

## INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] When you think of a successful preacher who brings revival and conversions everywhere he goes, what do you picture? You might picture someone smooth and kind in a suit like Billy Graham filling stadiums. You might picture someone like George Whitefield who had incredible rhetorical ability and a powerful voice that you could hear even far off in fields. You probably wouldn't picture John the Baptist. John looked much more like a homeless man than a successful preacher. He lived out in the wilderness and he wore camel fur and ate bugs and wild honey. He wasn't exactly a picture of refinement nor was he in a great geographical center that was just filled with people hungry for his message. And yet somehow John's preaching stirred up a revival in Israel.
2. [Need] The question is how? I want to look at what I'm calling "John's wild preaching" in the wilderness not because we're just dissecting why he was so effective. No, I want us to study it so that we can hear it for ourselves. I want the greatest Prophet who ever lived's voice would come into our ears and stir our hearts.
3. [Preview] This morning we will look at four characteristics of John's wild preaching in Luke 3:1-20.

Point number 1 is the first characteristic of John's wild preaching. **Wild preaching proclaims salvation (v. 1-6). Wild preaching proclaims salvation (v. 1-6).**

The passage begins in a strange place.  
It starts with lots of names and titles.  
But Luke does this on purpose.  
This is not boring biographical details.  
He has a theological point.  
Look again at what we see in this list in verses 1-2.

We see titles.  
Caesar, the emperor, a Governor, three tetrarchs, who are a step below governors and two high priests.

But where does the Word of God come from?  
Not to any of these powerful people, but to John who isn't even a priest.

And what else do we see in the list?

We get all of these locations.

And don't skip them because they are hard to pronounce.

We have Caesar in Rome, Judea, Galilee, Ituraea, Trachonitis, Lysanias, Abilene.

We have Rome, palaces all over the empire, even the Holy temple of God.

But where does the Word of God come?

Not to any beautifully designed buildings, or strategic centers,  
but to the wilderness.

And this tells us something about the salvation John preached.

Salvation is not for the powerful.

Salvation is not just for those in influential cities.

The gospel of salvation is for the ordinary.

And it is preached by ordinary people.

Verse 3, **"And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."**

John begins by preaching the gospel.

Out of the wilderness comes news of forgiveness.

Because John is the forerunner of Jesus, he preaches the same gospel.

He doesn't preach the cross because it hasn't happened yet.

But he does preach that forgiveness is available to sinners.

The most important fact of John the baptist's preaching is not that it takes place in the wilderness.

It is not that he wears camel skin and eats locusts.

It is that he preaches the gospel and salvation.

Verse 4, **"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,"**

There is a lot of metaphor in Isaiah.

What does he mean?

Why are we filling valleys and smashing mountains?

What it means is that John is preparing the path for Jesus.

He is making the way easier for Jesus and easier for us to see Jesus.

Like when the interstates were put in.

They cut down trees and made the way flat.

John is trying to make it as easy as possible to travel so that **"all flesh shall see the salvation of God."**

Because John's preaching proclaims that God is not longer high above in the heavens where no man can reach.

He is no longer on Mt. Sinai surrounded by fire and smoke where none dare approach.

He is not longer above where if we saw Him we would die.

He is here in the person of Christ.

And we are no longer crooked.

We are no longer broken where something is fundamentally wrong with us.

We are no longer so sinful that no one could love us.

We are made straight.

Because Christ has come to make us right.

The gospel proclaims that there is forgiveness for even the most wicked.

The gospel proclaims that even the roughest parts of our lives can be made smooth by the hands of the carpenter.

Because God has come down.  
Jesus is low where everyone can find Him.  
It is not difficult.  
All you must do is cry out in repentance.  
And Jesus will find you.

What John says is that Jesus comes down.  
You don't have to risk death and drive to the tops of mountains.  
Salvation is here.  
It is more beautiful than anything you could ever see.

**[Transition]** John's wild preaching proclaimed salvation and that there was forgiveness from sins. But how can they get this forgiveness?

Our second characteristic is this, **Wild preaching calls for true repentance. Wild preaching calls for true repentance.**

Because there is a difference between true and false repentance.  
And John rebukes anyone who wants to just go through the motions of false repentance.

Verse 7, **"He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"**

John rebukes the crowd.  
Which is a strange thing to do.  
After all he is preaching to a big crowd.  
And when he gives the invitation a massive crowd responds and comes to be baptized.  
This is most preachers dreams!  
But instead of celebrating.  
Instead of praising God.  
John rebukes the crowd.

