

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 402, 12-13-2020 †† Advent 3

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

JOHN 1

⁶There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.... ¹⁹This is the testimony John gave when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed and did not deny. He confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹And they asked him, “Who are you then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” “No,” he answered. ²²Then they asked him, “Who are you? Tell us so we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ just as Isaiah the prophet said.” ²⁴They had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵So they asked John, “Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet?” ²⁶“I baptize with water,” John answered. “Among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸These things happened in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.



Have you driven to the local house with a light show? The lights on the roof, doors, bushes, and trees are synchronized to special Christmas music. The first time I drove to one of these places a few years ago, I saw the light show, which someone had set up at their house, but I could not hear the music. Why not? It took a little while to figure out I had to turn our car radio to the right frequency.

The sign in the yard tells you the radio frequency. The sign isn't the music; the music is the music. But you don't get the music without the information on the sign.

This is true of human hearts in the season leading up to Christmas, a season of repentance called Advent. If we are to be ready for Jesus' coming, your heart

must be tuned to the right frequency. For that reason, you tune to John, and so you ...

TUNE YOUR FREQUENCY TO THE COMING CHRIST

1. To the voice crying in the wilderness ...

This did not happen to be the voice the people of his time really wanted, by the way. John the Baptist's way of life—camel's hair, uncooked meals, water only, desert ministry—all served to draw out the people. We learn from other accounts that John brought out the whole countryside, whom he baptized—and not at the temple.

So the religious leaders were confused. A delegation of priests and Levites came from the temple to see what John was up to.

- The priests and Levites wanted the earthly Christ, but John did not claim to be the Christ. (For John was only called and authorized to preach in the name of the Christ.)
- The priests and Levites wanted Elijah reincarnate (as prophesied in Malachi 4:5), but John did not claim to be Elijah. (For John was not the Elijah in whom the Jews had placed their hope and were here to find.)
- The priests and Levites wanted the Prophet as predicted by Moses (Deut. 18:18), but John did not claim to be the great Prophet. (For the great Prophet would be the same as the Christ.)

John directed them away from him personally. He was authorized by God, but he was of no value compared to the One to come after him. This would be like a professional athlete saying he was not the greatest of all time. Ignore him. He is no captain, no quarterback, no lead chair, no leader. He was just a voice.

This John was not what the Pharisees wanted for Christmas. This is not what the priests and Levites wanted. It makes you think about the Christmas carol where the child is singing about wanting a hippopotamus. No crocodiles, no rhinoceroses, but a hippopotamus she wants. She is in the realm of not really knowing what she's talking about. A hippopotamus is an impossible present.

Do you want the impossible present this year? Do you seek the false hope? Do you chase after the worthless treasure? We shape Jesus Christ differently. He may be just another Santa who gives gifts, another life coach who gives good

feelings, or another lawgiver who gives us goals to achieve. We are all tempted to false Christs. What *should* we want for Christmas? Do you know Pew Research just put out a study that the only thing making people happier over the past pandemic months is regular weekly worship? Is it your Savior to take you home to heaven? If not, the only reason it's not is because of sin.

2. To the message of the New Testament ...

But why were these religious leaders so misguided? I'll tell you why; John was not an Old Testament preacher. Matthew 11:13 says, "All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John." Since Christ the Lord was now present, the mission of Moses, the priests, the prophets and Levites, who had instructed the people of Israel and governed according to the Law, had ended. That means a totally different 'radio adjustment'— not just switching the station, but like switching the tuner altogether, from AM to FM. The Old Testament was obscure about the Messiah. These priests and Levites didn't even know that the Messiah was the same person as the Prophet.

As a New Testament voice, as told of in Isaiah 40, John came to prepare the way of the Savior. Who was John? He was just a voice. He fulfilled a dusty, unnamed prophecy. Why was he there? Imagine the excuse the people might have brought, saying, 'If only a prophet or some other saintly man had informed us of Christ's presence in our midst, we would have received Him joyfully and with all due reverence and gratitude!' But now they could not say this. They couldn't pretend they did not have a radio tuner.

The beauty of John, to be the first voice in the New Testament, was the new message. Now there would be a miraculous baptism. Now there would be repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now there would be fulfillment. Now there would be fruits of the Spirit in keeping with repentance. Now there would still be men despising the preaching and God's Word; but to all who need relief, there was now One among them to provide it as such.

So John was the sign to show them what frequency to which they must tune their hearts. Now that the tuner was set to FM, not AM, what would be playing on their hearts? To what would they be tuned?

3. To the One who comes after ...

It should tell us something that John did not want to sing his own praises. John said the opposite, that he wasn't worth losing the sandal of Jesus.

True, John drew attention. John's way of life, camel's hair, uncooked meals, and desert ministry was different. This way of life served the purpose of furthering his baptism and his unprecedented preaching. This way of life gave John a readier ear among the people. The people flocked to John, revered him as though he were Christ (Luke 3:15, John 1:20). They were waiting expectantly and wondering in their hearts.

In fact, the angel Gabriel had said John would be in the spirit and power of Elijah, "He will be great before the Lord." Jesus later would say that John was more, the greatest born of a woman.

But instead John joyfully seized the opportunity to give a clear testimony not of himself, but of Jesus of Nazareth, that Jesus is the Christ. John was merely a subject of Christ's kingdom.

Sometimes the Bible gives us great "hits," like a radio station that gives us the greatest "hits," an example of faith. We see a greatest "hit" in John the Baptist each Advent. He is great because he seeks to fade into the background.

In Jesus, they had the Prophet and the Christ. Who was John? In Jesus, they had Immanuel, God-with-us. Who was John? In Jesus, they had the hippopotamus. In Jesus, they had the two front teeth. In Jesus, they had the tune to match the light show. Who was John? Jesus was all the Christmas wants and needs balled into one, if they would just tune their hearts to who Jesus was. Jesus was already among them.

If John isn't worth losing the sandal of Jesus, then who am I?

Yet John was not the most humble. He did not have as much opportunity as Jesus to seize power. Nor did John face our guilt. John did not die for our sins. Jesus Christ did those things. He was to conquer the world with His Word and His miracles, not with gun or sword or physical might. He was to win us back in suffering, not in treasure. He was to die on the cross and be just what we needed—just what we didn't know we wanted—for Christmas, a Savior from sin. Tune your hearts to that frequency, and believe in what you hear. Amen.