

## 21.1.24 am

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Date: 21 January 2024

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning everyone, a warm welcome to the service today and any who are visiting, I saw at least one on the way in, you're very welcome. If you're able to stay behind for tea and coffee please do so. And those who might have been away for a wee while and are back, it's good to see them here this morning as well. The intimations have been on the screen before the service, I'm not going to go through all these intimations. There are sheets at the door, there's about 20 or 30 of these printed sheets at the door so if you want a copy of the intimations just pick them up on the way out. I'll highlight just the unusual things. Item 10, women for admission, that's this coming Thursday at half past seven, needle felting with margarita, refreshments and bringing by table, all ladies most welcome.

Is that here in the church? Here in the church. The service is next Sunday, just a reminder that morning service taken by myself, Gaelic, will be the evening service and then we'll have a fellowship in the evening at half past seven after that. And a reminder also the Island Study Conference, 2nd to the 4th of February, lectures will be here and there's no booking required for the lectures and there are those who are residents in the hotel also. So these I think are all the notices that I need to highlight just now. So let's begin this time of worship, let's sing to God's praise and we'll sing a paraphrase of one of the Psalms.

We don't have it in the books but the words are on the screen there, bless the Lord, oh my soul. We don't have it in the books but the words are on the screen there, bless the Lord, oh my soul.

We don't have it in the books but the words are on the screen there, bless the Lord, oh my soul.

Lord, oh my soul, oh my soul, worship this holy name.

Same like never before, oh my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

[ 2 : 2 0 ] The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning. It's time to sing your song again.

Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me, let me be singing when the evening comes.

It's the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship this holy name.

Sing like never before, O my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

You're rich in love, I give souls to hunger. Your name is great and your heart is bright.

[ 3 : 2 0 ] For all your goodness I will keep on singing. Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, worship this holy name. Sing like never before, O my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

And on the day when my strength is failing, the end draws near and my time has gone, still my soul, still my soul, Ten thousand years will be forever more.

Blessed are you, O my soul, I'll worship your holy name. I'll worship your holy name.

Sing like never before, O my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

[ 4 : 4 0 ] I'll worship your holy name. Let's unite our hearts in prayer now.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, your day, and we thank you for the opportunity and the desire that you've given us to come into this place, into the house of God.

And we thank you that you've given us the promise that as we come that you will meet with us, even two or three meeting together in the name of Jesus.

And we have the promise that you will be amongst us. And we pray, Lord, that we would know that, that we would experience that, something of the presence of God, the stillness that comes over us when we are in your presence.

We ask, Lord, that on the Lord's day, that you would enable us to be in the spirit, to be those whose hearts are tuned to worship you. And, Lord, as we have sang, we would pray, saying that you are worthy of our worship.

[ 5 : 53 ] You are worthy of all praise. We thank you that you are the God whose name is to be lifted up and to be blessed because you are the God who loves to bless us as your people.

And we thank you for the gift of today and for each day that as the sun comes up or as the light breaks in, we are able to praise your name. We acknowledge, Lord, that you are the God who gives life, who gives us physical life.

Every breath that we take is a breath that is gifted to us from you. And we thank you that you are also the God who gifts us with spiritual, with eternal life, just as we are given physical life and birth. We thank you that in the gospel there is the offer of eternal life, there is the offer of new birth in and through Jesus. We thank you for the words that were spoken to Nicodemus all these years ago, words that still are spoken to us today, that Jesus says to us, you must be born again.

And Lord, we pray that you would do that work of new life in our hearts. We thank you that when the Holy Spirit is at work within us, there is an awakening within our souls.

[ 7 : 14 ] There is a sense of the fact that we are sinners, that we are not what we should be, that we are imperfect, that our souls and our thoughts and our actions are stained with all kinds of sin, pride and greed and self.

We confess that, Lord. And we thank you that we have the promise that when we confess our sin, you are faithful and just and you will forgive us, that you will purify us.

We thank you that when we repent, when we turn from sin, and when we turn in faith to Jesus, the one whom the Holy Spirit leads us to, we have the promise that there is everlasting life.

Just as we think all the way back to the wilderness, where those who were ill looked up to the pole and saw the image there and were healed, we thank you that we are promised that as Jesus is lifted up, and as we look in faith to him, we are given the gift of eternal life.

