

John the Baptist Matthew 3:1-12

Courage is being the Lord's voice in a deaf world.

3:1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.'"*

4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume 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. 10 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.

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Disclaimers on medicine bottles:

Prozac

Prozac belongs to a class of drugs called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). It is used in adults for the treatment of major depressive disorder, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and bulimia. In children and adolescents, Prozac is used to treat major depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Prozac Weekly is approved for treating major depression.

Side effects may include: abnormal dreams, abnormal vision, anxiety, chest pain, chills, confusion, diarrhea, diminished sex drive, dizziness, dry mouth, flu-like symptoms, flushing, gas, headache, hives, impotence, impaired thinking, insomnia, itching, loss of appetite, nausea, nervousness,

rash, seizures, sex-drive changes, sinusitis, sleepiness, sore throat, sweating, tremors, upset stomach, vomiting, weakness, yawning

Tonight I want us to concentrate on this great biblical truth exemplified in the life of John the Baptist. This is our **Biblical disclaimer:**

"Speaking the truth is dangerous to your health"

Speaking out against the popular, the powerful, the status quo, may result in consequences to your job, social circle, health, family, life and privacy.

Think tonight of John the Baptist. He was both popular and hated at the same time.

Listen to his words:

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

In nearly three thousand years of biblical history the method by which the Lord blesses or punishes his people has not changed.

The Lord measures the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of his people on the basis of their leaders.

When King David was right with the Lord the people were blessed. When he sinned against the Lord the nation was cursed.

The Old Testament prophets always went to the king to pronounce blessing or curses based on the king's actions toward the Lord.

By the time of John the Baptist the strongly worded judgment of the Lord was not toward the people but toward their religious leaders: The Pharisees and Sadducees.

John calls them a “brood of vipers.” Pretty harsh language.

What would be the equivalent language today to pastors and church leaders who are not honoring the Lord with their preaching and teaching?

It would sound like this: “You maggots of the word, you leeches of God’s people, you liars of health and wealth, you HIV virus that kills the truth.”

OUCH!

Why does the Lord send prophets with such extreme language? To get their attention!!!!

Today when pastors and church leaders lose the truth of God’s Word then we can expect judgment.

Often I hear people say, “Boy am I glad to be out of that ELCA.”

Do you really think that will avert the judgment of the Lord on his church in this nation?

Do we believe that we can ignore the false teaching and misleading words of Lutheran, Methodist, Assembly of God, Baptist, Televangelists and Independent leaders and expect to escape the wrath of God?

Sadly The innocent often suffer the judgment of the unrighteous.

So this is the message of John the Baptist to the religious leaders of his day and it is our message to the religious leaders of our day.

*9 And do not presume 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.
10 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.*

When the leaders claimed that Abraham was their father they were saying:

“Wait John, we have the right pedigree. We are the chosen people. are special.”

John was not impressed or swayed one iota.

John is even a bit insulting: “*God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*”

So often we miss this great truth today:

It doesn't matter if you had Christian parents, nor does it matter that you have attended church all your life, nor does it count that you gave \$25,000. for some addition to the church....

What does matter is where you stand at this moment with Jesus Christ.

Are you right with Jesus? Do you willingly bow your knee in humble submission right now?

Do you stand for him as the one and only savior?

Do you love him by truly loving and serving others?

If you are right with Jesus, bow before him daily, stand for him publicly, and love him by loving and serving others THEN you are a sons and daughters of Abraham!

Paul even reminded the Jews of this great truth. Being Israel and being a Jew has nothing to do with where you were born, where you were raised, your ethnicity, or anything of the sort.

Romans 2:28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

John the Baptist was the first authentic voice of God in Israel after four hundred years of silence.

People flocked out to the Jordan River to hear John preach.

People revered the Baptist. Honored him. Venerated him. Held him up in highest esteem.

But one day he was arrested, imprisoned and brutally murdered, and the nation was shocked, stunned, and staggered.

Speaking the truth can be dangerous to your health.

People of the Lord who are committed to Jesus and speak the truth of Jesus sometimes get killed or martyred for their honesty.

John the Baptist was martyred.

Stephen, the first martyr after Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Historical traditional teaches that all the disciples of Jesus, except for John imprisoned on Patmos, died as martyrs for the Gospel.

