

## The Faithfulness of the Forerunner

**Matthew 3:1-9:** *“<sup>1</sup> In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, <sup>2</sup> And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. <sup>3</sup> For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>4</sup> And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, <sup>6</sup> And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: <sup>9</sup> And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”*

- I. Verse 1—*“In those days came John the Baptist”*
  - A. The word “came” portrays John the Baptist as the “comer.” He is the one who runs before the Lord Jesus Christ as the forerunner.
    1. **Forerunner** is a great title for John the Baptist because it is made up of 2 words that describe the life work of John the Baptist
  - B. The word “**fore**” shows us that John the Baptist came before the Lord Jesus.
    1. With these words, John is looking behind him, and he sees the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ as he says, *“He it is who coming after me is preferred before me.”*
  - C. In verse five, it says, *“Then **went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region** round about Jordan.”*
  - D. John was like a celebrity in Israel.
  - E. All of Jerusalem and Judea and all the regions around Jordan had not only heard about John the Baptist, but they went out into the wilderness to be baptized of John as they were confessing their sins.
  - F. John the Baptist was in great danger of being proud and listening to his heart say to himself, “Just look at how all of Israel is streaming out in the wilderness to hear my message and be baptized by me. I am really something.”
  - G. If John had listened his heart, then John would be described by the words found in **James 1:14** which says, *“But every man is tempted, when he is **drawn away** of his own lust, and **enticed**.”*
  - H. If John the Baptist had listened to his own heart telling him how great he was because all Israel went out to him, then John would have been **drawn away**.
    1. **Drawn away** is the term that Moses used to warn Israel to be on their guard in **Deuteronomy 30:15-18**.
      - a. **The verses says, “See, I have **set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil...**<sup>15</sup> But **if** thine heart **turn away**, so that thou **wilt not hear**, but shalt be **drawn away**, and worship other gods, and serve them;<sup>17</sup> I denounce unto you.<sup>18</sup>”**
  - I. These words in James 1 and Deuteronomy 30 are so graphic for us—enticed, drawn away, and turn away.
    1. Those words describe temptations that we face as life for us is a choice as God said in verse 15.

- a. Verse 15 says, “*See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.*”
2. Life for us is a constant “**if**” where we have to choose before life and death and good and evil.
  - a. We are walking with God by regularly reading the Bible and hearing God speak to us and responding to God by repenting of sin and changing our sinful ways.
  - b. But if we yield to those enticements to sin, then we are “**drawn away**” and eventually “**turn away.**”
- J. Life for us is a constant fight to resist temptation and just say, “**No**” to the voice of enticements.
- K. For John the Baptist, his great temptation was to listen to the enticing voice inside of pride.
- L. If John would have listened to that voice and become impressed with how great he was, then John would have been “**drawn away.**”
- M. By yielding to pride, John would have been drawn away from the Lord Jesus Christ.
- N. By yielding to pride, John would have been drawn away from God who was directing Him.
- O. By yielding to pride, John would have been drawn away from his life work of preparing Israel for the coming of the Lord Jesus.
- P. By yielding to pride, John would have been drawn away from his life work described in **Luke 1:16.**
  1. The verse says, “*And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.*”
  2. If John yield to pride, life would have been unfruitful and useless.
- Q. The same is true for us when we are enticed and yield to the sin of pride of being impressed with ourselves.
  1. Then, we no longer put the priority on daily reading the Bible, and we no longer want to hear God correcting us. We no longer want to change our lives to make God happy.
  2. Our lives become unfruitful and useless.
- R. John did not allow himself to be enticed. John triumphed over the sin of pride when he spoke in **John 1:27.**
  1. The verse says, “*He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, **whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.***”
- S. When John said that he was not worthy to untie the shoes of the Lord Jesus, that showed us how John as the forerunner was constantly turning backward to look at and admire the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- T. Turning back and seeing the greatness of the Lord Jesus, John said the following about himself in verse 23.
  1. The verse says, “*He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.*”
  2. John said that compared to the Lord, John was just a voice. **No one sees a voice; they just hear a voice**
  3. That is how John wanted to be known as—just a voice that no one saw. John the Baptist was described in **Isaiah 40:3** as “*the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness.*”
- U. No matter what grand work we have—no matter if we wake up in the morning with the grand work of preaching to a whole nation as John did, no matter what we have to do for any given day—our most important priority is to be like John the forerunner and to look back to the Lord Jesus Christ and be impressed with His greatness.

