Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

2002-002

January 13, 2002 by Steve Brandon

The Forerunner to Jesus Christ (Part 1)

Matthew 3:1-8

1. The Man (verses 1,3-4)
2. His Message (verse 2)
3. The Response (verses 5-8)

In every one of the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist always precedes Jesus. As different as the gospel accounts are, (and indeed, they are different) there are no exceptions to this rule: John precedes Jesus. This is because John the Baptist plays a crucial role in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. To ignore John's ministry, would be to mistake who Jesus was.

John expressed great humility when he compared himself to Jesus. John said things like, "[Jesus] has a higher rank than I" (John 1:30), "I am not fit to remove [the] sandals [of Jesus]" (Matt. 3:11), and "[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Though he was humble, John was a great man and his ministry of pointing others to the life of Jesus Christ is of great importance.

John has been called the "fore-runner" to Jesus. He has been called the "harbinger." He was the one who came to prepare the way for our Lord. In ancient times, it was customary for messengers to come before a king and announce his arrival. Kings often sent pioneers ahead of them to remove any obstacles in their way as they arrived at a particular destination.

Today, our secret service agency does this for our President. Wherever the President is going, the secret service arrive hours or days ahead of time to secure his arrival at a particular place. Furthermore, whenever the President goes to speak somewhere, he is always announced, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States of America" (then, the music begins to play). This is similar to the role of John the Baptist. He was the secret service -- preparing the way. He was the announcer -- telling others who Jesus was. Rather than saying, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States," John would say, "Ladies and

Gentlemen, the Messiah, who came to redeem Israel." You remember when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

We have the opportunity tonight to spend some time looking at John and his ministry. My outline is simple...

1. The Man (verses 1,3-4) - John
2. His Message (verse 2) - Repentance
3. The Response (verses 5-10) - Mixed

Let's first look at ...
1. The Man (verses 1,3-4)

Verse 1 says, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea." John is identified here, simply as "the Baptist." That is because his work consisted of "baptizing" people.

Baptism, as you all know, simply means, "Immersion." It means, "dunking." It means, "getting people wet all over." John was taking people and dunking them in the water as a sign of spiritual cleansing. This wasn't simply a free bath. John was baptizing those who repented of their sins. Mark summarizes John' ministry as "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). John preached a message of repentance. Those who responded to his message were subsequently immersed or dunked in water as a sign of their repentance. The dunking the people didn't cleanse them spiritually. It was a sign that they had been cleansed, as a result of their repentance.

Our text says that he was preaching, "in the wilderness of Judea." This is the region to east of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, as a city, is set on a plateau. Just to the east of Jerusalem is the Kidron Valley. If you proceed further east, you will ascend the mount of Olives, which overlooks Jerusalem. If you continue east, past the mount the mount of Olives, you will find yourself on a descent down to the Jordan river. It drops off some 4,000 feet. Once you go past the mount of Olives, the climate changes drastically. Within five miles east of Jerusalem, you are in the wilderness, where living is very difficult. Any rain that might come to that region, comes from the west -- from the Mediterranean Sea. It is stopped at the mount of Olives. The rain might penetrate a little beyond them, but the wilderness is so dry that any rain quickly disappears.

We might think of the wilderness and wild forests and dense jungles with many untamed animals. This wilderness is not like that. This wilderness is a dry and unlivable place. Very few plants or animals can even survive in this place. The danger in this wilderness is not the wild animals, which might enjoy you for lunch. Rather it is the severely hot and dry climate, which prohibits almost anything from growing.

We know from verse 6 that he was baptizing people in the Jordan River, which was about 30 miles from Jerusalem, on the other side of the wilderness. When you get near the Jordan River, there is more water, so it is more survivable, but still, it is very difficult.

In verse 4, we have some clue as to his dress and his diet. We read, "Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey." You might say, "wow, that's strange!" I would tell you that it is strange. Simply the fact that Matthew mentions it demonstrates that he was a little different than everybody else. This wasn't the common dress and diet of the day.

I believe that John was seeking to make a statement with his life. Just as today, many teenagers are into baggy pants and pierced body parts to make a statement, likewise John. John was setting out to live a life of humility and poverty. His clothing wasn't particularly comfortable. His food wasn't particularly tasty. This garment of camel's hair was a cheep cloth, which he simply wrapped around his body, and secured with a leather belt. His food was that of the common poor people. What do you think kids? Do you want to dress with your bed sheets and a belt? Do you want to eat grass-hoppers and honey?

