

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 7th April 2019
Services: 730, 930 Tewantin (via video) and Peregian
Series: Luke: you can be certain
Title: ... that John preached a baptism of repentance
Passage: Luke 3:1-20
Outline:

1. **The time**
 2. **The man**
 3. **The crowds**
 4. **The place**
 5. **The word**
 6. **The repentance**
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INTRODUCTION

- I have three questions as I start
- What did you come here for today? As you responded to the alarm and got out of bed and got ready...
- And when you were tempted to stay where you were and have an easy morning, what brought you here?
- What generally motives people to get to church?
- Could be a whole range of things... to hear God speak to them, to be uplifted and inspired by the music; for the fellowship with other believers; to worship God...
- But for some... habit, ritual, fear – fear of what God would do if you **don't** turn up... point scoring – racking up **merit points** so that when your life ebbs to a close, you have enough in the bank to make it to God! //
- **Second** question – what makes a preacher, **popular**?
- I'll just leave you to ponder that... and we'll come back to it
- My **third** question – what is the difference do you think between people who are actively **involved** in the life of a church... (not just talking about **this** church – church in general) – and those who kind of fit church in when there is no better offer for them or their family and they aren't involved in the **slightest**?
- Well – I that is not my outline... or anything like that – but I hope I've whet your appetite for some of what I think we'll cover this morning in our passage from Luke 3:1-20 and I hope you have that passage open in front of you – whether you're watching this in church or online.
- Here's where we are heading as we look at this remarkable man called John the Baptist this morning:
 1. **The time**
 2. **The man**
 3. **The crowds**
 4. **The place**
 5. **The word**
 6. **The repentance**
- ...and before you look at your watch this morning and think we'd better settle in... some of these points are extremely short... and we'll spend more time on 5 and 6.

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1. THE TIME

- Now I'm not going to read out the opening verses again – but just look down with me and note the detail...
- All of those secular leaders and religious leaders and the areas they had responsibility for can be validated by sources **outside** the **Bible**... so we are reminded again as we were from week **1** in this series, that this is **history** we are reading, not **fairy-tale**.
- This is not 'once upon a time in a land far far away', this is 1st century around 30AD in Israel and Palestine.
- But I want you to note too that this was a time of **darkness**...
- It was a time of more **degradation** and **political chaos**.
- The reign of **Tiberius** for example, was marked by **treachery** and **cruelty**...
- And while there had been some noise from God 30 years earlier – “Oh yeah – I remember about some shepherds raving on about some angels... and a Messiah being born” and “John’s dad going mute when he was told he and Elizabeth were going to have a child” – but “whatever happened about all that by the way – it’s been quiet ever since!!”
- Mmm... political chaos, maladministration, moral degradation... sound familiar at all? – along with people who have some vague recollection about God from Sunday school days – but know **little more**... and **care** to know **little more**./
- So that’s the time and context into which John came
- What about the man himself?

2. THE MAN

- It’s tempting just to think well this is a very strange man... and then almost to ignore him...
- He lived out in the **wilderness**... back of **nowhere**
- Matthew 3 tells us he wore **camel hair** and a **leather belt** – hardly in your Christians clothes catalogues today...
- ...and he was on to something with his **dietary plans**... with the **locusts** and the **wild honey**...
- And yet the Bible presents him as one of the most **striking** individuals on the stage of **human history**...
- He was remarkable in his **birth** – with Zechariah and Elizabeth being way past child bearing age
- Remarkable in his **lifestyle** – where he lived, what he wore, what he ate...
- Certainly remarkable in his **preaching**... you won’t have heard **anything** like it...
- And remarkable in the **crowds** he drew...

3. THE CROWDS

- Each of the gospels references his preaching... remarkable when all 4 gospels mention something...
- Matthew 3:5 says that people went out to him from Jerusalem, Judea and the whole region of the Jordan... they were coming from everywhere to hear this man preach...
- Mark says – the whole Judean countryside...
- John 3 – people were coming to be baptised...

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- We're tempted just to say - 'oh yeah, that's **nice**'...
- But Jesus says of John in Matthew 11 - *Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone **greater** than John the Baptist...*
- There was something absolutely **unique** and **special** about this man... as the one who would **prepare** the **way** of the Lord.... The one who would be a **voice** crying in the wilderness...
- ...the one who John said in the opening words of his gospel - *There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that **through him all might believe**.* That's hardly insignificant!
- Don't **over-look** John the Baptist as just an **odddity** of the **1st century** or someone a little **embarrassing** and somehow **tangential** to the gospel...
- He had a **crucial** role to play and his words **then** as **now**... have a certain **sting** in their **tale**... and we do **well** to take **notice of!**
- Just look for example at