II. Verse 1—*“In those days came John the Baptist”*

- A. John as the **“forerunner”** running before the Lord Jesus meant he couldn’t put obstacles in the way of the Lord to reaching the Israelites.
- B. When He said that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, that meant that the door to the Kingdom of Heaven was near.
  - 1. The time had come for people to come into the Kingdom of Heaven. The time had come for people to be saved from the sinking ship of this world and by getting into the Kingdom of Heaven.
- C. John’s motivation would have come from **Malachi 4:5-6**.
  - 1. The verses say, *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:<sup>5</sup> And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.<sup>6</sup>”*
  - 2. John was filled with the conviction that He was that prophet that was sent just like it says in **Romans 10:15**.
    - a. The verse says, *“And how shall they preach, **except they be sent?** as it is written, *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*”*

III. Verse 6—*“Baptized of him in Jordan”*

- A. Israel is flowing out to John.
  - 1. **Matthew 3:6** says, *“And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”*
- B. The Jordan River was made famous by what happened to a Syrian captain named Naaman in **2 Kings**.
  - 1. **2 Kings 5:1** says, *“Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but **he was a leper.**”*
  - 2. **2 Kings 5:10** says, *“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and **thou shalt be clean.**”*
  - 3. **2 Kings 5:10** says, *“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.”*
- C. Captain Naaman was a leper which meant that he was unclean.
  - 1. **Leviticus 13:45** says, *“And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, **Unclean, unclean.**”*
- D. The leper had to cry out, *“Unclean, unclean.”*
  - 1. It was a terrible existence as lepers were looked down upon.
- E. Naaman was considered unclean, but when he dipped in the River Jordan, Naaman became clean.
- F. From the history of Naaman, the Jordan River became known as a place where the unclean went to in order to become clean.
  - 1. When John the Baptist was baptizing in the River Jordan, that was a statement that the people were unclean and needed cleansing.
  - 2. The River Jordan was for uncleanness.
- G. There was a second significance to the River Jordan from **Joshua 4:1**.
  - 1. The verse says, *“And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,”*
- H. The River Jordan was the place where Israel crossed over to come into the land.

1. So, when John was baptizing in the River Jordan, the people thought of a new life with God.
  - I. Those are the two messages that the people understood about the River Jordan.
  - J. Just imagine as the people stepped into the Jordan River how they thought, “Just as Naaman dipped himself in the Jordan River and was cleansed from his leprosy, I now am dipped into the same Jordan River to be cleansed from my sin.”
    1. “Just as Israel under Joshua went into the Jordan River, leaving their old life in Egypt to go to the new promised land of Canaan, I now am going into the Jordan River to leave my old sinful life without God and coming into a new life with Him.”
  - K. The people had two associations with the Jordan River—a place of **cleansing** and a place of a **new beginning**.
- IV. Verse 6—“*Confessing their sins*”
- A. But, there is no cleansing from sins unless a person is acutely aware that he is a dirty, rotten sinner and that he needs cleansing from his sins.
  - B. There is no new beginning with God unless a person is acutely aware that he is a dirty, rotten sinner, and he needs a new beginning with God.
  - C. No cleansing and no new beginning with God happens unless a person is acutely aware that he is a dirty, rotten sinner.
  - D. That is why the record states in verse 6—“*And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*”
  - E. Confessing their sins showed that the people were acutely aware that they were dirty, rotten sinners.
    1. There is no start with God unless a person comes to God confessing that he is a dirty, rotten sinner.
- V. Verse 7—“*He saw many of the Pharisees come*”
- A. So, here were the people coming to be baptized in the Jordan River confessing that they were dirty, rotten sinners.
  - B. But, now we are told that there was another group coming to be baptized in verse 7.
    1. Verse 7 says, “*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*”
  - C. The people were confessing their sins, but the Pharisees and Sadducees were not confessing their sins. That was because the Pharisees and Sadducees did not see themselves as dirty, rotten sinners.
  - D. As a matter of fact, there was a conflict in teaching between John and the Pharisees and Sadducees.
    1. The Pharisees and Sadducees taught the people to justify themselves.
    2. They taught the people that they were special because they were Jewish, and they did not need anything more than to embrace their Jewishness to be accepted with God.
    3. The Pharisees taught the people to justify themselves because they were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
  - E. While the Pharisees taught the people to justify themselves, John taught the people to accuse themselves.
  - F. John taught the people to follow King Solomon who taught in **1 Kings 8:38**.
    1. The verse says, “*What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man **the plague of his own heart**, and spread forth his hands toward this house.*”

