

With 3, 1-6.

The a thunderstorm or an electric storm is not so common in our valley, yet you have no doubt all witnessed one at some time or another. It is a very close and sultry day. The heat of the sun has been so intense, that the grass seems withered and the flowers are drooping their heads. Slowly the sky becomes darkened and covered with clouds. In the distance you hear a rumbling noise. It becomes louder and louder. Suddenly a bright flash, followed in a few seconds by a severe roll of thunder. More bright flashes of lightning which seem to enlighten the whole sky at one time. Suddenly the rain descends in torrents, giving new life and color to the withered plants. The ground absorbs the moisture as tho it had been literally thirsting for it. And so we were again permitted to witness one of the greatest phenomena of nature. A phenomenon like this in the religious world marked the appearance of the character of whom our text tells us, John the Baptist.

The religious atmosphere of the then known world had become sultry and close. The religious life of the people had sunk into an nearly dead form. A spiritual drought and depression had come upon the land of Israel. The faith and hope of the at one time believing Jews had now wilted and fallen into a sort of dead formalism, yes, even skepticism and hypocrisy. And what seems to be the cause for these conditions? Perhaps the greatest reason may be found in the fact that a period of over four hundred years had passed since the time of the last great prophet, Malachi. And, altho the Jews had the OT which was the revealed will of G to them, altho these Scrs gave testimony of the coming of the promised Messiah, yet, because of the lack of the proper religious leadership, spiritual decay and blight set in.

In the midst of these signs of an on-coming spiritual storm, there comes, suddenly as a flash of lightning, the voice of a man whose preaching will revive the spirituality of the people. And if we listen to his words of admonition and rebuke, we are reminded of the roll of thunder. Thou shalt, thou shalt not resounded the voice of this great prophet. Repent, change the mode of your wickedness, return to the paths of righteousness, lest the eternal wrath and fire of G devour you. And so the words of this man of G, John, the Baptist, rang out clearly and distinctly to all who came to him. And there is a reason for his teachings, and for the severe rebukes which he passes out to the hearts and minds of the spiritually decaying people. John was preaching repentance unto the people in order to prepare them for the coming of the Son of G, JX into the flesh. And because John plays such an important role in the making of the first great chapter of Xtianity, therefore the consideration of his person and character is of especial interest to us Xtians. We wish to spend a few moments of prayerful devotion this morning in becoming better acquainted with:

John the Baptist.

1. Some features of his personal history.
2. The character of his preaching.

T. 1. 4. Our T is very short, and yet if we study it carefully, we will see that it gives us a beautiful description of the features of John's personal history as well as the content of his preaching and the mode of his work. Our T begins, 1b. In the days when this spiritual depression and slump had come over the people - then our T says, came John the Baptist. This time is also equivalent to the period in the life of X of which we are told, that he was growing in wisdom and age and favor with G and man. So, during the early years of X, John began his ministry. T. 1b. John began his public ministry in a very peculiar and secluded spot. Our T says that he preached in the wilderness of Judea. This wilderness or desert was located East of the mighty city of Jer, extending toward the Dead Sea. <sup>including the Jordan River</sup> It was a country which we may compare with the country near the Columbia River, at Vantage. Mountainous, desolate and rocky, having many small ravines. Here this great prophet of G, John, spent his early years. Surely a strange place of dwelling for a man with a mission such as John had.

There is however, another feature of peculiarity which commands our interest. v. 4. What peculiar type of clothing, you will say. He did not wear the

type of clothing which was style and custom at that time, namely, a complete dress or cloak. His clothing consisted of a covering or garment made out of a piece of coarse camel hair. It was hung over his shoulder and fastened about his waist with a leathern girdle, without ornamentations. Surely a crude and uncomfortable protection against the elements of nature.

T. 4b. Another striking peculiarity of his personal history. His diet did not consist of the food which most every one was eating, but, as we see, from our T, it consisted of locusts and honey. We are unable to say exactly what is meant by locusts. Some commentators who have studied the country in which John was living believe that it was a sort of vegetable product which was taken from a locust plant. Others, and this seems to be the most common explanation, say, that it consisted in the meat of the locust or grasshopper. The legs and wings were stripped off and the remainder boiled or roasted for food. This is even to the present time, used as food in certain parts of Asia Minor and Arabia, not so much a matter of choice, but rather a matter of necessity. To give a variety to his diet he also gathered honey which swarms of bees had deposited in the holes of old trees or rocks.

