

# **BaptistWay Bible Series for January 3: Are you ready for this?**

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We all like advance notice. Department stores may offer a “soft opening” for customers to see the goods before the doors are officially opened. Seeing the preview of an upcoming movie only adds to the excitement.

The Bible tells us John, the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah, prepared the people for the message and ministry of Jesus. I would call his method, preparation with an attitude.

## **What the Bible says ...**

John’s background remains a mystery. His appearance, his diet and the fact he spent much time around the Jordan River has led some to speculate he was part of the community known as Essenes. This group of Jews lived in a communal setting in the desert near where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea. They stressed purity of living and strict adherence to the Law.

John’s call from God and his authority to speak as a prophet were very clear. When the passage says “the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert” (Luke 3:2), this was the same way the message of God came to the prophets of the Old Testament.

Luke applies the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3-5 to John: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’” (v. 4). As preparations for the journey of an earthly king included the repairing of the roads he would travel, so John prepared the people for the

coming of the Messiah by calling them to correct their moral failings.

John preached powerfully and emphasized a baptism which focused on repentance for the forgiveness of sin (v. 3). Repentance signifies turning away from something and heading in a new direction. John refused to baptize those who did not show by their actions they truly were changed.

Apparently arrogance marked the crowds that came to listen to John. They believed their biological identity through Abraham guaranteed their salvation. John demanded evidence for repentance before he would baptize anyone. "And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (v. 8).

Three groups asked John for clarification concerning repentance and righteous living (vv. 10-14). To the general crowd, he called upon them to share clothing and food with those in need. To the tax collectors, he demanded they be fair—to collect only what was required. And to the soldiers present, he reminded them not to extort money from civilians, but to be content with their wages. In each instance, John was specific in his instruction.

### **What the Bible means to me today ...**

Baptists believe baptism is a symbol. There is no power or magic in the water, but when one is immersed as a believer, he/she is identifying with Christ and portraying his death and resurrection. In addition to portraying the life of Jesus, baptism also symbolizes a believer has died to the old way of life and now walks a new path.

Baptism does not save a person, but how many people believe that it does? And just because believer's baptism is a symbol does not mean that one need not show evidence of real life change. Our society is permeated with

an attitude of laziness and hypocrisy. God's word calls us to repentance and godly ethical behavior.

In light of the passage at hand, consider the following questions—

What things have I done that God calls sin? John prepared the way for Jesus by reminding us God does not tolerate sin. If we think we can claim God's grace and love in our lives, while, at the same time, tolerating racism and bigotry, then we must think again.

What things have I neglected to do that God labels sin? Some refer to such things as "sins of omission." In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), a priest and a Levite did not strike or inflict bodily harm upon the man who was left half dead along the roadside. He had been beaten by robbers. But did they do less harm as they ignored him and passed by on the other side of the road? To know that people are hungry and do nothing is to do something of great harm to those in need.

Am I ready for Jesus? People need the Lord and we are tasked to take the message of salvation and hope to those who are far from God. If you have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, then you are ready to face eternity. But, as believers, we are accountable to God for how we live our lives.

Let me be clear: We all will be judged as to how we spent our time while on this earth. I refer not to the test of salvation, but to the judgment described in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. As we build upon the foundation of Jesus, two results are described: "If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:14-15).

Saved, but as one who is rescued from a fire with nothing but the singed clothes on his back. I think we can and must do better than this.