

INTRODUCTION

Most towns in America have a “first Baptist church.” That means they were the first Baptist church organized in a particular city. For instance, First Baptist Church Tyler was established in 1848, two years after Tyler became a city. They are our mother congregation and members from there started Green Acres in 1955.

The first Baptist church in America is in Providence, Rhode Island. Roger Williams established it in 1638. The beautiful building is still there. But you don’t have to visit Rhode Island to see it, because an exact replica can be found on the campus of Dallas Baptist University. It’s the Patty and Bo Pilgrim Chapel—a lot of chickens gave their lives for that building!

But Roger Williams wasn’t the first Baptist preacher. The first Baptist preacher was a man we meet in the first verses of Mark named John the Baptist. But he wasn’t a Baptist in any sense of word that we use it today. His title was actually John the baptizer. The word “baptize” means to immerse, dunk, or dip. So long before the NBA, he could have been called John the dunker. And Baptist churches are actually dipper churches; Green Acres is a big dipper and we have plenty of little dippers in East Texas.

Before we look at the First Baptist Preacher, let me let me give you some introductory information about Mark’s gospel. We call this the Gospel According to Mark, but his name doesn’t appear anywhere in the text. We call it Mark because there was an early pastor named Bishop Papias, who wrote in the Second Century, that this account was written by John Mark as told to him by Simon Peter. We know that Peter and Mark were close because Peter ends his first letter by sending greetings “from my son, Mark.” So it could be called the Gospel According to Peter as told to Mark.

Mark was writing to a Roman audience. Romans loved action, especially miracles. Mark contains more miracles per chapter than the other gospel accounts. The most common word in these pages is the little word *euthus*, which means “quickly” or “immediately.” It appears 40 times in 16 chapters. The action never stops. That’s why I’ve entitled this series, “The reMARKable power of Jesus.”

Mark skips a birth narrative and jumps right into the action. Like a Hollywood producer, he says, “Lights, camera, action!”

Mark 1:1-8. “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way—a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message, ‘After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

We're not sure exactly what John looked like, but he probably looked like a cross between a homeless man and Bigfoot. One of my favorite images of him is found in the Academy Art Gallery in Venice. Tiziano Vecelli (also known as Titian) painted him pointing to a lamb, which was his ministry.

We know from Luke 1 that John was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb. He took a Nazarite vow never to drink or cut his hair. He was unusual in his dress and diet. He wore a coat of camel hair with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey. He probably looked like a wild man.

Can you imagine John walking into the local McCamel's restaurant? He said, "I'll take a McLocust burger, heavy on the honey." The kid taking his orders asks ... wait for it ... "Would you like flies with that?" Sorry.

But John was a man who understood his role in the world. So let's learn four important spiritual lessons about the man and his ministry.

1. WE'RE CALLED TO HELP PEOPLE FIND AND FOLLOW GOD

The Bible says that John was, "A voice of one calling in the wilderness. Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

Jay Leno is retiring after 22 years of the Tonight Show. Before Jay, Johnny Carson hosted the show for thirty years. For all of those thirty years, the show started with Johnny's sidekick Ed McMahon. He would introduce Johnny by saying the same thing, "Live from Hollywood, it's the Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson." He would introduce the guests. Then he would utter his famous line, "And now, Heeeeeere's Johnny!" You didn't see Ed McMahon until later in the show—in the beginning he was just a voice.

That was basically the role of John the Baptist. He came to introduce the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He was just a voice crying in the wilderness. "Live from Heaven Above, it's Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, and now, heeeeeere's Jesus!"

John's job was to prepare the way for the Lord. He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that said a forerunner would come to introduce the Messiah. This forerunner would build a straight path to him. In Isaiah 40:4 it says, "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain."

John was a highway builder. Think about Loop 49. When the engineers were designing and building Loop 49, they had to cut down some hills, and they had to bridge some valleys, they made a straight road and they made it smooth—and then they made it a toll road!

Picture John the Baptist standing on one side of a spiritual landscape filled with mountains and valleys. There were mountains of unbelief, and valleys of despair. There were crooked ways of sin and rough ways of doubt. For 400 years, the Jewish people hadn't had a word from God.

John's voice shattered the silence. He brought down the mountains and filled in the valleys and said, "Here He is! This is the Messiah. Let me show you how to know Him!"

The Bible says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

For all of us that know God, there was someone who pointed the way to us. It might have been a parent, a pastor, or a loving Sunday School teacher. But someone helped us find and follow God. Now, that's our job. For all of us that know Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we should be pointing Him out to others.

The Old Methodist evangelist Sam Jones used to tell the story about the time when paddlewheel riverboats steamed on the Mississippi River. When two riverboats passed on the river, the passengers would gather on the rail and wave to the passengers on the other boat.

One day as two paddlewheels were passing, a fireman who fed the boiler ran up onto the deck and pointed to the other boat. He said, "Look! Look! There's the captain! The finest captain on the Mississippi!"