So we ask, Lord, that you would be at work amongst us this morning, moving in the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray for anybody here this morning that hasn't yet received salvation.

[ 8 : 30 ] We pray for anybody yet who may not yet see their need of a saviour. We ask, Lord, that you would do in them what our words cannot do, that you would move in these hearts, Lord, that you would open them to the gospel message.

And we thank you for all that has been done to make salvation a free gift for us. We thank you that Jesus took the punishment for our sin. We thank you that Jesus lived the perfect life that we could not live.

We thank you that Jesus came into this world to be the saviour. And we ask, Lord, that we would come to him as we hear the call in the gospel, come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

So we pray that we would know that rest, that rest that begins in time, and that rest that is eternal for all those who are in Christ. We thank you for gospel hope.

Even as we continue to feel a sense of grief and loss, we are always aware of those who are struggling with grief. And as we think back a year, we remember Marlene's passing, and as we think back two years, we remember Aina's passing.

[ 9 : 46 ] And we pray for all those who are grieving, for John and for Angus Alec, and for all of the families, and us as a church family as well, as we continue to be aware, and as we continue to feel sorrow for those who are taken from us, we pray that you, the God of all comfort, that you would minister to us and the power of the Holy Spirit, that you would give that peace and that sense of encouragement that is not of this world.

We pray for those who are sick, those who would desire to be with us this morning, but who are struggling in different ways, those who are struggling with flus, those who are struggling with recovering from procedures and hospital.

We ask, Lord, that you would minister to them where they are. We pray for those who are housebound and have been now for years, those whom we see in our mind's eye and those whom we miss.

We pray for those in Harris House, those in Leverborough. And we ask, Lord, that you would bless them in their homes as they watch at a distance. We pray that you would bless them and that you would encourage them, that you would minister to them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you for answered prayer. We continue to thank you for Shona and for Nurse Margaret and for the recoveries that they're making. And we ask that you would protect them, especially over this season where there's so many things going about.

[ 11 : 20 ] We ask, Lord, that you would increase their strength and, Lord, that you would bless them and their families at this time. We pray for us as a nation. We have been taught to pray for those in authority over us.

And although often we don't agree with the approaches they take, we acknowledge that you are the God who is sovereign, the one who allows people to be in positions. And we pray, Lord, that you would draw us as a nation back to yourself and for those in authority, Lord, that they would look to you.

And we pray for a world that is broken, a world that is in so much turmoil. A world that is plagued by wars and rumours of war. And we ask, Lord, that you would be near to those who are struggling. As we think of war-torn lands, we pray for those who suffer in these places. We pray for peace. And as we think of brothers and sisters whom we have never met in parts of the world where it's an offence and where it is life-threatening to speak the name Jesus, we ask that you would encourage them, that you would protect them, and that you would bless them as they meet in secret. Help us, Lord, not to take for granted the freedom that we have and help us to go out with courage to tell other people about the Saviour, the one who gives us hope.

[ 12 : 47 ] So hear our prayers. Take away our sin. Lead us and guide us by the Holy Spirit. And we ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Boys and girls, would you like to come out, please?

Good to see you all this morning.

Missed some of you last week. It was very quiet here last week. Finley spoke, but it was very quiet. So it's good to see, good to see everybody back, all these voices back this week.

Now, I have got something to show you. It'll be on the screen in just a minute, but I'll first of all just show you in real life.

This here. What's that? It's a shirt. What colour is it? White. You sure about that? I thought my shirt was white too.

[ 13 : 57 ] But who said cream? As usual, you're getting ahead of me. Let's get the pictures up on the screen.

So I thought this shirt was white. It's not an old shirt. It's not been, it's been washed every time I've worn it, every time I've preached. I've washed it that night or the night after or whatever.

It's always been washed. And I thought this shirt was white. Then what happened this week past? Snow. Snow. More snow than we've seen for years. And the snow came down and everything that looked quite grubby around our houses, it just was white.

Everything looked beautiful, didn't it? Did you enjoy the snow? Yeah. I bet you did. And the wash had been on and you know how when you've had your wash on the line, it just smells a bit better and it just feels a bit better.

