

# SERMON GUIDE

The Cloud: John Knox

Matthew 3:1-12



8.4.2024

## SERMON NOTES

### Exegesis

Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist. John the Baptist is prophesied about in the book of Malachi when the Lord promises to send the "Elijah to come" before the day of the Lord's appearance. John's role is to prepare the way of the Messiah.

***VS 1-3 -- In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"***

John is preaching in the wilderness. The wilderness is where a lot of the spiritual movements happened in Israel. He called for repentance and proclaimed God's kingdom was coming. We also see the prophecy of Isaiah referenced to be speaking of John's coming.

***VS 4-6 -- Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out with him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.***

The description of John's attire and diet is a purposeful pointer by Matthew to show how John is matching the description of Elijah the prophet. He was predicted to come and meet all that criteria. People from all over are going out to John to be baptized. These are Jews being baptized. Now why is this such a big deal? Gentiles were baptized as a part of their becoming worshippers of YHWH. The Gentiles who followed YHWH were known as God-fearers. They had to follow certain steps in order to be accepted:

- Follow the Torah
- Keep the food laws & feasts

- Honor the Sabbath
- Be circumcised
- Be baptized (ritually cleansed)

It wasn't baptism in the same way we see it. Gentile baptism was a way of acknowledging your filth and need for pardon. Jews did not do this because they were Jewish. This was a Gentile practice. John's baptism was a call to humility, repentance, and recognition of the coming Messiah and Kingdom. It was a way of readying oneself for the Messiah. It wasn't Christian baptism.

**VS 7-10 -- *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now as the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”***

When John sees the religious groups coming to the scene, he doesn't wait for them to talk or see what their response is. He already knows what they are thinking: Jews don't need to do this; this is what Gentiles do. So he goes in on them immediately. He calls them a brood of vipers. Calling people names is a sure fire way of making enemies and driving a wedge in between you and them. He asks who warned them to flee the wrath to come (presumably meaning, on them). He calls them to repentance, but then adds not for them to presume because they are children of Abraham that they are exempt from humbling themselves before the coming of the King. This is a direct assault on everything they think about themselves. He is making it clear that they need Jesus like every other commoner there being baptized.

**VS 11-12 -- “I baptized you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”**

He then points to Jesus. He's coming with power. He will separate the wheat from the chaff. Repent. Be baptized. Ready yourself for the King. John would ultimately be imprisoned and executed by Herod for calling out his unlawful marriage in public and calling for repentance. John called out the hypocrisy and hard-heartedness of the religious leaders in Israel and he called out the corruption and moral decay of the Roman leaders in Israel. This is very similar to the courage and boldness we find in the life of John Knox.

## **Biography**

John Knox was born in 1514 in a small town in Edinburgh, in Scotland. His family invested heavily in his education in an effort to hopefully get ahead and climb up in society a little bit. At this time in history, going to university meant being a priest or a lawyer. At 15 years old, he entered the University of St. Andrews to study theology. He became ordained in the ministry in 1536 (at 22 years old). But he spent his time after his schooling as a notary and tutoring the sons of Scottish nobility.

A lot of turmoil existed in Scotland during Knox's youth. The Catholic Church owned more than half the real estate in the country and gathered an annual income of 18x that of the monarchy. The bishops and priests were often in their positions because of political connections and lived immoral lives in public for all to see. One example of this is the archbishop of St. Andrews, Cardinal Beaton, who would have different women live with him for seasons (unmarried) and produced 10 children from those relationships.

But in 1517, in Germany, when the young monk Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg, he launched a movement that exists to this day. The Protestant Reformation began as a movement to reform the church from its corruption and departure from Scripture. It eventually led to a total breaking away. As a result of the sea traffic between Scotland and the rest of Europe, Luther's ideas and writings were smuggled into the country. Those ideas began spreading. The church authorities in Scotland were alarmed by the "heresy" and tried to stop it. But they could not. They even burned one person at the stake in 1528 for embracing and spreading Luther's ideas.

By the early 1540's, Knox also came under the influence of Reformed teaching and joined the dissidents. He was in his mid-twenties. He became the bodyguard of a prominent preacher who was

going around Scotland preaching the gospel and stressing the need for reform in the church in 1543. But in 1546, Cardinal Beaton had the preacher arrested, tried, strangled to death, then burned. He had done nothing deserving of death. The response of the Protestants was a party of 16 people snuck into the castle Beaton stayed in and assassinated him in his sleep. Even though Knox was not involved in the incident (he did approve of it as justice for the Cardinal's murder of the preacher), he was a part of the siege of the castle that followed.

