**A Voice Crying in the Wilderness**

**By Pastor Fee Soliven**

**Mark 1:4-8**

**Wednesday Evening**

**July 18, 2018**

**4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.**

Saints, this messenger was John the Baptist. There had not been a prophet in Israel for more than four hundred years. It was widely believed that when the Messiah came, prophecy would reappear (Joel 2:28-29; Malachi 3:1; 4:5).

**Joel 2:28-29**

28 "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

**Malachi 3:1**

1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

**Malachi 4:5**

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD”

Saints, some people thought John himself was the Messiah. John spoke like the prophets of old, saying that the people must turn from their sin to avoid punishment and turn to God to experience his mercy and approval.

This is a message for all times and places, but John spoke it with particular urgency—he was preparing the people for the coming Messiah.

Saints, John preached in the wilderness in the area near the Jordan River, but he did more than that. He urged his listeners to be baptized. Some scholars think that baptism by immersion (going down into the water) was a rite required by the Jews for Gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism.

The ritual of immersion symbolized the death and burial of the old way of life; coming up out of the water symbolized the beginning of a new life. If so, then John took a known custom and gave it new meaning. While it was customary for Gentiles to be baptized in order to become Jews, John was demanding that Jews be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.

John’s baptism was immersion, and it was a visible sign that a person had decided to change his or her life, giving up a sinful and selfish way of living and turning to God. It was a public action signifying that a person had been cleansed of sin through repentance and had chosen a new way of life.

Saints, After Christ’s death and resurrection, baptism became an outward sign for identifying with Christ and his resurrection and for signifying entrance into the Christian community. (See, for example, Romans 6:3-4; 1 Peter 3:21.)

Baptism did not give forgiveness; baptism was a visible sign that the person had repented and received God’s forgiveness for his or her sins.

**Romans 6:3-4**

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

**1 Peter 3:20-22 (Modern English Translation)**

20 who in times past were disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 Figuratively this is like baptism, which also saves us now. It is not washing off the dirt from the body, but a response to God from a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.

**5 And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.**

Saints, from Jerusalem (the holy city of the Jews) and from all over Judea, a stream of people constantly flowed into the wilderness to hear John the Baptist preach.

**Why did John attract so many people?**

**He was the first true prophet in four hundred years**

He blasted both Herod and the religious leaders, a daring act that fascinated the common people. But John also had strong words for his audience—they too were sinners and needed to repent. When they confessed their sins, John baptized them in the Jordan River.

Confession is more than simply acknowledging one’s own sinfulness; it is agreeing with God’s verdict on sin and expressing the desire to get rid of sin and live for God. Confessing means more than verbal response, affirmation, or praise; it means agreeing to change to a life of obedience and service.

**Romans 10:8-13**

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

**1 John 1:9-10**

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

**6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.**

Saints, John’s clothes were much like the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) in order to distinguish him from the religious leaders, whose flowing robes reflected their great pride in their position (12:38-39).

**2 Kings 1:7-8**

7 The king asked them, "What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?" 8 They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

**Mark 12:38-40**

38 As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

John’s striking appearance reinforced his striking message. Elijah had also been considered a messenger preparing the way for God (see Malachi 3:1). His diet, locusts and wild honey, was common for survival in wilderness regions.

**7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.**

Saints, although John was the first genuine prophet in four hundred years, Jesus the Messiah would be far greater than he. John saw himself as even lower than that slave in comparison to the coming Messiah (see John 3:30). What John began, Jesus finished. What John prepared, Jesus fulfilled.

**John 3:22-31**

22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified--behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' 29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease. 31 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

**8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

Saints, John’s baptism with water indicated immersion in the water of the Jordan River. John’s baptism demonstrated repentance, humility, and willingness to turn from sin. This was the beginning of the spiritual process. To be effective, it had to be accompanied by an inward change of attitude leading to a changed life.

John’s baptism did not give salvation; it prepared a person to welcome the coming Messiah and receive his message and his baptism. John’s statement, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, revealed the identity of the “one” coming after John as the promised Messiah. The coming of the Spirit had been prophesied as part of the Messiah’s arrival (see Isaiah 44:3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29).

**Isaiah 44:3**

“For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring”

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

**Ezekiel 36:26-29**

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.

**Joel 2:28-29**

28 "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants

I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Saints, the Old Testament promised a time when God would demonstrate his power among people and give special relationship and blessings to his people. This looked ahead to Pentecost (Acts 2). All believers, those who would later come to Jesus Christ for salvation, would receive the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, the entire person would be transformed by the Spirit’s power. Jesus would offer both forgiveness of sin and the power to live for him. We need more than repentance to save us; we need the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 2:38-39**

38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

**Let’s Pray!**

**Benediction**

**"May The LORD bless you and keep you, May The LORD make His face shine upon you, May The LORD be gracious to you, May The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you His (Shalom) peace." '**