John made a conscious choice to live this way. He didn't have to. His father, Zacharias, was a high-priest. His father was one of the top, ruling members in the Sanhedrin. He had ascended in his religion to a prominent position. Perhaps this didn't make him rich, but it certainly provided for him. His family wasn't so poor that this is all that they could afford for John was a bed sheet and a few grass-hoppers from the back yard.

We get a glimpse into John's calling in Luke 1. Turn there. Before John was born, Zacharias was the high priest one year. As the high priest does on the day of atonement, he, and he alone, went into the holy of holies to offer the sacrifice for Israel. Low and behold, when he entered into that sacred place, he saw an angel,

and was gripped with fear (Luke 1:12). The angel, Gabriel, spoke to Zacharias and said, "[John] will be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15). Later in Matthew, we will see Jesus describing John as the greatest of men (Matt. 11:11).

John's appearance may not have been great in the sight of people (wearing bed sheets and eating grass-hoppers), but he was great in the sight of the Lord. And what really matters? Which is of more importance, to be great in God's eyes or in the eyes of men? In Family Worship, we are learning a hymn by Horatius Bonar, "Go, Labor On." One stanza sings, ...

"Go, labor on; 'tis not for naught;
Thy earthly loss is heav'nly gain:
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not;
the Master praises: what are men?"

If the Master praises, what are the praises of men?

John was great, because John wasn't seeking the approval of men. John was seeking to be faithful to the Lord, who had called him, (even from his womb). I believe that we can learn much from John. He sought not only in his message, but also in his life to seek not the approval of men, but God, who examines our hearts (1 Thess. 2:4). God used him greatly in preparing the way for Jesus to come.

Furthermore, John was great, because it was prophesied of him that he would do a great work. Luke 1:16 reads, "And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God." Luke describes John as "turning the people back," which is nothing other than the message of repentance that John preached. John thundered forth to the people of his day, "You have strayed from the Lord your God. ... Your sinful ways has kindled His anger. ...Turn back to God. ... Repent!" ((We shall find out in a little bit that many, did indeed respond to John's message).

Verse 17 continues the prophecy concerning John, (this is still Gabriel speaking), "And it is he who will go [as a forerunner] before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN [a quote from Mal. 4:6], and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." It was by the affirmation of this angel that John would indeed come in the spirit and power of Elijah. Jesus later affirmed that John was indeed Elijah (Matt. 17:12 -- a passage we will look at in more detail when we get there one of these years).

We all know that the Jews were expecting Messiah to come. But they were also expecting Elijah to come to prepare the way of the Lord. Even today, it is the same with many Jews, who have blind eyes. At their Passover meals, they set an extra place for Elijah, in the event that he might come back and join them. They claim to be awaiting the Messiah to come. But John came, "in the spirit and power of Elijah," and Jesus came as the Messiah. They have missed them both. Someday, as Zechariah foretells, "they will look upon Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first born" (Zech. 12:10). But, today, they have missed them both.

This is why it is important that John would come first. The Jews were expecting a forerunner to the Messiah. Anybody who claimed that the Messiah was here, needed also a forerunner. The Messiah wasn't just going to come on the scene and say, "Here I am!" No, the Messiah was going to have one come and prepare the way first. John the Baptist was this forerunner according to the prophecy of Malachi 4:6.

Luke makes an allusion to another prophecy made by Isaiah at the end of verse 17, "so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Turn to Isaiah, chapter 40. After 39 chapters of railing judgment against the nations, Isaiah speaks a word of comfort.

> Isaiah 40:1-2
> "'Comfort, O comfort My people,' says your God. Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins."

Isaiah brings a message of comfort to Israel. He is speaking of a time when their iniquity will be removed. He is speaking of a time in which the chastisement of the Lord will end.

> Isaiah 40:3-4
> "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley;'"

Throughout the history of the Jews, they understood these verses to be speaking about the forerunner to the Messiah. The forerunner would be the voice calling out, "clear the way for the LORD." The forerunner would announce the coming of the Messiah. The forerunner would prepare the way for the Messiah to come.

After the forerunner, verse 5 says, "Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed." This refers to none other than the Lord, Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus Christ was God made flesh. We know that Jesus Christ was the "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This is the glory that "dwelt among us, and [which] we beheld" (John 1:14).

Every one of the gospel writers, (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) quotes Isaiah 40:3 directly as referring to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). Turn back to Matthew's quote of this passage -- chapter 3, verse 3. Verse 3 says, "For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!" John, indeed, prepared the way by stirring the crowds with his preaching and with his stunning indictments against the religious leaders of the day.

