

SERMON-DECEMBER 05, 2021

TITLE: ARE YOU READY FOR MORE ADVENT?

Rev. Ted Althouse

TEXTS: LUKE 3:7-18

Second Advent – December 5, 2021

"John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 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. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same." Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay." The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with[Ⓜ] water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with[Ⓜ] the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them." (Luke 3:7-18)

Let's do an interactive exercise right now? Allow your mind to imagine yourself standing with a group of other people on the bank of a small river. Now in this river is a man standing there dressed in unusual clothing. This person is telling the group and if you listen closely, you can hear him telling you to come into the water with him. Now he is telling you about a person called Jesus Christ...the son of God. He says something about baptism

and salvation received for the repentance of sins. (FYI: the word baptism was only conceived at this time. The Jews celebrated a physical cleansing but not a baptism.) Now here was a Jew, briefly submersing these individuals beneath the surface of the water and blesses them in the name of Jesus Christ. (Another point of reference: To be blessed is to be (sanctified/made Holy in the eyes of Almighty God.) You may have guessed that this person I'm speaking about is the Apostle John who was later referred to by the name John the Baptist. John continued this rebirth ceremony for others who desired to be in the fellowship of Christ's kingdom on earth. This event happened over 2000 years ago and it is an important ritual carried forth today. It is a ritual which prepares us for a life dedicated to the spiritual direction of Almighty God. Water baptism is a way of connecting to God through Jesus Christ.

Many people of that day thought that maybe John was the Messiah. There was some confusion in the minds of some people. They heard of a person who was called the son of God, performing miracles and having people follow him as they received a new understanding of life. But John quickly assured the people that there is a difference between Jesus and himself. Listen; *"I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come...he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."* (v15-17)

John wanted the people then, and each of us today, to know that he (and all ministers) are only the intermediary for God's son. John and all pastors only baptize with water, but it is only through our belief in Jesus Christ that we will receive the baptism of the unseen Holy Spirit. And here is a very important truth: we must receive Jesus Christ into our hearts as Lord and Savior...the Messiah to

receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit, comes through his son Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit baptism brings this connection to anyone who desires it. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a commitment...an act in which we become a part of the family of God and try to live a life that is directed by the Holy Spirit.

Here I feel I must assist in clearing up any misconceptions. Water and Holy Spirit baptisms are important for spiritual direction. They both begin your process of salvation...salvation being your personal commitment/acceptance of Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior. This is the process when you feel God's own unseen Holy Spirit calling you to accept his son Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and then follow his teachings to the best of your ability. It is then that God's Holy Spirit, through Christ, becomes a part of your life

and you move toward the ultimate reward of life eternal with Almighty God. This is not a new theological theory. It is what John was telling us as he was baptizing the people in the river Jordan. Both water and Holy Spirit baptisms are real and are necessary for our eternal heavenly existence.

We'll leave this teaching for a moment and return to John and his verbal assault on the crowd he was baptizing. (John was good at this verbal method to gain the attention of people...and he got away with it). He said; *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"* (v7) He was actually telling the people of his day that they had become a generation of "vipers" (lowest class of unhealthy living). These were individuals who were poisoned by the evils of the world and hateful toward God and hating one another. John wasn't only

speaking to the people then but he is speaking to the world of today. Many of the same evil things are happening today as they did then? Today...do we not also see hatred exhibited toward people with murder, rape and abuse increasing daily? John knew this was happening then and I know God wanted him to be the spokesperson for all the generations that came after him. This is just one marvelous example of the importance and reality of the scriptures for today. Remember these ancient passages of scripture were passed on for the world to not only read about the past, but for the world to have positive life forming directions for today from these inspired words. God has preserved his Word/Scriptures for the world and the Bible continues to be the most prized literary manuscript ever written.

John was concerned with the future of these people to whom he was speaking...and baptizing. John knew that

the world was full of false hope and security...and he also knew the only way out of these sinful situations was through repentance and righteous living. He wanted everyone to be ready for worldly unrest and what to do about it. So, out of this water baptism experience, the people asked John; "*What should we do then?*" (v10) and John responded; "*The man with two tunics should share with him who has nothing, and the one who has food should do the same.*" (v11) Paul used two life supporting examples which most everyone can relate to...food and clothing. These are commodities which are most readily available and John tells us that we must share what we have been given. Today it is common knowledge that most of us have more food and clothing than any other nation in the world and we also waste more than we consume. We must become good stewards of God's gifts. We have the power to do almost anything we want to

do...but what are we doing about our power and wealth?
Are we allowing the people in powerful leadership positions to forget that our country of the United States was founded on the principles of Almighty God's design and allow them to overrule these directions of Almighty God?

John said to the tax collectors of his day; "*Don't collect any more than you are required to do.*" (v13) Let us remember that Almighty God established the first governing structure...the family unit of Adam and Eve. And through this family unit, God provided the fundamental plan of rule for love and peace.

Unfortunately, this original God given fundamental plan of the family unit has become so distorted that it is no longer functioning as God planned it. This presents a serious situation, since much of what is being done is

against God's original plan and also creates a spiritual problem for love and peace. Let us also realize that God gives us all the choice to make our own decisions...right or wrong. I fully believe this is his way of bringing us to finding our way of salvation and repentance on an individual basis. I also believe the world has gone too far over the edge to find total and full worldwide salvation. God knows this truth and this is why he provides us an individual way of being saved through receiving repentance and forgiveness.

The scripture says: *"And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them."* (v18) John seemed to know what to say and when to say it. His primary concern was primarily for the spiritual welfare of the people and their relationship with God. He realized that God, through Christ, must become

the central focus in their lives. He knew they had to be ready...to be ready not only for living...but also to be ready for a life with Almighty God directing them. We all know we are in the season of Advent where we wait to once again celebrate the birth of the Savior of the world. Are you ready and prepared to celebrate Jesus Christ's birth by allowing him into your heart? (repeat) Celebrating Christ's original birth brings us closer to Almighty God and through Christ's birth we have the ultimate plan of salvation. The season of Advent prepares us for these opportunities. It prepares us to renew and rethink our own personal dwelling (meaning home) with God. It prepares us to have a closer relationship with him. The birth of Jesus Christ was no ordinary event. It was God manifesting himself in the human person of Jesus Christ for the world to see and experience his great love. Advent becomes a time to renew your own faith in the presence

of the Holy Spirit in your life. Will you today continue to experience the life-force of Advent and carry it forth in your life? Remember, Almighty God is providing the true way of salvation through Jesus Christ...we only need to see him more clearly and then follow him.