So yeah, you know what I'm talking about, Henry, yeah. And so we thought, we'll just put a few bits out on the line, just for a few minutes. So I put the white shirt on and when I put the white shirt on the line and looked out the window and the white shirt against the snow, which is whiter?

[ 15 : 15 ] The snow. The snow. I think there's another picture too, isn't there? So I put it down on the ground and look how grubby the white shirt looks.

Compared to the white snow. And see if there was sunshine. It would look even grubbier still because the sunshine just makes the snow just dazzling bright. And you can't even look at it properly.

You need sunglasses to look at the snow when it's dazzling white. So my white shirt, I thought it was white, but no matter how many times I wash this shirt, even if I put it in a super hot wash and even if I put it in lots of bleach, it'll never be as white as the snow.

Here's a wee story. You know where this is going. We'll see. Where are we going, Michael?

Where's the next passage we're going?

Pardon? Henry, where are we going now? Is it about the sin? Is it about the transfiguration? So what's that all about?

[ 16 : 24 ] Sin? No. One day, long ago, Jesus took Peter and James and John up a mountain, up a hill.

And they, on that hill, they got a glimpse of what Jesus is like today. And this is what it says in Mark chapter 9 and verse 3.

It says, His clothes, that's Jesus' clothes, became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.

So Jesus, in these few moments on that mountain, it's as if he gave the disciples a glimpse of how glorious, how amazing, how pure, how bright he is.

And the question I want to ask is how can we become as white, as pure, as Jesus?

[ 17 : 43 ] How can we become as white as Jesus? How can we become as dazzling, pure, white? How can we become like Jesus? Do we need to read, let's say, 17 chapters of the Bible a day?

If we read 17 chapters of the Bible every day, will we become as white and perfect as Jesus? No. If we go every single week to the Sunday morning service and the Sunday evening service and even the prayer meeting, will we become as white as Jesus?

If we try and do every good work that we can possibly think of, if we make sure that we do all our homework on time every week, and if we look around at some of the old people's gardens and think, well, I could weed that garden and I could help all the old ladies and men across the road, if we try and do every good thing, keep our rooms tidy, wash the dishes, and we do that every day from now on till the end of our lives, will we be as white as Jesus?

No. Because even the best of our good things that we do, it's stained by sin, like Henry was saying just a minute ago.

So what can take away our sin and make our hearts and make us as white as Jesus, as white as snow? Who can make us as white as snow?

[ 19 : 16 ] God can. What then, if we think of a bit more detail, what can make our hearts as white as snow? As white as Jesus?

Jesus' love. Jesus' love. But even more detailed than that? Shawnee? Believing in Jesus and even more detailed than that?

Lois? Asking him to take away our sins. And how can Jesus take away our sins? What did he have to do to take away our sins?

Pardon? That's what we have to do. What did Jesus have to do to take away our sins? What did Jesus have to do? He had to die. And what could people see at the cross when Jesus died?

His blood. Blood. So when we have communion, we remember the body of Jesus, the bread, and the blood of Jesus, the wine. So what can wash away our sin?

[ 20 : 24 ] Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make us white, pure again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. So we're going to sing about that in just a minute.

But before we sing, let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you do love us. And we thank you that you loved us enough to come into this world and to live for us and to die on the cross for us.

And we thank you that when we pray, asking you to take our sin away, your blood is able to take away our sin. Even as it says in Isaiah, way in the Old Testament, even though our sin is like scarlet, like a scarlet stain, you are able to make us as white as snow.

And we just have to ask you for that. We just have to believe. And so we pray that you would wash our hearts. We pray, Lord, that you would make us clean. We pray that you would save us.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing now. And the words are again on the screen. They're not in the book. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

[ 21 : 36 ] What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

O precious is the throne that makes me white as stone. No other fount I know.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

[ 22 : 53 ] No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Nothing can for sin atone.

nothing but the blood of Jesus. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. God of good that I have done.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my hope and peace.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my righteousness. Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

[ 23 : 59 ] O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow. O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

And we'll read now from Matthew chapter 3. And we'll read the first 12 verses of the chapter. Matthew chapter 3.

And reading from verse 1 to verse 12. This is God's word. In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea.

