

New Testament Life Lesson 6
John the Baptist/ Jesus' Baptism
Text: Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3

Introduction

The angel Gabriel gave Zacharias the wonderful message: “Your son will be the one the prophets told of, the one who will go before the Messiah. He will preach and prepare the hearts of people to meet the Savior.”

John grew up and did just what the angel prophesied. He was full of God’s Spirit and loved God. He went into the wilderness and lived alone there. He wore camel skin clothes and ate locusts (grasshoppers) and wild honey.

The Life Lesson

If you planned to be a famous evangelist, would you start by going to live in the wilderness? Probably not. Today people who want to be public speakers spend lots of money on advertising and promotion so people will know all about them. They go where the crowds of people are.

John didn’t worry about promoting himself. He let God take care of that part. He was just ready to obey. As he went into the wilderness to spend time alone with God, the people came to him. Lots of people!

Just like the prophets had foretold, John preached to the people about the Messiah.

“There comes one after me that is mightier than I am,” John told them. “I’m not worthy to unfasten his sandal straps.”

He warned them that it was time to get serious about serving God.

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand,” he said. “Get ready, because the Messiah is coming, and when he does come, he will be like a farmer who separates all his grain from the chaff – the part that isn’t good to eat. He will thoroughly clean his grain and burn up all the chaff.”

John’s listeners knew what he was saying. There was lots of wickedness going on. Many people claimed to be God’s people and did the rituals they were supposed to do, but their hearts were far from God. They didn’t really love Him and didn’t obey Him when it wasn’t convenient.

John preached repentance.

To repent means to “turn around.” When we repent we turn around from going our own way and we go toward God – His way.

John told the people that they should turn from their wicked ways and turn toward God. To show that they were truly sorry for their sins, they were baptized. Because John baptized people, he became known as “John the Baptist.”

Some of the religious rulers came to John to be baptized, probably to show that they were as spiritual as everyone else. John wasn’t impressed.

“You snakes,” he said. “Who told you to flee from the wrath to come? You think that you are just fine because you are related to Abraham. But God can turn these stones into descendants of Abraham! The ax is at the root of the tree, getting ready to cut it down. You’d better repent, or you will be one of the people who cut down and cast away.”

Wow – you had to be brave to talk to all the important religious leaders that way. It certainly wouldn’t make you popular with the influential crowd.

But John baptized many who truly wanted their hearts to be right with God. There were many who trusted in the Messiah God would send to take away their sins. They believed John

when he told them that the Savior would come soon and they should get their hearts and lives ready for him.

Then He came. Jesus came to the place in the wilderness where John preached and baptized. He came and asked John to baptize Him.

John must have been surprised. “Me, baptize you?” he said. “I need you to baptize me.”

But Jesus knew that God wanted Him to be baptized. He would be an example to all His followers for one thing. For another, it was time at last for Him to begin his public ministry. It was time for people to know that He was the Son of God.

So John agreed. They went out into the muddy Jordan river and John plunged Jesus under the water, just as you have seen the pastor put people under the water in the baptistery.

As Jesus came up from the water, the Spirit of God came like a dove and lit on Jesus. The people heard God’s voice from heaven saying, “This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Everybody else who has ever been born has displeased God. Even one sin is enough to separate us from the Holy God forever. But He was pleased with Jesus. Jesus never did one thing wrong. He never sinned. Because He had no sins to pay for, He was able to take the sins of His people later on and pay for them.

John told the people, “Here He is – the one I told you about. The one whose shoes I’m not worthy to unfasten. This is the Messiah.”

John had done exactly what God had created him to do. He had prepared the hearts of God’s people and he had given testimony that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, who had come to save His people from their sin.

From then on, John was not so impressive or popular with the people. Many of his followers left him and went with Jesus. He begins to fade from the picture, but he didn't care. He said, "Jesus must increase and I must decrease."

He knew that serving God wasn't about him and his popularity. It was about Jesus.

John kept on preaching, though, until he made the king mad. Herod had done some wicked things, like killing his brother and taking his wife as his own. Herod had him thrown in prison. He would talk to John about God and sometimes he worried, but he wouldn't change his wicked ways.

Then one day his wicked wife and step-daughter tricked him into promising to have John killed.

Salome, his wife's daughter was dancing for him at a party. Probably he had been drinking and said, "I like your dancing. I'll give you whatever you want, up to half my kingdom."

Salome asked her mother, "What should I ask for?"

Herodias, her mother, certainly didn't like John because he had said she was wicked. She said, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Salome asked for that horrible thing – and Herod felt he had to keep his promise. Do you think he had to do that? No, we should keep our promises, but if we make a promise that involves disobeying God, we should break it! Besides, he promised her anything worth up to half his kingdom. John's life was worth much more than that.

But he had John the Baptist killed.

That wasn't the end for John, though. He had served God faithfully and he did exactly what God had called him to do. He went to a reward in heaven that will last forever.

The Life Lesson

John baptized people so they could show they repented and they believed in the Messiah to come. Jesus was baptized because he wanted everyone to know this was what he wanted them to do.

Baptism doesn't make you saved, and it isn't necessary for salvation. Because Jesus told us to follow His example, we ought to obey Him and do it! We show by going into the water that we believe that Jesus came to wash away our sins. We show that we are dying to our old life where we were the boss. As we come out of the water, we show we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and we have a new life as God's child. We are following Him and He is the boss.

If you have surrendered to God and believe Jesus is the Messiah who came to pay for YOUR sins, you should be baptized, too. That shows everybody that you believe and it shows that you are ready to obey and follow Jesus.

I hope you will be like John the Baptist, ready to obey God and serve Him, no matter what!

Review Questions

Where did John go to preach?

Into the wilderness.

What did he eat?

Locusts (grasshoppers) and wild honey.

What did he wear?

Camel skin clothing.

Why was he called “John the Baptist?”

Because he baptized people who repented of their sins.

Who did John refuse to baptize?

The Pharisees who came just for show.

What did John say when Jesus came to be baptized?

“I need you to baptize me!”

What happened when Jesus was baptized?

The spirit of God came like a dove and lit on his shoulder.

What did God say aloud about Jesus?

This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.

What did John say about Jesus?

This is the Messiah.

How did John the Baptist die?

Herod had him killed.