



Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. (Luke 3:1-17)

Evil men of that day rule in the Holy Place of Jerusalem just as the *abomination that maketh desolate* is now standing in the Holy Place of America's churches. That abomination has been severely censored by God in both the Old and New Testament. We have ordained and consecrated men (and women) who are openly homosexual to the ministry in the churches in America. These wicked people now stand in pulpits and even in episcopal authority over those pulpits. How long do we feel God will withhold His wrath for this willful disregard for His Word?*and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.* (Daniel

11:31, 37) and *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)* (Matt 24:15) This has direct reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus of Romans in 70 AD, but it also has a parallel meaning for us today who disregard the Word of God and allow unholy men to serve in ministry. Christ fulfilled the law of sacrifice so, regardless of what is done on an altar has no relevance, but what happens in the pulpits of the Church have a gravity that we had best begin to deal with or suffer the wrath to come.

God establishes a definite chronology for the Coming of His only Begotten Son so that the Scriptures will all agree as to the words spoken of the prophets centuries past. He sets the stage for our understanding. The Scripture cannot be broken regardless the futile attempts of higher critics and textual 'engineers' to the contrary. *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene.*

The stage is set for the arraignment of all of those despots who would, not only preside over the land throughout the ministry of Christ, but also at its closing through their direct complicity in His trial and crucifixion. It was to Tiberius Caesar that the land must pay obeisance, and to a local Pro-Consul named Pontius Pilate that would preside over the enforcement of that obeisance. Annas and Caiaphas sat in the seat of High Priest. Little did they realize that their own wickedness would be consummated in the de-thronement of their role as High Priests and the One whom they wish to destroy would take that title in Eternity future. *Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests.*

.....*the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.* It is amazing how clearly and often the Word of God comes to His people in the Wilderness. Perhaps, in the providence of God, only one man has been determined to receive that particular Word, therefore, the Wilderness is the appropriate place for its being revealed to him. Our prayers are better heard when we pray, not for the recognition of men, but in our closets alone with God. The Word of God is such an all-potent and valuable sound! *FRIENDS, if there is one great thing in this world, it is the Word of God; 'great in origin, great in thought, great in promise, great in beauty, great in purpose, great in power, great in its results ! It hangs as by a golden cord from the throne of the Highest, and all heaven's light, life, love, and sweetness come down into it for us. It hangs there like a celestial harp ; the daughters of sorrow tune it, and awake a strain of consolation. The hand of joy strikes it, and feels a diviner note of gladness. The sinner comes to it, and it discourses to him of repentance and salvation. The saint bends an ear to it, and then it talks to him of an intercessor and immortal kingdom. The dying man lays his trembling hand on it, and there steals thence into his soul the promise, **Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.** When thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee, and through the fires, thou shalt not be burned. Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world! The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. This mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and death shall be swallowed up in victory. Where is promise, where is song like this ? *Magnify the Word of God!* EE Adams (The Reformed manner of preaching is the expositional approach.) If we wish to preach with authority, we must preach the Word of God and not the word of the man delivering the sermon.*

And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Has this approach in preaching been disannulled? Should we, too, not be as fervent as George Whitfield, John Wesley, and Charles Spurgeon in preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins? But, alas, I must be dreaming – SIN is no longer fashionable to be condemned – not in our very modern and broad-minded world! He came into the country about Jordan, the same