The question just naturally comes to our mind at once, Just why did John live in such secluded, desolate country, why did he wear such peculiar clothing and eat the type of food which he ate? There are perhaps several reasons for this. In the first place, such mode of life would naturally draw the people to him, and they might only come out of curiosity. That then would give him the opportunity to carry out his G-given mission, of preaching repentance and faith unto the people. And we see that he was very successful, for our T says, v5. However, there is still another, Scriptural reason for his life and conduct. John the Baptist was an antitype of the prophet Elijah. The last of the great Prophets, Malachi, had foretold that the forerunner of X should be like unto Elijah. And if we look at the mode of living and dress of Elijah, we will see that the two are very much alike. The lesson which John wanted to impart to the people thru his simple diet, was in contrast to the luxuries and the great extravagance which was being practised by the people of Jer, all of which helped toward living a life of ungodliness and gluttony. The example, then was one of real self-denial, abstinence, and temperance.

There are lessons contained in the life and conduct of John the Baptist which the world and even the Xtians may well apply to themselves. It does not mean, that we should leave our comfortable homes and go out and live in the desert as John did. Nor should we adopt the peculiar garb which he wore, or use his diet. G has given us these comforts of life which we are enjoying, and we should use them. They are not here only for the unbelievers. We too may and should use them and may do so with a good conscience. However, the important issue is this, that we USE them, not ABUSE or MISUSE them. One does not need to be a pessimist to see that in our day these luxuries and rancies of life are the chief interest of the majority of people. And unless they have all they want just when they wish to have it, they begin to complain and murmur. All their apparel must be the very latest, their machinery must be the last model, their table must be set with the most exclusive fineries and dainties. In so many cases, excess, gluttony and intemperance. It is very true what the medical profession is telling us that most of us are literally digging our graves with our teeth. Over against such extravagance and excess, we should consider the self-denial of a man such as John the Baptist. *guarding vs abuse or misuse of G's gifts*

The surroundings in which John lived and the clothing and food which he used also served this purpose of giving him the opportunity of better service and ~~more~~ more time for the study and concentration of his work to make straight the way of the L, to preach repentance unto the ungodly people of his day. And so too, it becomes necessary for us from time to time to get away from the whirl and eddy of the speed and traffic, to sit alone for a while and to ponder and meditate over the blessings of G, and how we may best serve him. You have all experienced the occasion when you wanted to be all alone, to study your problems of life, to consider what you had done, and the like. And such moments are not wasted moments. They are the moments when the run-down battery of our soul charges itself with new SP power and joy.

T.1-6. The life of solitude and self-denial which John was leading, his peculiar style of clothing and diet, soon attracted many curious people from the entire surrounding territory. People of all classes, and walks of life came to see him and to hear the message which he was proclaiming. Lawyers, Scribes, Pharisees, soldiers, merchants, and all such who could leave their occupation for a short time, would tour thru the barren desert, to see whether it was true what they had been told about the second Elijah. And John the Baptist took advantage of the opportunity which presented itself here. He knew his mission; he knew that he should prepare the world for the greatest event in the history of the whole world, the coming of X. The reception which the people would give to the Sav depended largely upon the preparatory work which John was doing. And so whenever people would come to him, he would preach to them.

But what was the content of his sermons? Our T tells us that he would say: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of G is at hand." Repentance, contrition and sorrow over one's sins was the burden of his message. He told the people gathered to see him, that it would be necessary to bring about a complete change of heart and mind, to turnover a new leaf, with the slogan of serving G rather than serving Satan. And such complete change was absolutely necessary just at this time, since X was about to begin his public ministry. That great epoch of history was about to be issued in, when X himself would, in bodily form rule and govern his people here on the earth. So the watchword which characterized the preaching of the forerunner of X, John the Baptist, was REPENTANCE.

And this message of John is especially appropriate for us Xtians just at this particular season of the year. Every one is astir and making preparations for the celebration of the birthday of the Sav. We are preparing to hear anew the blessed and never tiring message that X came into the world to save sinners. And in order that we be truly prepared the admonition of John also goes out to us all. Repent. Let a feeling of shame and disgust fill your heart, because you too are guilty of having offended this your Sav by your many sins ~~are~~ shortcomings. Repent, turn from sin and ~~wait for the~~ turn to a life of faith and good works, in X. O that it may be said of every one of you, as it was said of those who came out to hear John, that they confessed their sins. In all humility, let your devout prayer ascend unto the throne of grace "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us". Xti an friend, in this advent season,

Fling wide the portals of your heart;  
 Make it a temple set apart  
 From earthly use, for heavens employ,  
 Adorned with prayer and love and joy;  
 So shall your sovereign enter in,  
 And new and nobler life begin;  
 To Thee, O God, be praise,  
 For word, and Deed, and grace.

AMEN.