Let's look now at ...
2. His Message (verse 2)

His message is summarized for us in verse 2, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This isn't the only thing he said. The gospel of John records for us a little bit more of his preaching. But this the summary of his message. This is the main point of what he was saying. John commanded the people, and gave a reason for the command. If you want an alliteration, you might say that John gave an exhortation and an explanation.

His exhortation was simply this, "Repent!" I think that we are familiar with what this means. Fundamentally, repentance is a "change of mind." But this "change of mind," never stops in the mind. It always proceeds to affect one's life. To repent simply means to turn. It describes the turning from doing one thing to doing another. It describes the sorrow and regret of one's sinful actions with the corresponding change in behavior.

Repentance is the sorrow of the prodigal son, who had squandered half of his father's fortunes. When in a far, distant land, he realized that his sin was great. He

realized that his life was miserable and looked upon where he was in life, and was broken. But you remember that the prodigal son didn't limit his repentance to his mind and his thoughts and his emotions and his sorrow only. His repentance didn't lead him to write to his father to ask him for more money for more indulgence in his sin. It is true that the repentance of the prodigal son occurred, (as Jesus said), when he "came to his senses" (Luke 15:17). It was his repentance lead him to seek his father and his forgiveness. The son came back from the "distant country" (Luke 15:13). The son came back from his "loose living" (Luke 15:13). The son came in contrition before his father, saying "I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21).

Genuine repentance is the sorrow of heart that confesses what wrong has been done before the Lord. But it isn't confession alone. It is hatred for that wrong that was done. It is a cry to God for help not to walk that way again.

This is the repentance the John preached. He preached to a sinful nation who had forsaken God. As a family, we have been reading through 2 Kings together (in our reading of the Bible together) and have seen over and over and over again how the kings were constantly evaluated on how well they reigned. The scriptures constantly declare, "... he did evil in the sight of the LORD." There are a few kings that "did good," but most were evil, wicked kings. This was the pattern in Israel -- years of wickedness. John's message was to a sinful nation that was in need of repentance.

John's explanation (or reason) was simply this, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Though Israel had lived in an earthly kingdom, God's kingdom had finally arrived. John was simply saying that "the King is here." The dawning of a new age has come. The Messiah has come on the scene.

This is the same message that Jesus gave in Matt. 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This is the same message that the disciples preached in Matt. 10:7, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" With the coming of Jesus, we see the kingdom of God being established upon the earth. In fact, Jesus even said, "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12: 28). Jesus was born a king (Matt. 2:2), and His kingdom came when he walked upon the earth and was near His people. Entrance into His kingdom was enabled through His death upon the cross at Golgotha. Yet, the kingdom of our Lord has not yet been fully established. Right now, He sits in the heavens, at the right hand of God, "waiting for His enemies to be made a footstool for His feet" (Ps. 110:1). As theologians like to say, it is "already, and not yet."

Notice also that when John said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," there was an urgency to his plea. "The king is here, you need to repent **now**!" Church family, genuine repentance always happens NOW! It is not delayed.

Think about the one who delays their repentance. To say, "I'll repent tomorrow" is no repentance at all. To say, "I'll repent tomorrow" is equivalent to saying, "I'll sure enjoy my sin today." To say, "I'll repent tomorrow" is to say, "I have no sorrow today! I can enjoy my idolatry; I can enjoy my pornography; I can enjoy my worldliness; I can enjoy my sensuality; I can enjoy my wickedness."

This is not repentance. Delayed repentance is no repentance. To delay your repentance is to pawn your soul to the devil (from Thomas Manton, in Puritan Quotations, p. 239). To delay your repentance is to give your soul to the devil in hopes that you might come back in the future and buy it back from him. To delay your repentance is shear madness! Genuine repentance happens **now**! The problem with repenting tomorrow is that tomorrow never comes!

Perhaps there are some of you, right now, who are waiting for tomorrow to repent from some sin. Perhaps it is something that has plagued you. Perhaps it has awoken you at night. Perhaps you have it every before your mind. May I urge you to recognize your need for repentance. Right now, cry out to God for mercy and help in time of need.

Perhaps you don't feel the urgency to repent right now. Perhaps you say, "Sure, when John the Baptist preached, the kingdom **was** at hand, Jesus was there, but for us today, the kingdom tarries. It isn't upon us now like it was back then." That sort of reasoning comes from the pit of hell, itself. Perhaps we don't see the kingdom of Jesus Christ being manifest in ways in which it was during the times of John the Baptist. But, that no less diminishes the sovereign rule of God upon our lives. He is in no less control in waiting to fully establish His kingdom than He was during His time upon this earth. Listen, to put of repentance one more day, requires one more day of which to repent and one day less in which to repent. I urge you now to repent.