Knox's perspective on this matter is reflected in his statement, "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God." His view was that the government of a people existed to do the will of God (as Paul states in Romans 13). They are ministers of justice. They are to see themselves as accountable to God, not as god. This is why Knox believed resistance against tyrannical governments were necessary. Christians, in his view, should never bow the knee to ungodly authorities simply because they had the title of government. There is a higher authority that they are accountable to, and that we are accountable to.

One Sunday shortly after this event, in a gathering of Protestant believers worshiping together, Knox was asked by the pastor to undertake the office of preacher. The congregation confirmed the call. Knox was shaken and scared. He was reduced to tears by it all. He tried to decline, but ultimately submitted to what he felt had to be a divine call. He once said, "I have never once feared the devil, but I tremble every time I enter the pulpit." Knox's preaching was persuasive and passionate. He preached on the priesthood of every believer and against the need for a Pope. He held to the Bible as the ultimate authority in the life of a believer since it was the Word of God.

*"Let no day slip over without some comfort received from the Word of God."*

*"The Scriptures of God are my only foundation and substance in all matters of weight and importance."*

But his ministry was short-lived. The Catholic Church mounted an assault and siege on the castle St. Andrews (where the Protestants had taken refuge) and recaptured it. Knox and others were arrested and sentenced as a galley slave and assigned to labor on a French boat. There he worked nearly to death and great toil on his body. Once, when sailing by St. Andrews, Knox remarked that before he died he would preach again at St. Andrews. About a year and half later, Knox and others were

released. He would spend the next 5 years in England where he found himself the court preacher under King Edward VI, who believed Knox could help spread the Reformation ideas throughout England. There his reputation as a preacher soared. But after the death of King Edward VI, his half-sister, Mary Tutor, a Catholic, ascended the throne. Her opposition to the Protestant Reformation and execution of nearly 300 people for their faith earned her the nickname: bloody Mary. Knox, with others, fled to Geneva (Switzerland) and met John Calvin. He learned from Calvin and served alongside him, amazed at the way the Reformation has shaped the city. Calvin taught Knox about principles of how to lead the Reformation movement. Knox would go on to travel to Frankfurt, Germany where he joined other protestant refugees.

Back in Scotland during this time, the Protestants kept working to gain traction and saw congregations forming all over the country. In 1555, they invited Knox to return to Scotland and asked him to spearhead the Reformation in Scotland. His heart for his homeland is felt in his famous cry, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die!" He spent around 9 months preaching and persuaded people in Scotland about the gospel and principles of the Reformation. But he was forced to return to Geneva after that time.

While away from his homeland again, he began writing. He published works that became very controversial. He wrote against leaders that allowed Catholicism back in England. He wrote a scathing work against the three Mary's that all labored against the Reformation called "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regime of Women." There he spoke forcibly against the unnatural position of women in leadership. Many like to discredit John Knox today because of this, but it is vital that we understand the context of what he was facing. Mary of Guise was the mother of Mary, Queen of Scots. Both were Catholic and labored against the Scottish Reformation. Then Mary Tutor, Queen of England, also fought against them and forced his exile from England. He called Mary Tutor "a traitoress and rebel against God." He went on to write about the duty of ordinary people to rebel against their unjust rulers. He told Queen Mary of Scotland later, "The sword of justice is God's, and if princes and rulers fail to use it, others may." But in 1558, Mary Tutor (Blood Mary died) and Queen Elizabeth I (Tutor) ascended the throne, and Knox made a significant alliance with her, allowing him to return to Scotland to preach again (1559).

Within days after his arrival, he preached a sermon against the idolatry that he saw in the church that led to a riot of the citizens where they smashed altars and destroyed images. His focus was not on the elite in Scotland, but on the common man. He was elected the minister of Edinburgh. His sermons were fiery. He would spend around 30 minutes calmly exegeting a passage. Then as he applied the text to the situation in Scotland, he became animated and vigorous, violently pounding the pulpit.

In 1560 (after the death of Mary of Guise), the Protestants had effectively occupied more and more cities, taking up arms to protect themselves. A treaty was formed and the English and French agreed to leave Scotland. The English, now under the Protestant Elizabeth I, sent soldiers to support the Protestants. The French were there with soldiers to aid the Catholics. All of them left after the treaty, making Scotland a Protestant country. The Parliament assigned Knox and a few others the task of writing a Confession of Faith for the country, as well as the First Book of Discipline and Book of Common Order (Calvinist and Presbyterian).

After peace was established, Knox spent the rest of his years preaching in Edinburgh, helping shape the developing Protestantism in Scotland. During this time he wrote his History of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. He was married to his first wife and had two sons with her. After her passing, he married again and had three daughters.

