

Luke 3:15-20 – The Ministry of John the Baptist (continued)

John the Baptist was the first to publicly preach Jesus as the Christ. How did he preach? What did he say about him? Remember the setting of these words. Christ was soon to appear, but the people were not ready. They needed to repent, and their repentance needed to be serious. John's preaching had a great effect on the people. Now we read more of what happened.

1. Christ above all: in who he is (v15-16)

People were wondering if John was the promised Messiah. His preaching had been powerful, and they were eager for the Christ to come. Was John him? John knew their thinking, and he immediately set them right (v16). John was only a servant. He baptised in water as a sign, but he had no power. He never did any miracle (John 10:41). He told them that he was not worthy even to be a servant of Christ; not worthy even to remove his shoes. Why was Jesus so worthy, when as yet he had not even begun his service? It was because of who he was in himself. As the Son of God from heaven, he was the perfect and glorious one whom the Father delighted in (John 3:28-36). All things were in his hands (John 3:35). Now that he has died and risen especially, our cry is “worthy is the Lamb!” (Revelation 5:12). A true servant of Jesus points always to him, never to himself.

2. Christ above all: in what he does (v16-18)

John spoke of two baptisms that Christ would carry out. John himself baptised with water; this was a sign performed on the body. It had no inward spiritual power, but was a sign. The spiritual power was in the hands of Christ. He baptises by the Spirit – he washes people inside, making them new people. This is what he does in conversion, when someone is born again (1 Corinthians 12:13). He does this, so we must look to him and seek it. The baptism of fire is a judgment. In Israel, the wheat farmers separated the wheat from the useless chaff using a “winnowing fork” (v17). Christ was ready to do that. Christ divides – he separates between his people and his enemies. He is an awesome judge. He will purify. John preached this with many other words (v18). Have you received this? Have you bowed to the Lord Jesus Christ?

3. Christ above all: always worthy (v19-20)

God's plan was not for John to preach for many years. The time had come for Jesus to appear. God had a plan to remove John from the scene. John as a faithful preacher, and he faithfully rebuked the sins of both rich and poor men. He rebuked the sins of the powerful ruler Herod. Herod had taken his brother's wife, and many other things. John did not fear to speak to him the truth. He loved Herod's soul, and wanted him to repent. But Herod did not listen to his conscience, and tried to silence John. Do you listen to your conscience, and repent? For his faithfulness, John lost his liberty, and in fact, his life (Mark 6:17-29). He was faithful to the end. Following Jesus can be costly, but at last we will hear him say “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). Is Jesus worthy to be served to the end? Yes he is; so let us follow John's example!