4. THE PLACE

- ...these crowds came to
- It wasn't a walk in the **park**...
- It wasn't a huge city **convention** centre that sat 12,000 people with air conditioning and parking underneath...
- It wasn't in **Jerusalem** in the temple or synagogue...
- Such was the crowd John drew... such was there something in his message that the crowds **wanted** to **hear**... that they travelled **way out** into the **desert** to hear him...
- He was actually in a pretty **junky** kind of place..
- 600-1300 ft **below** sea level... **dead sea basin**...
- It's **hot** and **uncomfortable**... one commentator "hot uninhabitable depression - wild in every way and removed from all civilisation"
- So you have a **strange** man, in **strange** clothes, with a **strange** diet, in a **strange** location... yet drawing **crowds**...
- So how do we **account** for this?
- because John was a **voice** with a **word** from **God**...

5. THE WORD

- Have a look with me at v2 - *during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.***
- John didn't wake up one day and decide to make an impact... and create a niche market for a public speaker in terms of his clothes and his diet and his location and home... yes - **this** will be different - no one else is doing **this**... /
- No... the **word of God came** - and he **went**...
- He was like the **last** of the great OT **prophets** of whom we also read - *the word of God came* - Micah - Jeremiah - "*the word of God came...*"
- There are **two** types of preachers who attract attention... those who simply preach what the hearers'

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itching ears **want** them to **say**... God is **love** and he doesn't **mind** how you live your life... God is **love** – he doesn't mind your **sexual** ethics... God is **love** – he doesn't mind you **ignoring** parts of his word you don't like... // those people will **draw** a **crowd** – for a **time** // – until people realise they've actually got **nothing** to **say** and **nothing** to **offer**...

- And the **other** type? Those who speak with the **authority** of **God's word**... and people want to listen not necessarily because it's **fun** or **easy** – but because they know that God is **speaking** to them **through** the preaching of His word... and their lives are being **transformed** because of it...!
- If ever I become the **first** type and not the **second** – please be the **first** to **tell me!**
- You don't want to hear from **me** every Sunday morning – I'm not **worth** getting out of bed for – but you **do** want to hear from **God** – as here, we **open God's word** and work to **understand** it and **apply** it to our lives... //
- Now what **was** this word from God which John preached?
- I'm pretty sure you've **never** heard preaching **like** it...
- Can you imagine if the first words out of my mouth to you this morning was *You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?*
- You're a **bunch** of **snakes**... and what are you doing out here in the **desert**!??
- You can imagine his associates saying can't you – “what are you **doing** John?” “you've got a crowd here already – are you trying to **ruin** everything?”
- “Couldn't you have had a **nicer** introduction than **this**?”
- He **wasn't polite** and he didn't **sugar coat** the **gospel**...
- He didn't **rush** to the people and appeal to their **felt needs**... he didn't hand out cards for people's **feedback** at the end of the **talk**...
- No instead of painting over a few cracks in their common misunderstandings... he gets to work with some **sandpaper** – not the fine sandpaper you use to **finish** a job, but the stuff used at the **beginning** of the work...
- He's coming with **sandpaper** to prepare the hearts of listeners, so the **good news** will **stick**...
- John the Baptist enters the stage of history speaking in a **dramatic fashion** because the **word of God** had **come** to him.
- He's not interested in starting the “John the Baptist **fan club**...”, but **knew** God had given him a message...
- The message is deliberately **harsh**, to **wake** them **up**... even though such **directness** takes our breath **away**... /
- He's telling them they are related to that great **serpent** we first meet in the Garden of Eden – **Satan**...
- And he says “don't give me any nonsense about being related to **Abraham** as if that gets you off the **hook**... because God can raise up these stones as children of Abraham...”
- Now by this stage some people might be saying – “ah let's go – I don't like this guy” – “he's rude and dogmatic... we have our background... I'm of a good pedigree... my whole family were Anglican and my grandfather was an archdeacon!!” //
- I wonder if you've ever heard a sermon with the title ‘flee from the coming wrath’.... The preacher gets up and starts ‘good morning, I'd like to address you this morning on the topic of fleeing from the coming wrath’