[ 25 : 30 ] Repent for the kingdom of heaven 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 for the Lord of the Lord.

Make his path straight. Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt round 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 to him.

And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 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 free 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 the axe 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. I baptize you with water for repentance.

[ 26 : 42 ] 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. Amen.

And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We're going to sing again now to God's praise. We'll sing from the Psalm 51.

Psalm 51. And we'll sing verses 6 and 7 in Gaelic. I'll read the verses in English. Behold thou in the inward parts with truth delighted art.

And wisdom thou shalt make me know within the hidden part. Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me, I shall be cleansed so. Ye wash thou me, and then I shall be whiter than the snow.

[ 27 : 43 ] We'll sing these two verses in Gaelic. And we remain seated to sing in Gaelic. And we're singing in Gaelic.

And we're singing in Gaelic. And we're singing in Gaelic. And we're singing in Gaelic. NINGNING  
CHOIR SINGS

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Well, as we turn back to the passage, let's pray.

Lord God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this passage where we see this character, John the Baptist, and we hear the message that comes through him.

[ 31 : 12 ] We ask, Lord, that as we, many years after the time of his preaching, listen to the message, we pray that you would still speak into our hearts, that you would help us to see John in order that we would be enabled to see Jesus.

We pray that you would minister to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, that he who guided the hand of Matthew would be our teacher, and would gather our thoughts and stir our hearts, that we may be in worship and that we may be faithful in our responses to your word.

So help us, Lord, we pray. Help the children as well. We continue to pray for them and ask, Lord, that as they hear these messages, that they would believe, that they would grow up knowing and trusting that Jesus is the Savior and that you are the God who is their creator, the one who knows them, the one who loves them, the one whom they have been made to be in relationship with.

And we pray even for the tiny wee ones in the creche. Although they don't have the capacity to be able to take in the Bible stories, we pray that as they come into this building, that they would know the love of God for them and that they would be drawn to Jesus from their earliest years.

And even those who are within the womb at this time, we pray for them, for your protection over them and the mums. And Lord, that they too would be not hindered, but drawn to Jesus.

[ 32 : 54 ] So hear our prayers and help us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I was about to take off my jacket, but I'm a bit self-conscious about my shirt now.

If you've got Matthew open in front of you, please, that would be helpful. And just as we pick up the passage and as we leaf through these pages of Scripture, it's important for us just to remember what it is that we're reading.

Because whatever we pick up, when we pick up a document to read it, we need to know what we're reading because it affects the way that we do read it.

Most of us will have picked up a newspaper at some point yesterday. And when you pick up a newspaper, we tend to flick through it. And we see what catches our eye.

We see what we have an interest in. We don't read it all. We might read 30% or 40% of it. We just read what we're interested in. When you pick up a bank statement, that's a different kind of reading.

[ 34 : 07 ] We study it. We make sure that the statement is accurate. We want to check to make sure that the transactions that are on the statement are transactions that we recognize.

We want to have some confidence that the balance at the bottom of the page is accurate. It's accurate. Or if we pick up a map, we tend to just, we don't do this so much now.

We're picking up maps on our phones. But we don't look at the whole map as such. We zoom into the area that we have an interest in. And we'll try to navigate our way from the place that we're in to the place that we want to be in.

So there's different ways that we read a document. It's important that we recognize what we're reading. So what are we reading here? Well, the book of Matthew is a gospel.

It's the gospel according to Matthew. And the word gospel simply means good news. And this is the good news, not general good news, not good news about Matthew.

[ 35 : 11 ] This is the good news about Jesus. And so in the first couple of chapters that we spent some time looking at over the Christmas period, we've read about the birth of Jesus.

And last week, we thought a little about the troubled early years that Jesus and Joseph and Mary experienced in Egypt. And now we're coming to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

And John, John the Baptist, as we know him, he's sent to prepare the way for Jesus. So today, I want to look at John and to listen to his message.

And the first thing that we see in respect of John is that John is called. So the first point is the calling of John. Look at verses 1 and 2.

In those days, it says, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Repent. The best translation there probably is be converted.

[ 36 : 19 ] Be converted. Repent, it certainly has the negative. To repent literally means to turn away. To turn around.