He says, **“you brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”**

He calls them lying snakes.

And he wonders why they believe that they can escape the wrath of God.

Why does he do this?

Because he does not want them to think their false repentance will save them.

Because anyone can walk into the water and get wet.

Anyone can raise their hand at a revival and say they got saved.

But John is not interested in numbers or bragging about how many people he baptized.

He wants true repentance.

Verse 8, **“Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.”**

True repentance bears fruit.

This means someone who is truly repentant acts like it.

They act like it not just when they walk the aisle.

But they act like it on the way home.

They act like they are repentance when they are back in their regular situations.

I saw a big revival once.

A preacher came to my high school and preached the gospel in power.

He called for everyone to dedicate themselves to Christ.

And so many people came forward that the bleachers were empty.

But it was not true repentance.

Because everyone might have walked forward, but they didn't bear fruit.

John does not want them to assume that they are now saved and good.

And his audience had a big reason they thought they were.

The rest of verse 8, **"And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."**

They thought that because they were God's chosen people.  
Because they were Jews.  
Because God had always been their God.  
They assumed that they would be saved.

But John reminds them God could make children of Abraham out of rocks if He wanted.  
Their heritage will not save them.

Now we might not have the same temptation.  
But plenty have their own reasons for false repentance.  
Some believe they just have to pray the sinners prayer once and then can do whatever they want and be saved.  
Some believe that they can simply attend church and go through the motions and be saved.  
Some believe they can be saved because of who their parents are.  
Some believe they can be saved because they were baptized once as a child.

But there is a severe warning for anyone who thinks they can be saved without true repentance.

Verse 9, **"Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."**

He paints a terrifying image.  
He says that the axe is waiting.  
It is going to cut down every tree that does not bear the fruit of true repentance.

And they are the trees.  
God is waiting by to cut them down.

John does not say this to scare them.  
He wants them to understand how serious this is.  
They cannot go through the motions.  
Their repentance must be true repentance.

Naturally this forces the question "What does true repentance look like?"

10 And the crowds asked him, **"What then shall we do?"**  
This is what they ask.  
"How can we avoid the axe and judgment?"

And graciously John answers.  
Not in mysterious prophet speak.  
He tells them exactly what fruit looks like.  
He even gives them three different practical ways to show the truthfulness  
of their repentance.

Verse 11, **"And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share  
with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."**

True repentance reveals itself through generosity.  
If you are repentant.  
If you realize the greatness of what God has forgiven you,  
Then you will willingly give to those in need.

Notice what John says about this generosity too.  
He does not say to give out of your excess.  
He says give what you have.

The tunic here is your undershirt.

Almost everyone would wear them under their clothes.  
So he says if you notice someone doesn't have one.  
And you have an extra,  
Then give it.

Not if you have 3, or 4.  
If you have another one, then give it away.

And if you have ANY food.  
Not extra food.  
If you have any, then give it to those who have none.  
Eat less yourself and give more away.  
That is a mark of true repentance.

One of my favorite pictures of this is from Little Women.  
It follows a relatively poor family and their front daughters.  
Christmas morning comes and the girls are excited for their Christmas  
breakfast feast.  
But their mother comes and says she just met a poor woman with six kids.  
And even though they have waited an hour, she asks them to give it away.  
And they joyfully do in a picture of gospel generosity.  
Watching it usually makes me cry.  
"That was a very happy breakfast, though they didn't get any of it. And  
when they went away, leaving comfort behind, I think there were not in all  
the city four merrier people than the hungry little girls who gave away their  
breakfasts and contented themselves with bread and milk on Christmas  
morning."  
True repentance is generous.

But John isn't done.

Verse 12, **"Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."**



Tax Collectors are not popular people.  
They still aren't today but they really weren't at this time in history.

Because Tax Collectors would be authorized to take taxes from people and give them to Caesar and to the government.  
But they also were authorized to take a little bit off the top for themselves.  
And so they would.  
That was factored into the system and their pay.

And so Tax Collectors would raise taxes not because the government had raised taxes but because they wanted a new addition on the house or they wanted to increase their cost of living.

You can imagine they were incredibly unpopular people.  
But some of them come and want to repent.  
They want to receive forgiveness for their sins.

And John tells them that's great I'm so glad that you have come  
Here's what you must do.

He doesn't tell them to quit their jobs.  
He tells them you can do your job but don't take any more than you are authorized to.