Perhaps you say, "But repentance is a one time act. I repented long ago when I became a believer." Oh, but you forget that all of our life is to be a life or repentance. In 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses at Wittenburg. He wished to debate those in the church on any of these matters. Remember his very first

one? "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." In other words, you can stop repenting the day you stop believing.

The Christian life is a life of repentance. Sure, there may be a major point in your life, when you radically changed -- when you were pursuing one direction of life, but have forsaken it. That's the day that you believed upon the sufficiency of our Savior's death upon the cross to wash away your sins. But see, that's the day you started to believe. Have you stopped believing? I ask you then, have you stopped repenting?

As a believer in Jesus Christ, it is your desire and your goal and your love to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called. When confronted with your sin, what will you do? Will you repent or will you love your sin? The Christian life is a life-long process of sanctification. You will never feel like you have arrived. Yet, we are called to continual repentance.

Let's look lastly at ...
3. The Response (verses 5-8)

We first encounter **those who responded properly** in verses 5-6, "then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins."

Revival was taking place. Many were turning from their wickedness and responding to John's message. So many were coming that John personified these regions that were coming for his baptism. He didn't say, "those in Jerusalem were going out to him." He said, "Jerusalem" was going out to him. He said, "all Judea" was going out to him. This is the region surrounding Jerusalem. He said, "all the district around the Jordan." This is the region surrounding where John was preaching. Many, many, many people were coming to heed John's call to repentance.

Look at how they were responding: They were being baptized by John and they were confessing their sins. They were doing exactly right. Before God and before others, they openly confessed their wrong doings. Upon their confession of their sin, John was baptizing them. This was open, and unashamed admission of wrong before other. That is repentance! When you get to the point where you can say, what I have done is wrong and evil, and can confess it both to God and to others, such is repentance.

Notice the central focus of Matthew upon our sins. Remember back in Matthew 1: 21, it was Jesus, who would come to save His people from their sins. In chapter 3, they began this process through their confession of their sins. The glorious news of the gospel of Christ is simply this. We don't reform our ways to make ourselves acceptable to God. We confess our ways to Him, who can make us acceptable to God. That's what these people from Jerusalem, Judea, and the regions surrounding the Jordan were doing. They were confessing their sins and crying to God for mercy. Their baptism was nothing more and nothing less than a sign of their repentance.

Sure, there is great imagery. When the one being baptized confesses his sins and subsequently is "cleansed" by the water. But, the baptism of John works no mystical magic. It doesn't insure your salvation. It doesn't wash away your sins. It doesn't make you a new creation. It doesn't make you a member of some covenant. This baptism is simply a sign. It is **an outward expression of an inward reality**. With the heart, there is genuine contrition and emptiness and lowliness. With the baptism, there is a symbol to express the reality.

Christian baptism is modeled after John's baptism and is essentially no different. We baptize those who confess their sins and profess their trust in Jesus to forgive them of all unrighteousness. Christian baptism does nothing more than symbolize the spiritual cleansing that has taken place, ... which is precisely why John rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees who came for baptism.

The crowds may have responded properly to John's message, but **the religious leaders responded improperly**. Look at verses 7-8, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance."

John preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). He said, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (Matt. 3:11). But these religious leaders demonstrated no repentance. Thus, John said, "with no repentance comes no baptism."

How did John know that they didn't have repentance? Look at verse 8. John rebuked them saying, "Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." This means that repentance will be obviously apparent. There is such a thing as fruit of

repentance. This is why I addressed repentance being more than a simple change of mind or sorrow for sin. The fruit of repentance is simply the natural outworking of one's sorrow for sin.

John looked at the lives of these religious leaders and saw nothing that would demonstrate such a sorrow for sin. He rebuked them strongly for this! He said, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (verse 7). "You are venomous snakes. Like the most despised and despicable of animals, you are." John stands in the line of the prophets who spoke similarly (see Isaiah 59:5). Jesus would later say the same thing (Matt. 12:34; 23:33). This is a strong indictment against these religious leaders.

So, you ask, what are fruits of repentance? Let me simply list some. As I list them, I ask you to examine your heart and see if these are true of you or not.