Knox would make us uncomfortable. Many things about him are a paradox. He loved the Lord, the gospel, and the church, but he was very active in taking up arms and revolution in that cause. That seems foreign to us today. But he was a man of great courage that experienced a lot of danger and persecution. Knox died on November 24th, 1572. One man standing at his open grave before his burial said, "Here lies a man who neither flattered nor feared any flesh." Today, the spiritual descendants of John Knox include nearly 1 million Presbyterians in Scotland and over 3 million in the United States, and many more millions worldwide. Knox for much of his life found himself in the minority and fighting against the grain of power. But he famously said, "A man with God is always in the majority." Why stand up for truth and cause conflict? Why embrace the turmoil and have others ridicule you (even other Christians)?

### **1. God's glory.**

We want God to be glorified and we are not okay with open defiance and distortion of His truth. David's response to seeing Goliath taunting the armies of God was, "Who is this Philistine, this uncircumcised guy, who defies the armies of the Living God?!" David was zealous for God's glory and honor to be maintained. That's one reason why John the Baptist, John Knox, and we (the church today) ought to stand for truth.

### **2. Love of neighbor.**

It is the truth of the gospel that saves others. It is errors and lies that lead people astray. Bad ideas are not only wrong, they are dangerous. They are dangers to people's souls and eternities. To love our neighbor as we are commanded is to grasp the importance of truth to their lives. They need to know the truth and walk in it. But there are many people led astray by lies, captive to ideologies of devils and traditions of men. See to it that no one takes you captive, but as we see in Genesis 4, we are our brother's keeper. We are not to think only of ourselves, but of others. We are to see our responsibility as loving our neighbors enough to help them avoid captivity into lies. John the Baptist, John Knox, and believers today must love their neighbors enough to fight for the truth. We are called by Jesus to be salt and light to the world. That imagery of salt and light means we stand out in a world of darkness. As salt, we preserve in the midst of decay. We are the last bastion of holdout if necessary. Imagine where our world would be today if the church did not hold out and fight against the lies and deceits of the culture. Imagine how quickly things would spiral if Christians did not hold out and cling to the truth.

### **3. Love of truth.**

At the end of the day, we love the truth because it's God's truth. We love truth because we hate lies. We are people of the truth because God is true. Our enemy is a liar and the father of lies. He hates the truth. They refused to love the truth. We are to be people who love the truth. One of the primary tasks of the church today is to uphold the truth in a world of lies. The church is both the side support and under support of the truth. That's our role. We do not cave to lies or support lies because our mission and teleology as a people is to preserve truth. This is one reason why Pastor Brandon is debating next Saturday against a Muslim. The goal is to proclaim and defend truth against error. Join us. We don't often know what to do with those bold, courageous reformers the Lord raises up to speak against lies and confront tyranny. Most Christians feel uncomfortable with them and don't know how to make sense

of them. They aren't always gentle and nice. Sometimes they are brash and appear reckless to us. But the testimony of Scripture and of church history shows us the Lord works through men and women like this. John Knox is one such example. There are those today who may fit the same description. The challenge I believe we have as Christians and the church today is not to stifle or muzzle these types. We must be careful not to restrain them to become more like us, because God has purpose and use for them. They don't always fit neatly in the work of local churches or organizations. Sometimes they have to strike out on their own and/or find organizations whose causes need their kind of gifts and passions. This is not everyone's ministry to be like this, but it is the ministry of some. Where we are uncomfortable and perhaps in disagreement, let's give it to the Lord to deal with and judge. Let's recognize that the Lord raises us warriors that must clash with others in order to preserve and advance the cause of truth and Christ in the world.



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?



- **REVIEW**
  - Read **Matthew 3:1-12** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
  - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
  - Additional Scripture:
    - Colossians 2:8
    - Matthew 5:13-16
    - 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10
    - 1 Timothy 3:14-15
- **REFLECT**
  - What is the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus?
  - How should Christians view civil disobedience?
  - How should Christians respond to unruly authorities?
  - If John Knox was obedient to the Lord, why did he suffer?



- **RESPOND**

- Have you been obedient to the Lord's call to baptism?
- What can you learn from John Knox's life?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

- **MEDITATE**

- Matthew 3:11-12 – "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

- **MEMORIZE**

- Revelation 22:20 – He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!



- **FOLLOW:** How will you follow Jesus this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?

- **FISH:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story or the gospel?

- **PRAYER**

- Pray over any request from your group members.
- **Staff** – Jeff Long
  - **Ministry** – For the City Director
- **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
  - The Wilsons
  - The Grays
  - The Starks
- **Pray for our short-term teams**
  - Asian Pacific Rim Team #2 departing August 16
  - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>