean that we can't learn and apply John's ministry to our own.

[28 : 43] Six observations I've made about John's ministry that needs to be observed in ours too. One, we need to passionately share the gospel. Passionately share the gospel.

We need to care about evangelism. We need to care. The picture of John is not this guy that was just kind of take it or leave it.

You know, here's what I think. What do you guys, I'm open-minded. What do you all think? That's not what John's doing. He's passionate. He knows this truth. He knows who he is.

He knows what his calling is. And he's passionately telling these people, these thousands and thousands of people, many of which hated him probably because he said, you're not worthy of the kingdom. But he passionately preached the gospel.

Hey, people are going to hate you for preaching the gospel. I can promise. If you go to David's in today, and all those people are out on the sidewalk, and they're walking through town, and they're getting their hot dogs, and they're enjoying their day, and you start preaching the gospel of the kingdom, they are not going to love you for it.

[29 : 48] Passionately preach the gospel anyways. That's our call. If we truly believe that Jesus is who Malachi and Isaiah says that he is, we can preach that truth passionately.

Two, preach with humility. Humility. Here's what I mean. This is not about us. What we do in evangelism, we've got this program we talked about a couple weeks ago.

I'm going to talk more about it in a few weeks. Where over the next three years, we want to hand deliver a copy of God's word to every house in Cornelius. We want people to come to our church.

We've got anniversary Sunday in a couple weeks. I hope that you'll bring people that need to hear the gospel that day. We don't want to build our church just to build our church. This is not about us. This preaching is not about us.

Filling these chairs is not about us. It's not building our constituency in this community. That's not what it's about. It's not about seeing how big of a church we can have.

[30 : 46] It's not about having a nice place where we can meet. If we've got to meet six times on a Sunday at the Acting Out studio just to have services, we'll meet at the Acting Out studio for six times on a Sunday. Whatever we've got. This is not about us.

This is about Christ. This is about Christ. Whenever we get to a point that the Lord blesses our church enough to have enough people, we're going to take some of those people, we're going to send them somewhere else.

We're going to say, why don't you go to Mooresville? Why don't you go to Davidson? Or why don't you go to this part of town? And let's do this all over again. This is not about us. It's about the gospel. Three, recognize our calling.

John knew what his purpose was. He recognized his calling. If you're a believer today, you have that calling. You have it. We all do.

Jesus said, go. Go, therefore, and teach all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you to do.

[31 : 46] And I will be with you even to the end, he says. That's our calling. Let's fulfill our calling. Four, focus on Jesus.

We need to focus on Jesus. Here's what I mean by this statement. I saw somebody say this or write this a few days ago.

I wonder how many of us would be perfectly content with the people in our community and in our nation converting over to our morals but not actually receiving Christ.

How many of us would actually be okay with that? I wonder how many of us would be content for Roe v. Wade to be overturned but not one person come to know Christ in that process.

I wonder how many of us would actually be, hey, this is a victory for us. No. We're not preaching the message of morality. How many of us would just be content?

[32 : 51] You know, if we just got all the conservatives in this election, which half the positions doesn't even have a conservative running for it. If we just got all the conservatives in each position, we'd be content.

Man, we're on the right path. No. It's not about that. Focus on Jesus. It's not about abortion. Focus on Jesus. And Jesus will take care of that.

It's not about Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Pray for them to be saved. Focus on Jesus. Five. Commit to holiness.

John had a ministry of integrity. People won't care the least bit about your message of salvation if that message of salvation hasn't affected your life. Six. Six.

Six. Urgent in presentation. Urgent in presentation. Urgent in presentation. That's what we seem to glean from John.

[33 : 49] He was urgent in his preaching. This is important. The point of this is the people we know need Jesus.

It's not just that Jesus will improve their life. No. They need him to have life. This is the urgent salesman.

Which we're not selling anything. We're giving it away. But we all know those salesmen who are urgent. They know how to close the deal. And when we leave that conversation, what's the thing that we think?

I never realized it. But I need what this guy's offering. I need it. We need to preach the gospel in such a way not to blind people or to step over the scriptures in order to persuade them to think something that's apart from the Holy Spirit's work.

That's not what I mean. But we need to preach the gospel in an urgent way so that when people talk to us about Jesus, they leave that conversation thinking, I think I need this. This isn't just something that will make my life better.

[35 : 01] This is something that will give me life. If I don't have Jesus, I will have nothing. There should be urgency in our message. Urgency in the gospel.

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