



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #025
Jesus' 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry

A Sample of John The Immerser's Christ-Exalting Preaching

JN 1.15; MT 3.4-10 (Parallel Texts: MK 3.5-6; LK 3.7-10)

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John witnessed incessantly about Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, and saying, "This is he of whom I spoke, 'He who comes after me has totally surpassed me, because he existed before me.'"

MT 3.4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Streams of ^{MK}all different kinds of people from Jerusalem ^{MT}and all Judea, and the whole region of the Jordan kept going out to him. 6 They were being immersed by him in the Jordan River because they were confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was immersing, John said to the crowds coming out to him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 You must produce fruit worthy of your repentance!

9 "And you must not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that God has the power to raise up children for Abraham of these stones. 10 The ax is already laid squarely at the root of the trees; every tree that is not producing good fruit will certainly be cut down and thrown into the fire."

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Jordan River, Near Aenon
Time	April, 29 AD--the Year Before Jesus Began His Ministry
Stage of Jesus' Life	Stage II: His 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry
Chapter 5	John the Immerser Prepares the People for Jesus' Ministry
Section #025	A Sample of John the Immerser's Christ-exalting Preaching

TEXT NOTE: Today's reading gives us our first exposure to the "Q" written source that the synoptic gospel writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) used in writing their gospels. (We introduced "Q" in the commentary of [DJN #005](#)) We especially see "Q" in the writing of MT and LK, who both emphasized the teachings of Jesus.

I chose MT as the base text for this reading. From the “You brood of vipers” words of John in MT 3.7B, to the end of verse 10, the words of MT and LK are the same, word for word. They were both quoting a common source. Scholars call this source-document “Q.” We will point out Q in the text of the DJN occasionally in future readings.

COMMENT:

Today’s reading is the second of three that describe John’s ministry. In addition to (1) his role as a witness, and (2) the uniqueness of his call for Jews to be immersed as a sign of their repentance that we noted in the last DJN, we see three more of John’s major characteristics today. We will look at these now, adding them to the two we have already noted, as we make a list of John’s major character traits.

(3) John was a man of extremes. He would be called an “obsessive-compulsive” type today. John was nothing if not a strong personality. He preached with a loud, booming voice in wilderness places. He wore rough clothes and was content to eat a spartan diet of wild food. He had spent most of his life alone in the desert, and it showed in the way he ignored social expectations and norms. This all came together in his fourth defining characteristic.

(4) John was fearless. He got in people’s faces and declared their need for real repentance, with no thought of alienating them with the bluntness of his message. When the vaunted Pharisees and Sadducees of the Sanhedrin came to hear him, he did not shrink from confronting these respected leaders of the nation, calling them “a brood of vipers.” He was thrown into jail by Herod Antipas for repeatedly proclaiming that his marriage to Herodias—his brother’s wife—was illegal, sinful and adulterous. John feared none but God.

The result was that John was highly respected as a truth-teller. He had sky-high credibility as a man of God. The people quickly became convinced that he was a bonafide prophet of God, for John’s fear of God made him totally without self-interest in rebuking any man. A non-stop river of people traveled to remote places to find John and hear his message, and many repented publicly by receiving immersion from him. God was using his prepared prophet in a powerful way to prepare people to believe in and follow Jesus.

(5) Coupled with his fearlessness before men, John had a soaring, high view of the greatness of the coming Messiah. John believed in the Messiah’s pre-existence, therefore his preeminence. Even though Jesus was born six months after John, the prophet declared:

“He who comes after me has totally surpassed me, because he existed before me.”

And, *“One who is much more powerful than I will come ^Mafter me, ^Lthe straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to ^Mstoop down and ^Luntie, ^Mnor carry.”* (DJN #026)

Jesus so surpassed John in the prophet’s mind and heart, that he was not worthy to lie face down in the dust and touch the dirt on the bottom of the Messiah’s sandals. John found his own identity in Isaiah’s predictions of his ministry, but he also saw the glory of the Messiah in Isaiah—enough to humble himself forever in the presence of the eternal King. For John, the greatness and glory of Jesus overshadowed everything else in all creation. The prophet had undergone a far deeper repentance into genuine humility than he could ever proclaim to anyone else.

John was the real deal, and everybody knew it.

APPLICATION:

Repentance is a complete change of mind that results in totally different behavior. It is to become convinced that something is true in a way that requires action. For example, as a small boy I took in a mouthful of kerosene one time, thinking it was water. The taste and sting of the kerosene in my mouth quickly changed my thinking about drinking it, and I spit it out rather enthusiastically. I have never changed my mind back into thinking that kerosene is water—my repentance is permanent.

The problem is that we take sin, and sinfulness for granted. It is a normal lifestyle for us sinners. It is only when we see the glory of God in the face of the Messiah, like John did, that we begin to realize how totally unacceptable we are to God in our sin. Then we begin to embrace humility, as we sincerely begin to think that we are totally unacceptable to ourselves, too. This is when real change in our behavior comes.

People who clearly see the greatness of Jesus sincerely believe they are the most sinful people who have ever lived. This is how John saw himself in the light of Jesus. We should, too.

Repentance is a totally new way of thinking...the resulting change in our behavior is the "fruit" of repentance that John was calling for. Because God is infinitely good, and we are thoroughly sinful, repentance is the inevitable lifestyle of people who follow Jesus. It is impossible to draw close to him and not realize how much about us needs to change.

Constantly realizing new things about ourselves that do not match up with the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of Jesus Himself is the norm for a person who is following Jesus.

What is the last thing you repented of?

What are you in the process of repenting about now?

How is your repentance bearing fruit?