



**Sermon Series:** Risk-Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

**To be used with Session Five:** John the Baptist: A Faith That Challenges Others

**Sermon Title Possibilities:** Say it Loud

**Scripture:** Matthew 3:1-12

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the Bible study “John the Baptist: A Faith That Challenges Others” this sermon emphasizes that faith stands unwaveringly on the truth. Studies show that when people who’ve had heart-bypass surgery are told by doctors they must change their lifestyles or die, about 90 percent do not change. Nevertheless, despite most people’s response, it does not absolve doctors from the responsibility of telling their patients the truth.

John the Baptist came preaching a spiritual message of repentance - a call to change one’s mind that results in a change in one’s behavior - because a person’s response, was a matter of life or death. Despite most people’s failure to listen, it did not absolve John from telling the truth, and neither does it exempt us.

**Introduction:** Haddon Robinson gives an illustration from A Call to Discipleship by Juan Carlos. Suppose that a ship was sinking, and the captain knew it. But instead of telling the truth, he acts like the ship is not sinking at all. He tells the passengers in second class they can move up to first class. He tells everyone they can have all the alcohol they want, and it’s free! Anyone who desires to play soccer in the dining room may do so. If anything gets broken, it’s no problem. The passengers are delighted, thinking they are free to do whatever they want. But in the end, everyone drowns. We would think that the captain was horrible for not telling people the truth and giving them the option to choose to be saved rather than die.

There’s a hymn, Love Lifted Me. “I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore, very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more; but the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry, from the waters lifted me—Now safe am I. Love lifted me” (Public domain). When we fail to tell people the truth about their sinful condition, but how God so loved the world, that He sent His Son to broker peace and provide eternal life, and then call for them to repent and be saved by believing in Jesus for forgiveness of sins, we often commit the same act as the captain on that ship.

**1. Matthew 3:1-6. Call to repent.**

John’s birth and ministry was announced to his father Zachariah, by the angel Gabriel.

“He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before

Him (meaning the Messiah) in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people” (Lk. 2:16-17). Matthew opens his Gospel with John, not only fulfilling his ministry, but coming in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah (Matt. 3:3; Isa. 40:3) and in the spirit and power of Elijah (Matt. 3:4; 2 Kgs. 1:8). No matter how long it takes, and as improbable as it may seem, God is true to His Word. What He says will happen (Isa. 55:10-11).

The word Greek that John uses for “repent,” *metanoeo* (*meta-nō-ā-ō*), means “to have another mind, to change the opinion or purpose with regard to sin and a deliberate redirection of one’s life for the future.” It is equivalent to the Old Testament idea of repentance, a wholehearted turning from sin and turning to God. True repentance manifest itself in confession of sin and is symbolized by baptism (Matt. 3:6, 11). 1 John 1:9 declares, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

## **2. Matthew 3:7-10. Address hard truths.**

The apostle John said in his Gospel, “But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.” The Pharisees, scribes, and many Jewish people believed they had inherited salvation because Abraham was their father. But salvation does not come through natural descent. Salvation cannot be willed of the flesh. No amount of human effort or religion can save. Nor can human beings will salvation. We were born dead in sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:1) and dead people cannot will anything. You must be born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

John addresses a hard truth. The Pharisees and scribes may have been children of Abraham physically, but they were children of the devil spiritually (Matt. 3:7). Jesus said the same thing (John 8:37-44). The evidence that they belonged to the devil was that they lacked the fruit of repentance. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

We were once children of the devil (Eph. 2:1-3). But praise be to God, because of His great love for us, He has made us alive in Christ. We have been saved by grace through faith, not of ourselves. It is God’s gift, not from our works, so we have no cause to boast (Eph. 2:4-8).

## **Matthew 3:11-12. Point to Christ.**

Many questioned if John was the Christ (Luke 3:15). People came to hear him and were baptized by him from the city, suburbs, and countryside (3:5). His ministry was so

powerful, it attracted the attention of the religious leaders (3:7), probably out of jealousy more than curiosity (John 1:19-22). With all the buzz and attention, it may have been tempting for John to take glory for himself. Psalm 115:1 declares, “not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory because of your faithful love, because of your truth.”

John spoke of both him and his ministry as inferior because the One who was coming after him was so much greater, that John felt unworthy to even remove His sandals. In that culture, because of all the mud, dirt, and dung caked on the feet from walking - washing another person's feet upon entering a home was a sign of hospitality. However, it was reserved for the lowest servant. In comparison to Christ, John considered himself lower than the lowest of servants. Rather than water, the coming One would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (symbolizing purification and judgement). He would also come with His winnowing fork. A winnowing fork was used to separate wheat from chaff, with wheat symbolizing believers, whom the Christ would gather unto Himself and chaff (the outer husk of the seed) symbolizing unbelievers, whose ultimate end would be to experience unquenchable fire (Matt. 25:31-46).

**Conclusion:** A Pew research study from November 23, 2021, found that about 75% of Americans believe in heaven, but 62% believed in hell. It appears that many Americans believe that a loving God would not send people to hell let alone create it. However, hell does exist, and it was created for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), not for human beings. God doesn't send people to hell, the hard truth is human beings were born separated from God by sin and they ratify that sinful nature by committing acts of sin, which destines them for hell. But “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” That is why it is so important for us to tell people the hard truth about their condition, but to also tell them about the good news of Jesus Christ.

Whose “ship” is sinking, and he or she is unaware because they are distracted by the things of this world and blinded by the “captain” or ruler of this world (2 Cor.4:4; Jn.-14:30)? Who do you need to tell the “hard truth” but to also share the Gospel with today?

### **Author Bio**

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