2. What an interesting way the Bible describes the condition of man with “the plague of his own heart.”
  - a. “A plagued heart” is the real heart disease of man.
  - b. “A plagued heart” is a heart gravitates toward sin.
  - c. “A plagued heart” is a heart that is prone to wander away from God and chose his own way.
- G. The issue is for every man is **1 Kings 8:38**.
  1. **1 Kings 8:38** says, “*Any man...which shall know the plague of his own heart.*”
  2. The question is whether a person is acutely aware that he is a dirty, rotten sinner in serious need of cleansing from his own sin and of a Savior to deliver him from his own sin.
- H. Verse 6 describes the people coming to John confessing their sins. That shows that they knew the plague of their own heart.
  1. The people coming to be baptized were filled with sorrow and shame from their guilt.
- I. That detail is missing in verse 7 for the Pharisees and Sadducees as they did not come to confess their sins.
  1. They did not know the plague of their own heart.
  2. The Pharisees and Sadducees did not feel any sorrow and shame and guilt, but they came to be baptized which raises the question.
- J. Why do you think that the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John’s baptism? They must have seemed out of place standing in line with all the people around them full of sorrow and shame and crying and confessing their sins while they stood there discussing the weather.
- K. They probably wanted to gain favor with the people.
  1. They are described in verse five as follows:
  2. **Matthew 6:5** says, “*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.*”
- L. The root word for Pharisee means “to separate,” and that is how the Pharisees saw themselves as separate and detached from others.
  1. This is seen in what the Lord Jesus described in **Luke 18:9-14**.
    - a. The verses say, “*And he spake this parable unto certain which **trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:**<sup>9</sup> Two men went up into the temple to pray; the **one a Pharisee**, and the other a publican.<sup>10</sup> The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that **I am not as other men are**, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.<sup>11</sup> I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.<sup>12</sup> And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.<sup>13</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.<sup>14</sup>”*
- M. That was the perfect description of the Pharisee when the Pharisee said in **Luke 18:11**.
  1. **Luke 18:11** says, “*I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers.*”
  2. They separate themselves from others and see others as dirty rotten, sinners, but they do not see themselves as dirty, rotten sinners.
- N. The two groups of people coming to John’s baptism were as follows:
  1. The people filled with sorrow and shame and guilt and were at rock bottom

2. The Pharisees and Sadducees who saw themselves on the height of self-righteousness.
- O. These very low people confessing their sins and with these very high Pharisees, John fulfills his mission of **Isaiah 40:3-4**.
  1. The verses say, *“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.<sup>3</sup> Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.<sup>4</sup>”*
  2. The valley are the people at rock bottom filled with sorrow, shame and guilt.
    - a. They are the valley that are exalted by being cleansed and forgiven and becoming children of God.
  3. The mountains and hills are the self-righteous high minded Pharisees and Sadducees that are made low by John’s rebuke.