Stop Being Greedy.  
If you are really repentant then that will work itself out in your work.  
If you are really repented then your reputation will be as an honest tax collector in contrast to everyone around you.

If you are really repentant then you will be willing to be a poor tax collector,  
if you are really repentant then you will be willing to financially suffer.  
If you are really repentant then you will work honestly as unto the Lord.  
That's what John tells them.

Then he gives a third application to a different group of people.

Verse 14, **"Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."**

Again he does not tell this group to quit.

Which as an aspiring pacifist makes me uncomfortable.

But like the tax collectors he tells them they need to do their jobs with integrity.

Because soldiers often functioned as a kind of police force.

They kept the peace.

But they did not always get paid a lot.

They might get a place to sleep and some food and basic provisions but that would be it.

So often they would use their power and influence out of greed.

Soldiers would extort people would threaten people and abused their power in order to get money.

You might picture corrupt police who abused their positions in order to steal either from citizens or the government out of greed.

That still happens today doesn't it?

John tells them if you want to repent today then you had better act differently tomorrow.

You need to bear the fruit of repentance which means knock it off.

Because true repentance or you will look like contentment with even your low wages.

True repentance will look like integrity.

It's also probably implying it's not enough for them not to be the ones to extort others.

They should use their influence on their friends and co-workers who are doing so.

They should not profit from it and they should step up and tell people no I will not be a part of this and you should not do this either.

The question all of us has to ask ourselves is what does true repentance look like in my life?

You don't get out of true repentance if you're not a tax collector or Soldier or police officer.

Every Christian should be daily showing signs of true repentance. So when you look at the tree of that your life is their fruit on it?

Is there the fruit of generosity and how you share even if you don't have that much yourself?

Is there the fruit of integrity?

The fruit of working hard rightly with righteousness.

Is there the fruit of contentment?

Are you content with what God has given you or are you tempted to send in order to get more?

Is there the fruit of kindness of gentleness a peacefulness of love and patience?

This is the question John asks us a question we must ask ourselves. Now don't misunderstand.

John is not saying these acts earn repentance.

What he says is that if you really repent and are asking Jesus for forgiveness then your life will bear fruit.

I got pecan trees in my yard and they bear pecans they don't bear oranges.

If you are a Christian,

if you say that you follow Jesus,

if you say that you want the Forgiveness of sins,

then you should be a repentant tree that bears fruit.

Not because the fruit is what earns salvation, but because the fruit is just who you are.

If you look at your life and you don't see the fruit of repentance you probably are not a repentant tree.

**[transition]** So John's wild preaching calls for True repentance. But he doesn't stop there with something they should do. He doesn't leave people with an application on stuff on their to-do list. e leaves them with something even better

The third characteristic of wild preaching is **Wild preaching points to Jesus (v. 15-17). Wild preaching points to Jesus (v. 15-17).**

So the most important part of anyone's preaching. It has to point to Jesus.

If you hear a sermon that doesn't mention Jesus.  
If you hear a sermon that could be true even if Jesus didn't exist or wasn't raised from the dead,  
Then you haven't really heard a Christian sermon.  
And I would be wary of listening to that person again.

But John points to Jesus.  
And he doesn't not just with his preaching but with his life

Verse 15, **"As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ,"**

The people start to wonder.  
They realize something miraculous is happening here.  
This wild preacher is bringing spiritual Revival.  
A prophet is finally born again after hundreds of years of nothing.  
Miracles happened when he was born.

Maybe John is the messiah.  
Maybe he is the Christ.

But John points to Jesus.  
He does not dare claim to be more than he is.  
In fact, John is not that impressed with his own ministry.

**16 John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."**

John says if you're impressed with me you're going to be really Amazed by Jesus.  
Because somebody even mightier than me is coming.  
His baptism is even better than mine.

This is not just John being humble he is trying to show them the wonder and greatness of Jesus.  
And he says that he is not even worthy to undo his sandals.

This is not just John using prophetic metaphors.  
You see one of the most basic tasks of a Slave what's the undo their master's sandals when they got home.  
And it's of degrading act.  
People didn't go around touching each other's feet.  
This is part of why Jesus washing the disciple's feet such a wonder.  
But even the act of undoing someone's sandal was so offensive to the Jews that they wouldn't let Hebrew slaves have to do it.  
Hebrew slaves would be exempt from this practice.

But John says not me.  
He's not saying that he is also exempt from it he is saying that he is not worthy of doing the most degrading basic tasks of a slave.

Just trying to point to the greatness of Jesus.

