

## “Wandering” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent 2 – December 5, 2021

- I. **Luke 3:3** – <sup>3</sup> And [John the Baptist] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- II. **Fire and brimstone...**
  - a. Some of you may remember sitting in a church where the pastor preached fire and brimstone sermons.
    - i. This usually means that he said a lot about God’s wrath for unbelief and sin in people’s lives – that the punishment for rejecting Jesus Christ as Savior is eternal fire and sulfur smoke.
    - ii. In Revelation chapter 21, we get a picture of all the blessings of heaven, and we often use the beginning of that chapter in funerals
      1. Yet, for all the wonders of heaven and paradise, verse 8 says, “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8)
      2. I’m not sure if you’ve experienced a whiff of burning sulfur before, but your nose, throat and lungs burn and your eyes water like crazy – it’s awful
  - b. Going back to a preacher who spends all his time telling people that they will end up in a lake of burning sulfur because of their sins... we usually don’t like him – or his message very much.
  - c. Any time we are accused... or told that we are wrong for doing something... or told that we are bad...
    - i. Usually, the defensiveness kicks into high gear and we think of all the reasons that person is wrong... not us!
      1. We come up with all the ways that person falls short – where they have no room to judge when they aren’t perfect either.
      2. For some reason we feel the need to flip things around and judge the one who points out our sin.
    - ii. Sometimes, we go cool off a little, and over time... as much as it hurts our egos to say it... they were right.
- III. **John the Baptist was a fire and brimstone preacher.**
  - a. If he were a pastor in today’s world, I wonder how many people would put up with his preaching before they found another church home.
  - b. The responsibility John was given before he was even born was to prepare the way for the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus Christ.
    - i. In the beginning of Luke, before John was born, the angel Gabriel visits his dad, Zachariah and says, “<sup>16</sup> And [your son] will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup> and he will go before [the coming Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah [the prophet], to

turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” (Luke 1:16-17)

- ii. Just reading today’s Gospel tells us how John preached and called people to repentance and to turn from their wandering from the Lord.
  - 1. He used language like brood of vipers, the axe is going to cut you down if you don’t repent, and you will be thrown into the fire
- iii. Although we don’t have the following verses, the response from some of them was, “what shall we do?” (vs 10)
  - 1. These people realized they were wandering from the Lord’s ways and needed to return to Him.

#### IV. **What is repentance?**

- a. We talk about repenting all the time but when you repent, what happens?
- b. Repentance is the Holy Spirit turning us back to Jesus and the Father.
  - i. We might think it’s our decision or desire, but only by the power of God do we even care that we need to change... to turn back to Him.
  - ii. I like to think of repentance as coming back home to Jesus.
- c. You see, all of us are prone to wandering away from God’s will and plan
- d. As much as we love to hear about Jesus and His love for us, He also calls on us to obey Him in this life.
- e. I was teaching the confirmation class on Friday, and I said it’s easy to say we are Christians but actually trusting in God and doing what He commands is hard.
- f. For John the Baptist, he was calling the people of Israel to turn back to God instead of thinking they were saved just because their forefather was Abraham.
- g. In our lives, where have we wandered?
  - i. I see many people who think the big sins are the trouble – you know, murder, stealing, adultery and that sort of thing.
  - ii. However, we often justify or rationalize the little stuff because we don’t think it really counts.
    - 1. I read a study that was done over several years and with many college students all over the world.
      - a. They gave them a small math test and then asked them to use the honor system to grade their own work and get paid for each correct question.
      - b. The students thought they were throwing their paper in a shredder, but they were actually kept and graded to see how many cheated to get the money.
      - c. Out of 30,000 people, only 12 people didn’t answer any question right and took all the money... but 18,000 took a little (maybe one or two questions worth)

- d. In the end, the researchers said that there's only a few big cheaters out there, but, "our problems are rooted in the lives of typical, ordinary people who find ways to rationalize their own bad behavior. In other words, we want to think of ourselves as honest people while enjoying the benefits of dishonesty."<sup>1</sup>
  - h. This study shows that many of us are "little cheaters," and then we justify it by saying, "well, at least I'm not a murderer!"
  - i. Just like the Jews of Jesus' day who came to listen to John the Baptist who were trusting in their family heritage, we often trust in the fact that we are pretty good... most of the time.
  - j. Either way – John calls out in the wilderness, "repent!"
    - i. Sounds a lot like what Peter says to the people in Acts 2 – repent!
  - k. In no way can we rationalize even the smallest of sins against our God – because all of them come at a huge price.
- V. **Why did Jesus come... and why did Jesus have to die?**
  - a. The reason we have the color blue for this season is not because it's pretty.
    - i. Blue represents penance or sorrow for sin.
    - ii. It means that Jesus had to come into this world to take our sins upon Himself.
    - iii. Our little sins and our big sins are a part of the price He paid to save us... to buy us back from an eternal death in fire and sulfur.
  - b. In essence, Jesus took the fire and wrath of the Father so we don't have to
  - c. God's love for us is bigger than our sin, and He chose the way to bring us home by paying the price Himself.
    - i. The Son of God was born in human form, in a specific time and place in history...
    - ii. That child, in a great exchange, was raised up as a sacrifice to pay for our sins and wandering from our Lord.
    - iii. I know that the season leading up to Christmas is filled with activities and maybe family time, along with excitement... but keep in mind why Jesus had to come – to save us from our sins.
  - d. This is the great love and grace our God has – that even while we were sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)
  - e. The wilderness of life is full of trouble and sin, and that is why God is so important to keep us on the right paths...
    - i. By His grace and forgiveness, we always have a way, and we always have a guide.
    - ii. Wander no more! The Lord is calling us into His open arms of forgiveness, life, and salvation... Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Adapted from Tim Suttle, *Shrink* (Zondervan, 2014), pp. 114-115