1. Do you declare God to be just in your own condemnation?

> In other words, do you think that you deserve to be condemned apart from God's gracious dealings or do you think that you can stand before God on your own merits?
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> The Pharisees were known for their self-righteous religion. Jesus constantly called them hypocrites who "outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly ... are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matt. 23: 28). This was one of the qualities that they lacked -- an utter brokenness before God. They would disagree with God's condemnation of them, because they thought themselves to be so religious, rather than broken over their sin.
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> Perhaps the most famous depiction of them is in Luke 18, "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to life up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me, the sinner" (Luke 18:11-13). But the genuinely repentant is the one who willfully admits his own sin and utter lostness before God. Apart from Jesus Christ, the genuinely repentant one knows that God would be absolutely just in sending him to hell forever!

So, when someone would come and say to you, "You are good enough to get into God's kingdom on your own. You practice great religion." Do you say, "Oh, no, no, you are quite wrong. I am not good enough. God deserves to cast me forth from His kingdom. Oh, but for the grace of the cross of my Lord, Jesus Christ, I would be in hell. It is only His merit that I claim."?

2. Do you confess your sin in general and in particular?

The repentant one is the one who says, "wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 8:24), and "there is no good that dwells in me" (cf. Rom. 3:10-12). "I am a sinner!"

But the repentant one goes further. He says, "I acknowledge my sin to Thee, and my iniquity I did not hide; ... I will confess my transgressions [i.e. specific sins] to the LORD" (Ps. 32:5). When Zaccheus was converted, he said, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much" (Luke 19:8). He confessed specific sins.

There are millions in America today that have gone to church and confessed that they were sinners (that confession is imbedded within the liturgy of many churches). Yet, those who are truly repentant, will show the fruit of confessing their particular sins to God and to others.

Again, the Pharisees never did this, which demonstrated no fruit of repentance. They thought themselves to be righteous and had little need for confessing their particular sins (which were few, or none).

In the previous two questions, I looked to the lives of the religious leaders, for the next two questions, I look to what the scriptures declare concerning, "fruit."

3. Do you see the fruit of the Spirit in your life or do you see the deeds of the flesh? (Gal. 6:19-23).

Paul spoke of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. The fruit of repentance is similar. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 6:22-23).

The fruit of repentance is ...

Demonstrating **love** to others.
Having a **joyful** countenance.
Being at **peace** with each other
Having **patience** with others.
Demonstrating **kindness** to others.
Seeking the **goodness** to others.
Being **faithful** to others.
Demonstrating **gentleness** to others.
Having **self-control** in all things.

Are these traits manifest in your life or are the deeds of the flesh evident in your life, which are, "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (Gal. 6:19-21).

Notice how these are often depicted in opposing parties having dis-harmony in their relationships. When examining such qualities, I ask you simply to look at your relationships with others. Are you known for disputes? Or are you known for peace? Are you known for outbursts of anger? Or are you known for self-control?

The one who knows and understand his sin, clearly acknowledges that he has no rights to demand anything from others. He has transgressed, and has been forgiven. Such a one will be forgiving and seek the fruit of the spirit in his relationships.

4. Do you see God transforming you more and more into the image of His Son?

Those who are truly repentant are new creatures, with holy desires to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Jerry Bridges said it succinctly, "True salvation brings with it a desire to be made holy" (The Pursuit of Holiness, p. 38). Peter said, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24).

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. ... By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:5,8). When the branches bear fruit, they are part of the vine.

Peter said, "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior" (1 Peter. 1:15). The truly repentant will see God at work in transforming their lives. The gospel of Jesus Christ isn't a message concerning the forgiveness of sins only, it is a message of grace that will transform us into the image of His Son.

Paul says that a Christian is under obligation, "not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh -- for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:12-13). Paul further said, "Jesus died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:15).

I close with this.....

If you heard John the Baptist preach, who would you be like? Would you be like those in Jerusalem, Judea, and the regions surrounding the Jordan, who eagerly confessed their need of forgiveness? Or, would you be like the Pharisees and Sadducees, who thought they needed no repentance? Careful how you respond. We stand in danger at Rock Valley Bible Church of being like the religious leaders of Jesus' day. We have our theology all wrapped up in nice containers. We read our Bibles and know them. But are you really repentant for your sin?

Much has been spoken and written about the tragic events that occurred on September 11, 2001. I believe that your response was a great indicator of where you are with regard to your sin (and that of our nation). Did you point your finger at others and say, "God allowed this whole thing to happen because of their sin!"? Did you think in your heart, "I'm righteous! God wouldn't allow this to happen because of my sin."? Or, were you humbled and repentant over your own sin and the sins of our nation. Listen to Daniel's humble, repentant cry, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep his commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled, even turning aside from Thy commandments and

ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Thy servants the prophets, who spoke in Thy name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land. Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are far away in all the countries to which Thou hast driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against Thee. Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee. To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him" (Daniel 9:4-9).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 13, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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