A well-dressed man looked at the grimy fireman and said, "What gives you the right to say that he is the finest captain? How would you know?" The fireman said, "Last year I was on the deck of his boat, and a storm blew up. I fell overboard and I can't swim. I was crying, 'Help me! Help me!' The captain himself jumped in the water and saved my life. And ever since he saved me, then I just love to point him out!"

That's my story, too. "I was sinking deep in sin; far from the peaceful shore. But the master of the sea; heard my disparaging cry; from the waters; lifted me; now safe am I!" And brothers, and sisters, that's why I love to point out the captain of my salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you pointing people to God? I encourage you to continue to use your kindness cards to show people God's love by performing acts of kindness. I've heard dozens of great stories. Pat Harris wrote me: "Good morning Brother David. I paid the tab for the car behind me in the Chick-fil-A drive through. It turned out to be \$6. Later when I opened my order, an extra sandwich was in my bag. Coincidence? I don't think so."

2. WE FIND FORGIVENESS WHEN WE MAKE A U-TURN TOWARD GOD

The Bible says, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

John's message was simple: "Repent and be baptized." The gospel is a short and simple message. For instance, there are only 297 words in the Ten Commandments; Jesus told the Prodigal Son parable using only 504 words. An average 30-minute message from me is 3,800 words. Compare that to how many words are in the Affordable Care Act Bill, also known as Obamacare: 234,812. Simple is good.

The word "repent" means to have a change of mind that leads to a change in your behavior. John's preaching didn't win him any awards. In Mark 6 we're going to see where his preaching led to him being arrested and beheaded.

People don't like to hear that they need to repent. They think they're fine just the way they are. There are some churches today that no longer talk about sin. They are simply centers for human improvement. But the message of the Bible is that we are all sinners and if we want to experience God's forgiveness, we must admit we're sinners and turn toward God.

Joseph Parker was the pastor of City Temple in London during the last part of the 19th Century. He was known as one of the strongest preachers in Britain. He wrote: "The man whose message is 'repent' sets himself against his age and will be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges. There is but one end for a man ... off with his head. You had better not preach repentance until you have pledged your heart and your head to heaven."

The message of repentance is found throughout the Bible. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He told the people, "Repent, or you're going to drown." But they laughed at him. Jonah went to the wicked city of Nineveh and preached, "Repent, or God is going to destroy your city." And in that case, the people repented, and God spared their city.

God's requirement to repent hasn't been repealed. The Apostle Peter said, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (Acts 3:19)

Repentance involves a spiritual U-turn. In many cities a U-turn is illegal; but in Tyler U-turns are now mandatory. Many of you can remember a time before the city built the medians in the middle of Loop 323 and other roads in Tyler. Before then, many motorists would rush out into what is sometimes called "the suicide lane." Now we have become a city of U-turners. You may not like the medians, but they have reduced the number of accidents and probably saved many lives.

Mickey Cohen was a violent gangster who lived in Los Angeles. In 1949, a young evangelist named Billy Graham was holding a crusade in L.A. One of Cohen's men, Jim Vaus, was converted to Christ and arranged a personal meeting between Billy Graham and his boss. *Time Magazine* reported on their meeting. After they met, Mickey Cohen was quoted, "I am very high on the Christian way of life. Billy came up, and before we had food he said—what do you call it? That thing they say before food? Grace? Yeah, grace. Then we talked a lot about Christianity and stuff." Mickey was interested, but he wasn't interested in repenting of his sin. He told Billy Graham, "There are Christian football players, Christian cowboys, what not a Christian gangster?" Billy Graham later reported that Mickey was never willing to repent.

Repentance means that you're going in one direction, away from God. You hear the truth and you turn from your sin and turn to God. It's one turn, not two. You don't have to first turn from your sin, and then turn toward God. When you turn toward God you are turning from your sin.

3. ABUNDANT LIFE IS MORE ABOUT JESUS AND LESS ABOUT ME

John said, "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."

The job of the lowliest slave was to stoop down and untie the leather thongs of his master's sandals. John claimed he wasn't even worthy do that. Crowds came out from Jerusalem into the desert and were enthralled with his preaching. If he had claimed to be the Messiah, most of them would have believed him. But John didn't have a Messiah complex. He was willing to step aside and give all the glory to Jesus.

We may forget that John the Baptist had disciples as well. In John 3 his disciples come to him and complain that the "new guy" Jesus was getting all the crowds they used to get. John said he was only the friend of the bridegroom, the bridegroom should get all the attention at the wedding, and so he was happy. Then John said, "I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him...He must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:28, 30)

We live in a culture where nobody is satisfied with being #2. When the Denver Broncos lost to the Seattle Seahawks in the Superbowl, they didn't go in the locker room and chant, "We're number two! We're number two!" Nobody gets excited about being #2. For many years, the slogan of Avis Car Rental was "We're #2. We try harder." But even they dropped that slogan a couple of years ago. They're actually #3 now. Enterprise is the #1 Car Rental Company, and Hertz is #2. But you can bet that you won't hear Hertz bragging about being #2.