He says that Jesus' baptism is way better than mine.

I'm just giving you wet and water but Jesus will immerse you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The baptism of John is a symbol

The baptism of Jesus is the reality.

After the baptism of John you will be wet.

After the baptism of Jesus you will be born again.

After the baptism of John you will be motivated to be holy

After the baptism of the Holy Spirit you'll be sanctified and made holy.

After the baptism of Jesus the holy spirit of God will live inside your body.

That's much better baptism.

But there is a flip side to the baptism of Jesus.

Verse 17 **"His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."**

John has no problem preaching judgment, does he?

John preaches forgiveness and compassion but he also preaches judgment in hell and there is no contradiction between them.

He wants you to know the danger you are in and then shows you the way to escape it.

So he tells us there's the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire.

And uses this image of Jesus and a winnowing fork.

Might be helpful to just picture something like a pitchfork.

And they would take this tool and lift up the grain and throw it into the air.

It's always they did that the chaff would float away in the air and then the grain and wheat that they want would be heavy and stay on the ground.

He says that all that shaft that doesn't fly away Jesus will take up and will be burned with the unquenchable fire.

Seems that the baptism of Jesus comes for everyone.

And you can either experience the fire of the Holy Spirit now or the fire of judgment later.

Is the fire of Jesus like a fire in the Book of Daniel.

Shadrach Meshach and Abednego went into the fire and got to walk around with Jesus.

But the men who threw them in died in judgment.

The fire Jesus will either bless you or destroy you.

And if you were alive now you have a choice.

And John points to Jesus same look at him and you will be saved.

Have you been baptized for the fire of the Holy Spirit yet?

Have you look to Jesus for your salvation?

Because Jesus has the winnowing fork the fire will touch you one way or another.

It will either refine and save you or it will crush you.

Choose wisely.

The last characteristic of wild preaching is this: **Wild preaching is costly (v. 18-20). Wild preaching is costly (v. 18-20).**

Jones preaching it's costly to himself.

Not because he lives out in the wilderness.

Because it cost him his freedom.

Ultimately we know it will cost him his very life.

This is just a snippet of John's Ministry and his preaching.

Verse 18, **"So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people."**

John preached the gospel.

John's ministry and preaching is not about fame.  
John is not a prophet who is after a glory and money.  
John is willing to do what God has called them to no matter what it costs him.

Verse 19, **"But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reported by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 Added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison."**

Now we go back to a familiar name.  
Herod who was one of the most important leaders where John lived.  
And John's preaching was not generic repentance.  
You see John had no problem telling the crowds to knock it off and to repent.  
But he also specifically told even Herod he needed to repent.

And it seems as if he wasn't just telling Herod did he needs to follow God.  
It was not a generic call for conversion.  
John called out here it's in specifically and publicly.  
The main one that it mentions is the fact that he married his brother's wife.  
John doesn't whisper about it in corners.  
John stands up and says Herod that is wrong repent of your sins.  
And tells us they're all the evil things it doesn't bother to list all of them but you can bet that John did.  
I'm sure that John told her that he needed to repent for all of the innocent boys that he's slaughtered when he tried to kill Jesus.

John is not impressed with Rome's power.  
He confronts it and he speaks truth to power.  
He doesn't even when it's unpopular and even when it will cost him.

See John is willing to follow Jesus.  
John is willing to do what God has called him to do and to be obedient.



John is willing to pay the cost even though it means he will die before he sees Jesus on the cross and the resurrection.

John will die in the middle of the story.

We get to Luke chapter 9 we will see that he will be beheaded and then he fades from memory.

Like all of the prophets before him he declares Jesus is coming and then he said he really is but he does not get to see all of his prophecies come true.

And yet he is willing to pay the cost.

Because he has faith.

Because he believes that Jesus is worth any price.

Will you follow Jesus even though it is costly?

Will you follow Jesus even if it means you have to make less money?

Do you follow Jesus even if it is unpopular?

Will you follow Jesus even if it hurts right now?

John did.

And we should too.

Because a reward is not in this life only.

Are awarded to the cuteness of all of our sins and eternal life that comes through Jesus and Jesus alone.

And a life to come in the resurrection is worth any cost.

#### CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] The four characteristics of John's wild preaching. His wild preaching proclaimed the gospel, called for true repentance, pointed to Jesus, and was costly.
2. [Challenge] I hope you heed the preaching of this wild prophet and look to Jesus for your salvation. Bear fruit.