One of the early church father said that the "blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Throughout the centuries, the martyrs have inspired us Christians with their commitment unto death. Which continues today in Pakistan, Nigeria, Iran, India, China and a host of other places.

This story of John the Baptist invites us to have the courage to be truth tellers, to tell the truth of the Lord's morality to people around us.

When we do, we are often ridiculed, rejected and even killed for doing so.

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A powerful illusion among all Christians is to:

“play it safe,”
 “keep one’s mouth shut,”
 “don’t offend folks around us,”
 “keep peace in the family,”
 “keep peace in the nation.”

Yes, there is a safety in being silent when evil raises up its ugly head.

Unfortunately we are MINNESOTA NICING ourselves into obscurity and oblivion.

Consider with me the four characteristics of martyrs like John the Baptist.

First, Courageous followers of Jesus get killed, not for their convictions, but for expressing their convictions.

Courageous believers don’t keep their faith private.

Courageous believers are people who “don’t know better” but keep opening their mouths and often at the wrong times.

They refuse to keep their mouths shut, and therefore they get into trouble.

There are all kinds of people who have beliefs in Jesus and beliefs in Christian values and they never get hurt at all.

The key is to keep your mouth shut and you won’t get hurt.

Keep your mouth shut and nobody will bother you.

But as soon as you open your mouth about Christ and the Christian faith, that is when you will start becoming a martyr.

Interestingly the same Greek word we translate as witness is the same Greek word for martyr.

Both have a lot in common: both witnesses and martyrs open their mouths for Jesus Christ.

So Stephen had this problem, as did all martyrs, of not keeping their mouth shut and keeping silent about their Christian convictions.

A second characteristic of a courageous follower of Jesus is not only *what* they say but *when and where* they say it.

For example, back in the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, if you declared that you were a Christian, you could be killed for it.

If you said the same thing in the United States, nobody would be bothered at all.

It is not just *what* you say but *when and where* you say it that makes for courage.

If you talk about Jesus and social justice in church among believing friends, nobody gets too upset about it.

But stand up at the capital or a town hall meeting and most likely you will be ridiculed and dismissed as an extreme nut case.

A person of courage is not a person who checks the wind of public opinion.

They don't say to themselves, "I will make my pronouncement when things calm down."

That person has the guts to go against culture.

That person has the guts to go against public opinion.

They have the guts to go against the king or governing authority.

John the Baptist expressed his convictions to both Herod and Herodias for their adultery and he got his head removed and served on a silver platter.

It would have been safe for the Baptist to express his convictions privately to his disciples and friends.

Yes, speaking the truth can be dangerous to your health.

A third characteristic of a courageous follower of Jesus is that they are *willing to die*.

They don't want to die, but they are willing to die for Jesus Christ that *others* might live in justice, freedom and truth.

Christian martyrs believe passionately in Jesus Christ.

Note the key word: **PASSIONATELY!!!!**

Probably the closest we can come to understanding this kind of passion occurred when we first fell in love.

When I first fell in love with Jan 39 years ago she occupied my whole purpose for existing.

Everything I thought, said and did was based on how it would affect her.

This is the kind of PASSION Christians are called to have for Jesus daily throughout their lives.

Nothing is more important than knowing Jesus.

Nothing is of higher value than serving him.

Nothing can get in the way of proclaim him as Savior and Lord.

Do you have that kind of passion for Jesus?

Honestly most of us don't.

So how to we get it?

We ask for it over and over and over and over.

We repeat daily: **“I love you Jesus, I want to know only you, I want my life to reflect you, I want to walk with you, I want to stand with you.”**

If you do these things the day will come when you believe so deeply that you are willing to die for your faith in Jesus Christ.

Courageous believes don't hide behind the safety of silence; they speak God's Word when and where it is not safe to speak the truth; and they are willing to die for the truth of Jesus Christ.

A fourth characteristic of courageous Christians: They inspire us.

Bravery encourage us. Courage lift us up so that we are more committed to Jesus Christ in our day and age, in our world.

The life, ministry and even beheading of John the Baptist invites us to be honest about immorality when we see it, invites us to speak the truth even when its dangerous, invites us to stand up for Jesus.

Conclusion:

Yellow Card

I will ask Jesus to show me where I am deaf to his truth.

I will pray everyday this week for the deaf members of my family that they would hear the truth.

Even though the truth may be detrimental to my health I will ask Jesus to make me a John the Baptist.

Prayer