But it doesn't quite capture what John is saying. It's got the negative. The best translation is be converted. Turn from sin.

Turn to Jesus. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. So that's what John is doing. He's preaching. And why is John preaching?

And the reason John is preaching is because he was called to preach. Now, this isn't as easy to grasp if we just focused on Matthew.

Because in Matthew's gospel, John just appears. We're not really given the background. But in Luke chapter 1, we're given the background. Luke, remember, is a doctor.

[ 37 : 17 ] He's a man of detail. And so Luke gives us a little of the background of how John appeared and the birth narrative. We're told that John was given a special calling.

Luke records a calling to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. So John is called. He has a specific job to do.

He has a work to do. And that calling of John, it doesn't just go back to Luke chapter 1. It goes all the way back hundreds of years to Isaiah. Isaiah 40. Because that's what Matthew's quoting from in these verses.

In verse 3. Because Matthew, as he speaks of John the Baptist, he quotes from Isaiah 40. And he says, 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. So the point that Matthew is making is that John didn't just decide to become a preacher.

[ 38 : 29 ] It's not that John was terrible at practical things. It's not that John wasn't a learned academic and he couldn't get on in the universities of his land.

John isn't a preacher because he went to a careers advisor talk or filled out one of these forms and it said preacher. John was called by God.

And I wonder this morning, if someone here, I wonder if someone here is being called by God.

Scotland is now, in terms of missionary publications, Scotland is now classified. The attendance of church and the knowledge of the Bible is so low.

Scotland is now classified as an unreached nation. I don't know if you knew that. Scotland is considered in the world context as being a place that is dark to the gospel.

[ 39 : 46 ] Most people in Scotland don't know about Jesus. And if you've moved about in the country and if you've worked in different places, you'll know that.

People don't know about Jesus. People don't know about the message of the gospel. And so I'm wondering, in light of this passage, is the Lord calling someone here to go and preach?

To preach the light of the gospel in a dark nation? And if someone is being called to preach, heed that call.

Respond to that call. John was called by God to preach. Maybe somebody here is wrestling with a particular call to go and preach.

But in a sense, every Christian is called to go and do what John did. Every person who is a Christian is called to go and tell people about Jesus.

[ 40 : 58 ] And that can happen at Sunday school. It's happening right now. It can happen at Jam and Connect and Rooted, all of which places are looking for more workers. It can happen in our homes.

As we open the Bible and we lead family worship. It can happen at our works. As we pray for the people that we work with.

As we speak to God about them. And then we speak to them about God. It can happen when we play badminton on a Tuesday and a Thursday night. There's people there who don't know about Jesus.

It can happen at the distillery or in the hospital or the classroom or whatever it is. There's people who don't know about Jesus. It can happen at the shop. In these conversations, when we pick up a can of green beans, it can happen at the flank.

Every one of us is called in the gospel to come to know Jesus. That's the call of Jesus.

[ 42 : 05 ] That's the call of Jesus to us. Jesus says, come to me, believe in me, be saved. And for those who know Jesus, for those who have responded to that call, our calling is now to go and make him known.

As John did. Have you got an opportunity to make Jesus known? Have you got an opportunity to speak about Jesus?

Have you got an opportunity to talk, to preach? John teaches us to take it. Remember in the scene, very sternly scene to me in the past, I think I've been asked to do a talk at a YF for a prayer meeting or something, and I wasn't keen.

And as I kind of resisted it a bit, he said to me very sternly, you need to have a very good reason to say no to an opportunity to share the gospel message.

So go and think about that and come back to me. It didn't take me long to come back. The calling of John is the first point.

[ 43 : 16 ] He is called to preach. The second thing we see here is the character of John. And that takes us into verse 4.

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. There's two things about John's character, his life.

We can note the simplicity of it, and we can note the humility of the man. First of all, John, in terms of his character, look at the simplicity of the way that he lived.

John isn't dressed in luxury fabrics. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, the religious leaders, they were. They were wearing the designer labels. They had the fine cloth.

John isn't dressed in any of these things. He wore a garment of camel's hair. Don't know what that would feel like. I remember as a wee boy in primary school, I'd been given gifts for my granny and Ness of a bobbin jumper.