VI. Verse 7—*“O generation of vipers”*

- A. John does not call the Pharisees rabbi.
  1. Rabbi means “my teacher,” and they were not John’s teachers.
- B. Instead of Rabbi, John calls them a “generation of vipers.”
  1. This is similar to the term found in **Isaiah 1:4**.
    - a. **Isaiah 1:4** says, *“Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers.”*
  2. This is the same term that the Lord used for the Pharisees in **Matthew 12:34** and **Matthew 23:33**.
    - a. **Matthew 12:34** says, *“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”*
    - b. **Matthew 23:33** says, *“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”*

VII. Verse 7—*“Warned you to flee from...wrath to come”*

- A. Then, John asked them, *“Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”*
- B. John was suspicious of their coming and in essence asked them, “Why are you here? What was the fear that drove you to come here?”
- C. John was comparing the Pharisees to the people filled with shame and guilt.
  1. The person who warned the people was God. That was conviction, the work of the Holy Spirit.
  2. **John 16:8-11** says, *“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:<sup>8</sup> Of sin, because they believe not on me;<sup>9</sup> Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;<sup>10</sup> Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.<sup>11</sup>”*
  3. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to warn that there is wrath to come by convicting of sin.
    - a. The Holy Spirit warns a person that there will be wrath for his sin
    - b. The Holy Spirit warns a person that the Lord Jesus will be the judge to administer the wrath of God.
    - c. By convicting that the prince of this world, the devil is judged.
    - d. The Holy Spirit warns a person that he is facing the same judgment as the devil.
- D. So, the Holy Spirit is the one who warned the people of the wrath to come, and the people were afraid of the judgment of hell.
  1. The title for the lost is found in **Ephesians 2:3**.

- a. **Ephesians 2:3** says, *“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”*
    - 2. Children of wrath is a terrible title.
  - E. But, no one warned the Pharisees of the wrath to come, and the Pharisees were not afraid of the wrath to come.
  - F. The word “flee” means “to run away from.”
    - 1. So, the question John asked was, “Who warned you to **run away** from the wrath to come?”
- VIII. Verse 8—*“Bring forth therefore fruits meet”*
- A. Then, John said to the Pharisees, *“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”*
  - B. The only way to bring new fruits is to change the tree.
- IX. Verse 9—*“Think not to say within...We have”*
- A. Then, John went on to put his finger on the root problem in verse nine when he says, *“And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”*
  - B. How could John know what they were saying inside of them?
    - 1. It was God who revealed it to John. This was because John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit.
      - a. **Luke 1:15** says, *“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.”*
      - 2. The Holy Spirit revealed to John what the Pharisees were saying to themselves.
  - C. When John said, “Think not to say within yourselves,” John was saying to them to not imagine to say inside of you.
  - D. This shows how God has a stethoscope on every heart, and He hears what is said within the heart.
    - 1. **Psalms 14:1** says, *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.”*
      - a. He does not say it openly, but just in his heart. God still hears that.
      - b. This person thinks that no one knows that he has wickedness hidden described as under his tongue, but God knows.
  - E. The Lord sees also when a person has faith inside like the woman who had the issue of blood for so long.
    - 1. **Matthew 9:21** says, *“For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.”*
  - F. The Lord heard what the proud said when the Lord forgave sins in **Luke 7:49**.
    - 1. The verse says, *“And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?”*
- X. Verse 9—*“We have Abraham to our father”*
- A. We shall be saved because we are descendants of Abraham.
    - 1. They are saying that hell is for Gentiles and not for descendants of Abraham
    - 2. Abraham had two sons—Isaac and Ishmael just to show that a descendant of Abraham did not guarantee favor with God.
  - B. There was the time when the Lord Jesus was being confronted by the Pharisees and at that time they said the following in **John 8:39**: *“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.”*
    - 1. Here the Lord did not contest that they were the seed of Abraham, but He did say that they were not the children of Abraham.

2. This is just like Ishmael and Isaac. Both were the seed of Abraham, but Ishmael went his own way while Isaac followed the God of Abraham. That is what made Isaac a child of Abraham.