

## **Advent 2022 – Bible study**

### **Have You Ever Heard John the Baptist Preach**

#### ***Session 2 – John’s Baptism***

***“The Jordan River was his baptistry” (Fred Craddock)***

#### **1. Some reflections on last week**

John preached a message that offered a new rite: that of baptism. It is difficult to know where John got the idea for baptism. The Jewish faith prescribed washings (or lustrations) for the hands, the feet and the whole body. Last week we attempted, using the scriptures as our only source of information, to understand what John’s early life looked like. We also attempted to learn about the religious and political landscape of the world that John, and Jesus, lived in.

John’s father, Zechariah, was a priest who also was a descendant of Aaron, Israel’s first high priest. His mother, Elizabeth, was also a descendant of Aaron. For their friends and neighbours, who were not privy to the vision that Zechariah had, the reasonable expectation would be that John would follow in his father’s footsteps and become a priest. We know that God had another plan for John’s life.

We are also told that John’s parents were old and this could lead us to speculate that John was orphaned early in life. This, coupled with Luke 1:80:” And the child grew and became strong in spirit and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.”

What did he do in the desert?

Historians such as Josephus and Pliny the Elder describe desert communities that were distinguished by their love for each other, their ritual baths and meals, common ownership of property and strict observance of the Sabbath. These were the Essenes. The Dead Sea Scrolls are believed to have been part of a library of one such community.

As we shall see, John had a solid theology of salvation. One's personal theology does not arise out of a vacuum. John knew and believed in what he was doing and teaching. This confidence and understanding did not arise out a vacuum.

## **2. John and His world**

A story about Jesus, after all they were contemporaries. In Luke chapter 7:36ff, we read of Jesus being invited to dine at the home of Simon the Pharisee.

As he was reclining at the table a woman who had "lived a sinful life" came with an alabaster jar of perfume and stood behind him at his feet "weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them."

Jesus' host saw this said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him; that she is a sinner."

Jesus came to her defense: "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown."

The woman who had touched Jesus was a sinner; therefore, she was unclean, and Jesus would become, through her touch, unclean. The world John and Jesus dwelt in had two parts: the clean and the unclean. Gentiles, their food, their property. Sinful women were unclean Jews avoided them. Lepers were unclean, Jews avoided them. Pigs were unclean, Jews avoided them. Gentiles were unclean, Jews avoided them. Leviticus 11-15 gives us a snapshot into the world of the unclean and to the remedy for this uncleanliness which was usually washing.

The excrement of animals that was lying in the street was unclean and it was the duty of the host to provide water to his guests so they could purify themselves. It is ironic that Simon, a Pharisee should have neglected this duty.

Contact with the unclean was made a person unfit to come into God's presence. Washing of hands, feet and sometimes the whole body was the means of purification that made one presentable to God.

### **3. John's Insight**

John's insight was to connect repentance and washing in a rite he called baptism as the beginning of the way to salvation.

Repentance + Washing (baptism) = salvation

### **4. Let us Pray**

O LORD God, who hast left unto us Thy holy Word to be a lantern unto our feet, and a light unto our steps: give unto us all Thy Holy Spirit, that out of the same Word we may learn what is your eternal will, and frame our lives in all holy obedience to the same, to Thy honour and glory and increase our faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Read**

Mark 1:9-11    Luke 3: 21-22    Matthew 3:13-17    John 1:29-34