[ 44 : 20 ] Scratchy, itchy, hard bobbin jumper. And I would be pulled over my head and I'd be sent out to school wearing a bobbin jumper. And I'd be scratching all day long.

I think a garment of camel's hair was probably harder to wear than a bobbin jumper. And he's wearing a leather belt around his waist. So it's functional clothes.

It's not stylish clothes. It's practical clothes for being out in a desert wilderness. It's also like a prophet's uniform because John is the last of the Old Testament prophets. And John is wearing the kind of clothes that Elijah wore.

So there's a kind of Old Testament drama about the way John looked. There's no style, there's no comfort, but he's identifiable as a prophet because he's wearing a prophet's uniform.

And John doesn't seem to be into fine dining because his food is locusts and wild honey. That was a prophet's diet. That's what Elijah would have eaten all these years before.

[ 45 : 23 ] That's what's available on the shelves of the grocery store in the desert. There's nothing much else available. And John is an elite pastor in a trendy megachurch.

He ministered, verse 1, in the wilderness of Judea. He's out in the sticks. So nobody could say to John, John, you're just in it for the money.

John, you just want the status. You just want the perks. because there were none. John lived a simple, God-focused life.

And I think John is a great example for us to follow. John is a challenge to the way that we live.

Our lives are very complicated. Our lives perhaps are overcomplicated. John's life is not. He knows who he is.

[ 46 : 29 ] He knows what he's called to do. And he just gets on and he does it. Jesus says in Matthew, chapter 6, in verse 25, Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body what you shall put on.

John is a great example of somebody who lived that out. So there's a simplicity about John's life, his lifestyle, his clothes, his diet.

And then there's a humility about John in terms of his character also, his personality, because from the beginning John's life and his calling, it was not about him. It was all about Jesus.

John's ministry was a preparatory ministry. You know, when there's a concert, when there's a festival, you tend to get the warm-up acts and then there's the headlining act.

The warm-up acts are on and nobody's paying much attention because they're not the focal point.

The headliners are what the people are out there for. John, in that context, John was never going to be a headlining act.

[ 47 : 46 ] John would never get to say, look at me. John would never say, I want my 15 minutes of fame. I remember watching, I think it was The X Factor one night and there was a girl who came on to sing and when they were given the introduction, they asked her who she was and where she was from and all that kind of thing.

She said, I spent the last 10 years singing as a backing singer for, I don't know who it was, Tina Turner or some big name like that. But she said, now I want my 15 minutes of fame.

I don't want to be in the background anymore. I want to have my name in lights. I want to be at the forefront. I want the spotlight on me. That wasn't John.

John would always be pointing away from himself and to Jesus and John was absolutely fine with that. That was his calling. So he preached in verse 3, prepare the way for the Lord.

He preaches, make the path straight, clear the way for King Jesus. He preaches not himself, but he preaches verse 11, he who is coming after me.

[ 49 : 12 ] He's saying, don't look at me. There's one that's coming. So listen up and look out for him because he's the one you need. So there's a humility that marks John's lifestyle and his ministry.

And again, this is so counter-cultural. This is so unlike our age. John would not be taking selfies.

John would not be setting up an Instagram where he would tell the world about himself.

John is taken up with pointing to Jesus. And John's humble life is an example for us to follow.

We are to be less about self. We are to be more about Jesus. And the strange paradox of it all is a life that is all about drawing attention to oneself is a miserable life.

But a life where we forget ourselves and we look to Jesus and we point to Jesus, that's a joyful life.

Tim Keller wrote a book, a wee book, I think it was called something like The Freedom of Self Forgetfulness.

[ 50 : 38 ] And John could have written that book long before Ken. So there's the character of John, there's the calling of John. The third thing here is the compassion of John. Verse five, Now, there's a preview of the ministry of Jesus here.

As we look at John, John has crowds of people. In verse five, all Judea and the region about the Jordan were going out to him. Just the way that all the crowds were going out to Jesus. And we can imagine John not getting two seconds peace. But just like Jesus, John didn't drive the crowds away. I think John was probably the kind of guy who liked his own company. We can't be sure about that. It was something slightly austere with the way he preached and the way he lived. He strikes me as somebody who probably would have liked a bit of peace and quiet, but he doesn't get it.