waters in which our Lord was baptized by John, and whose sweet waters never fail the wilderness traveler. Luke does not even mention the apparel of John, but goes directly to the heart of his mission as a bolt of lightning to the lightning rod –preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Here again God inexorably joins His prophetic utterances of the prophet to the events unfolding before us. (Isaiah 40:3-5) If you are preaching sound doctrine, sound truth, sin, repentance, and grace, you will also be today as a Voice crying in the wilderness. You shall not find yourself flocked about with souls of men and women starving and thirsting for the pure Water of Life and Bread of Heaven. They have their own synthetic bread and impure, polluted waters to drink, and they desire none other. But, to their detriment, like Herod, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilot, men do not seek refuge in the City of God because they feel a false security already in their world-favoring sin. In the Old Testament Law, the children of Israel were commanded to establish cities of refuge throughout the land to which men guilty of serious crimes could flee for refuge. Now comes to Jordan Waters the perfect likeness of that City of Refuge in Jesus Christ. We are guilty beyond doubt. We are murderers and sinners yet, God has provided a Refuge and an Ark for our salvation! Flee to Christ, and He will receive you. In those ancient cities of refuge, the gates were never shut – night or day, but always welcoming to the refugee from justice who we all are. If we are granted justice, we shall be condemned; but, if granted grace, we shall be accounted righteous and forgiven.

Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Generation of Vipers! Careful John, you are going to hurt someone's feelings by being so 'judgmental.' Or perhaps you recognize them for what God's Word has called them? Political correctness is the furthest thought from John. Here John refers not only to the men who unworthily occupy the seat of Moses and of David, but to the people at large. Israel has rejected God as a nation. Christ tells the Jewish leaders that the Kingdom shall be taken from them and given to a people bearing the fruits thereof. (Matthew 21:43) So do we long to see the stone temple rebuilt and the daily sacrifices begun anew in rejection of that once-and-for-all sacrifice made by our Lord? Has America become a generation of vipers? Though there remain many devoted Christians among us, have we given our powers over to evil forces in propagating every immoral concept through our vast control of media? Have we used our national resources to impose values on Third World countries that they would otherwise righteously abhor? Yes, we have done, and we continue to escalate that policy through the IMF and World Bank. Our national voice has often spewed poison from our mouths (media).

Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Fruits worthy of repentance have their birth in a *broken and contrite heart*. (Psalms 51:17). Before repentance can come nationally, it must come personally, for every nation is comprised of ever so many hearts. The sum total of hearts measure the righteousness of the nation. We cannot forever count upon the favor of God based on the Godliness of the Founding Fathers, and neither can Israel count on their bloodline in Abraham to merit salvation. Only those who possess the likeness of Abraham shall be the children of Abraham – in thought, word, deed, and faith. The Seed of Promise was only foreshadowed in his son,

Isaac, born out of time of child-bearing. Christ is the ultimate Seed of Promise and we cannot count Abraham to be our father if we have not accepted the promise of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. If the natural seed fail, God is able even to raise up children from the stones. The promise is made available to all for the acceptance or rejection of it.

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Here is the dire warning which we would prefer to avoid! We are all as trees of either righteousness or unrighteousness. The axe has already been brought to our place of standing. The Woodsmen sizes us up to determine if our fruits are worthy of justifying our remaining in the forest, or has our hearts rotted away and rendered us a waste of forest space. The axe is already about to swing at our root – our character and testimony in Christ. If we have not been fruitful trees, we shall be cut down and burned – and so has the moment of decision come for this old Israel. Instead of works mete for repentance and mercy, their fruit is bitter and condemning. Perhaps that axe hangs over the prairies and alabaster mountains of American today as well.