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- well the preacher may be accused of being a “fire and brimstone” preacher and surely the church gave that up years ago...
- well – I think we **did** – but it just may be possible that we went too far the **other way**...!
- because when we go through **Luke’s gospel** as we are doing – I can’t with integrity say ‘let’s skip over this bit where John talks about fleeing the coming wrath’... as if to say – “well, **that’s not very nice!**”
- here’s a quote I like: “there is a morbid dislike of strong language today – a fear of giving offense – a flinching of plain-speaking and directness...”
- you know when that was written? 1856... the quote finishes: “people in the 19th century don’t like to hear it straight”
- there **is** a wrath to come... *the axe is already at the root of trees v9, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be thrown into the fire...*
- imagine with me a man at the top of that factory fire in Melbourne on Friday... fire coming up the building little by little...
- he’s leaning out the window... and suddenly a rescuer calls to him from a ladder – “you’re in danger – flee! – take a hold of my hand – trust me – get on this ladder and get out of there..”
- And he says... “I’m sorry I find your language a little too harsh and your description of my predicament is rather unbalanced...”
- “Come on now” says the fire officer – “get out while you can...”
- “I don’t need an emotional crutch... maybe next week... but only come if you promise not to be so **melodramatic**...”
- Well of course that it ludicrous... this brave man was their *only* hope! They need to leave behind all that was holding them back and turn and embrace the one who came to rescue them!
- Jesus had not come **up** the ladder... but **down** the ladder... and John says ‘flee the coming wrath’... ‘flee before it is too late’...
- well what should we **do**?? – and you’ll notice that is the precise question the crowd asked in v10...
- which brings me finally to

6. THE REPENTANCE

- We must face that what the people **wanted** was different from what they **needed**
- And what they **needed**, they did not **want!** (That hasn’t changed!)
- And so instead of **giving** them what they **want**, he takes his **sandpaper** out and he **rubs** them...
- He doesn’t **tickle** them under their **chin**, he doesn’t **scratch** them where they **itch**, he doesn’t find out what the **drift** of the **group** and find out what they want to **hear**... he says – “**you brood of vipers...**” “**who got to you and told you to flee from the wrath of God?**”
- What **should** they **do**? If they came for a **baptism of repentance** – they need to **repent!**
- You can’t **flee** God’s wrath by adding a bit of **religion** to your life and pulling up your **socks** and trying to do **better**.
- You can’t **flee** the coming **wrath** by claiming your family **heritage**.
- What is **repentance**?
- It is an **about turn**.

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- Turning from living around our **own self-centred concerns** and walking in the **opposite direction**.
 - For **most** of us, our lives will have two clear **volumes**... (unless you've lived with Jesus all your life...) two clear volumes: volume **I** where we serve ourselves and volume **II** where having discovered the wonder of the gospel and Jesus writes a whole **new** chapter in our lives.
 - Do **you** have a volume II? / Clearly, repentance means more than **sorrow** of being **found out**
 - It's means more than simply **regret** about previous bad choices in the past
 - Remember the **prodigal son**?
 - He had turned his back upon his father. I can do better on my own. Allow me freedom. And in so doing he had made a total **mess** of his life
 - He came not simply to a position of **regret**. He doesn't just **moan** and say **I regret what I have done**. That would have left him where he **was!**
 - And it's not that he left the pig sty and decided because of his regret to turn over a new **leaf** and live a better **life** – no – he decides to turn his life **around** and go **back** to the **father**... and was **lovingly welcomed** in a **forgiving embrace**... /
 - so repentance is a **radical turning away from self** as **first** – to a place where **God** is **first**... running **back** to him as our **loving Father**... **submitting** to **him**... **revelling** in the **Father-child relationship!**
 - and **THAT** will result, in a **radically changed life**...
 - radically **generous** with **clothes** and **food** – “Mr Smith I saw your son down the street this afternoon – he had no shirt – and I'd just love him to have one of mine...”
 - **tax collectors** not collecting any more than is required... “Mrs Levi – your rent is only \$65 this week” – “oh – there's been a reduction?” – “no – I've repented of my sin and I don't want to charge you more than you're meant to be paying”
 - **soldiers** – don't extort money or accuse people falsely and be content with your pay... “how much to pass by here? You normally charge \$10...” “no – **nothing** today – we get paid **enough** as it **is**...”
 - Can you **imagine**...!?
 - The **crime** statistics in Sydney went markedly **down** in the year after the **1959** Billy Graham crusade as people were genuinely **changed** from the **inside out** as a result of their **repentance**...
 - **Real repentance** results in **real fruit**... /
 - And I want to ask you this morning... have you **repented**? Is the **fruit** of radical **repentance** visible in your life?
 - ...the result of no longer living for **you**, but **entirely** for the God who **loves** you, invites you **back**; and the God whom through the **death** and resurrection of his Son **Jesus**, has done **everything necessary** for you to be **forgiven** and to **return!**
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- Why did you come this morning? Not to hear me **entertain** and say what you **want** me to **say** – but to hear me bring the **word** of **God** – to hear what you **needed** to **hear!**
 - What makes a preacher **popular**? The one who says **nothing** – the one who **tickles**... but only till people realise they have nothing to say... but **also** – as we see in John – the one who **uncompromisingly** brings the **very word** of **God** – **tough** though that may **be!**
 - And the difference between people who turn up to church **uninvolved**, or those for whom the Lord Jesus is **everything**? It's **repentance**... **radical, life transforming, fruit-bearing repentance**.