In the 1970s Thomas Wolfe identified the Baby Boomers as "the Me Generation." But last spring, *Time Magazine's* cover declared the millennial generation as the "Me Me Me Generation." It went on say, It shows the picture of a girl taking a "selfie." In 2013 the Oxford Dictionary made "selfie" their official word of the year. The very fact that the word "selfie" is part of our vocabulary says a lot about our culture.

In Greek mythology, Narcissus was a handsome god who saw a reflection of his face in the water, and fell in love with himself. He took the first selfie. John the Baptist never took a selfie. Someone once said the toughest instrument to play is second fiddle. John was comfortable in the role of being second fiddle.

Like John, can you make that the desire of your heart? That Jesus would become greater in your life? The only way Jesus can become greater and greater is when you're willing to become less and less.

So repeat after me: "It's not about me. It's all about Jesus." If you make that your motto, then you're on your way to understanding what abundant life is all about.

4. JESUS WANTS TO TOTALLY IMMERSE US IN GOD'S LIFE

John's immediate message was, "Repent and turn to God." But his main message was about Jesus. He said, "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." John's

ministry was to baptize people in water as a sign of repentance. In the next message, we'll talk more about water baptism when we look at the baptism of Jesus.

Remember, the word "baptize" means "to immerse." There is a baptism that is more important than baptism in water. It is baptism in or with the Holy Spirit. Water baptism is an outward act that symbolizes the cleansing of your sins but it only touches your body. Spirit baptism is an inner act that literally purifies your soul and spirit; you become Holy because the Spirit of God is Holy. That's why He is called the Holy Spirit.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is so important it is mentioned six times in the New Testament. It's mentioned in all four Gospel accounts, and Peter quotes it to Cornelius in Acts 10. We don't have to wonder what the baptism with the Holy Spirit is, because Jesus identified it just before He ascended back into heaven. Jesus said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5)

Jesus was talking about what would happen on the Day of Pentecost, and we know what happened. The disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

There are some well-meaning Christians who describe the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as some kind of second-blessing experience in which you do strange things like faint or speak in tongues. For some of them, if you haven't spoken in tongues, they may make you feel inferior and say, "There's more." And some people end up seeking an experience rather than seeking the Lord.

I strongly believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit, but the Bible makes it clear that all believers will not speak in tongues. The initial filling of the Holy Spirit may be called the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but God commands us to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not for our enjoyment it's for God's employment!

To be filled or baptized in the Holy Spirit means you are totally immersed in the life of God. There are many Christians who are still living according to the desires of their flesh—the Bible calls them carnal Christians. A carnal Christian is saved, but they aren't experiencing the joy and victory of the Christian life. It's like a carnal Christian has taken a glass of the Living Water and splashed it on them. They have just enough of Jesus to save them, but not to really bless them. But a Christian who is baptized in the Holy Spirit has jumped head first into a swimming pool filled with the Living Water, and their entire being is surrounded, covered, and supported in the life of Jesus. So go ahead, take the plunge. Allow Jesus to fill you with His Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

John's message was "repent and be baptized." Jesus' message was, "Unless you all repent, you shall likewise perish."

God is giving you the opportunity today to turn to Him and trust Him for forgiveness. Like most licensed pilots, I've been interested in aviation accidents through the years. Many accidents are

caused by pilot error, and if we can learn from another pilot's mistake, it may save lives in the future. The worst aviation disaster in history happened in 1977 in the Canary Islands off the coast of Spain. Two 747s had been diverted to Tenerife because of a bomb threat at their destination in Spain. The jumbo jets refueled and the KLM 747 taxied to the end of the fog-shrouded runway to take off. Meanwhile a Pan Am 747 piloted by Captain Victor Grubbs was taxiing down the runway to follow the KLM jet in taking off. Neither crew could see the other, and the controller in the tower couldn't see either jet because of the fog. The KLM captain began his takeoff roll. Captain Grubbs saw the KLM jet roaring toward them and he turned left to exit the runway, but it was too late. The KLM jet lifted off the runway, but sheared off the top of the Pan Am jet. There were a total of 583 fatalities. Captain Grubbs was one of only 66 survivors. He received second and third degree burns. As he visited the scene of the crash the next day, he wept and was heard to say, "If only I had turned sooner." The investigation found that it wasn't his fault, but he still carried that guilt.

The Bible says there is danger in delaying your turn to God. The scriptures say, "TODAY, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 3:15) If you don't turn to Christ today, you may be spending eternity saying the same thing Captain Grubbs said. "If only I had turned sooner."

The message of salvation is simple. Repent and turn to God. The way you do that is by placing your faith in Jesus. John 3:16 puts it in simple terms that anyone can understand. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

We often say there is nothing God can't do. But actually, there are three things God cannot do today. First, He cannot love you any more than He already does. Second, God cannot give you more than He has already given you: He's already given His Son to die for you. And third, God cannot make it any simpler—that if you believe in Him you can have eternal life. I'm not the first Baptist preacher, and I won't be the last, but I may be the last one you ever hear offer you God's invitation to trust Him. Will you trust Him today?

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*