Is there no remedy for our national and personal sins? There IS an answer!¹

And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? What shall you do to regain the favor of God? What can the nation do to re-establish that favor? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. A greedy man cannot abide this counsel, neither a man of fashion and sophistication. We covet our fine suits and robes. We are fond of our full and elaborate pantries stocked with every dainty food and cuisine. But even a greedy man (as Scrooge in Charles Dickens' story) can be rendered not greedy by one single quality – LOVE! This was lacking in Israel, and it may be becoming scarce in our nation which mislabels sex as love and value of persons by fame and money. I recently read of an occasion of more than seventy years ago when an elderly missionary couple were returning from the harsh mission fields of Africa. They had deprived themselves of a luxurious home, fine food, and the benefits of society for the straw-covered hut, the rough diet, and the inconvenience of living in a wild land for all of their adult lives. They had given all they had of resources, health, and vigor to the service of God's less fortunate people. Now, broken and tired, their continuance on the mission field had been deemed 'unproductive' by their church and they were called home to be put out to pasture as an old work horse in its waning years. As they began to disembark from the ship at the port of New York, they struggled to drag their few belongings with them, but the crowds were overwhelming and cheering. The old couple was prevented from leaving the ship until a famous Hollywood celebrity, returning from a European cruise, had received the adoration of the gathered crowd and had been met by his chauffeur-driven limousine. When the crowd thinned, the old couple continued down from the ship and awaited the next taxi. They waited alone because no one took notice of their years of sacrifice. Is that LOVE? These two had given, not of their extra coat, but their ONLY coat. They had given their meats and received gruel for the sake of their service to God and man. Of what value was the fruit of the Hollywood celebrity's vanity?

Every man and woman has a calling in Christ. It may not be as an active missionary on the foreign field, but it shall always be a missionary in the place where

¹ Simply put, the answer is *priority*. What do we put first, to what standard do we attempt to comply first? The key is doing things *right* the first time. We can only know *right* by God's Standards as laid out in Scripture. *Right* and *Fair* are two words that do not necessarily mean the same thing. When we start doing what we believe to be fair in our eyes, while disregarding what is right according to God, we start down a path that makes Alice's rabbit hole look quite straight.

you are placed whether as a doctor, a lawyer, a butcher, a teacher, or a carpenter². Whatever our calling, we must reflect the nature of a virtuous and loving heart. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. We do not often think of 'publicans' (tax collectors) and soldiers as serving God directly, but we have the words of John to suggest otherwise! If we deal in money, do so with honesty. If we are serving our country as soldiers, we are to do no violence to any man (unwarranted force or mean-spirited action). We must not take from the enemy land that which does not belong to us, but we must be satisfied, as good soldiers, with our pay allowance.

The people began to wonder about John because of the beauty of his words. Remember, his words have been entreating them to repent; and he has been warning them of the destruction to come if they fail to repent. Today, most people would walk away, but these people had enough presence of mind to know that he spoke truth in beauty. Many today lack that discretion. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not. When a minister or a layperson speaks the truth of God, his words will have the force and power of God behind them.

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. John did not suffer that same vanity of many ministers. He discerned the thoughts of the multitude and answered humbly. Here we see the greatest of all prophets confessing his own inadequacy before the One who's Way he was preparing. He's not even worthy, as a household servant's role, to unloose the shoe latches of Christ. Do we stop to reflect that we have no merit whatsoever apart from that imparted to us by Christ Himself?

He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. He is the REFINER of Gold and Silver. His instrument of purification is fire. The Fire of the Holy Ghost will purify those who are called and chosen of God. They are made more and more pure through the refining process (sanctification). Fire and Wind will be the choice tools of Christ at purging the wheat from the chaff. He will fan the wheat as it falls to earth (from the Tribulatum) and the chaff will be blown aside while the pure wheat falls to earth. The chaff will then be burned as death and Hell are cast into the Lake of Fire. (Rev 20:14)

We will celebrate Christmas at Christmas Eve Worship. Of course, Advent is our early celebration of Christmas as well. Let us remember that our beautifully lighted and ornamented trees represent that beautiful Tree of Life that came down to us a Christmas. The Star top the Tree can symbolize that Bright and Morning Star that all Wise Men still follow. Even the candles will remind us of that Light which led the Wise Men and, later, burst out in the brilliance of the Day Star and the Sun of Righteousness. Let us not forget to wish all we meet a very Merry Christmas (not holiday)! There is no reason for us to abandon the joys and love of Christmas on December 26th. We should clasp those to our bosoms every waking moment of the coming year.

² CS Lewis observed a Christian doctor, lawyer, mechanic or dustbinsman will bring more people to Christ than many ministers, when they do the minister's job is to help them closer to God. We must therefore all lead by example.