But such is the compassion of John. Like Jesus, he received the crowds. And like Jesus, John, he called the crowds verse to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[ 52 : 09 ] That was the message. He says, repent, turn away from sin, turn towards the one who is coming. man. And the people, they did repent.

They were, verse 5, confessing their sins, and verse 6, they were baptized. And so as John receives these crowds, and as he preaches, and as he baptizes them, as he encourages them to confess their sins and be baptized, he shows the compassion of Jesus.

Now, as we apply this to ourselves for a moment, you know the most compassionate thing that you and I can do? It's to share with people the need to repent.

The most compassionate thing you and I can do is to tell people in love that there is a need for us to confess our sin and to believe in Jesus.

It's a good thing to make a lasagna for somebody who's struggling. If you've got enough strength to help somebody dig up their garden when they're not able to do so themselves, that's a good thing to do.

[ 53 : 33 ] That's driven by compassion. But the most compassionate thing we can do today is to tell people the need to repent and the need to turn to Jesus.

Because we're only here for a short while and then there's eternity. And if the people around us don't know that they need to repent and to believe, how will they ever find out if we don't tell them? people don't understand today the bad news about sin.

People don't know the good news about Jesus who came to save us from our sin. So if we have compassion like John did, we will tell people the compassion of John.

Fourthly, the courage of John. Verse 7 is where we're getting to here. Some of you might have seen it flicks by my Facebook feed from time to time, but there's a slot that's given at the Scottish Parliament.

[ 54 : 59 ] I think it's called time for reflection. I think it's a weekly thing, I'm not sure, but at some particular intervals, faith leaders in Scotland are invited to come and give a time for reflection.

It's three or four minutes where they're invited to say something meaningful before the business of the day starts. And so all the most important politicians of the country are there.

And it's televised and it's live streamed and all that stuff. So if you're invited to go and speak at the Parliament at a time for reflection, what do you say?

Well, there are some exceptions to this. Bob Aykroyd gave a good, strong message two or three weeks back, which I happened to see. But most people that I've listened to, when they are given the opportunity to give a time for reflection, they go super gently.

They're very, very, very cautious. They're very fearful that they might offend the people in front of them, so they don't say very much.

[ 56 : 12 ] It's a nice message that doesn't really say very much. Now, what would John say if John was given an opportunity to speak at a time for reflection?

Well, we get an answer, actually, to what John would say in verses 7 to 10. Verse 7, when he, John, saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees, these were the religious leaders, but they were also political giants.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, you brood of vipers, you bunch of snakes, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

What are you doing here? I'd love to have seen their faces. I don't think that's the introduction that they were expecting. I don't think that's what these VIPs were anticipating.

I mean, these were religious people, they were very powerful people, they thought because of their background as Jews, they thought because they were serious religious people that they were fine. [ 57 : 31 ] They thought that if anybody deserved God's approval, it was them. So if John is speaking on behalf of God, they're expecting to get a big thumbs up.

They're expecting to be told, come on in and sit down, take the top seats. We're glad you're here. But that's not what John did.

John preached that religion was not enough. John preached that repentance was needed. John preached that they needed to turn from their respectable religious sins and confess them. and because John knew that these men who were coming in force were proud men with hard hearts, he preached this message of repentance with more force towards them than he did with the crowds. And John also preaches that there is judgment for those who will not repent when he sees these religious leaders in the front row. Get what he says in verses 8-10.

[ 58 : 49 ] He says, 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 the axe 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.

And you might ask the question, how have we got from verse 3, from point 3 to point 4? Where's the compassion of John gone now? The answer is it's still there.

John is not preaching a message here because he's cruel and he wants to sting these religious leaders. John is not preaching a message here because he's frustrated and he's angry at them. He is still driven by the same love for the lost. His message is not lacking compassion. He's trying to reach them. He's trying to break through to them because he knows that they need Jesus like the crowds need Jesus but they are resistant to Jesus.

[ 60 : 08 ] So his message is full of compassion but it's high on courage. It's a high risk message. This is a message that we get John blacklisted.

this is a message that ultimately would lead to John's head being removed from his body. But John had the courage to preach it. And this is just speculation.

I don't know if this is true or not but as I was preparing I was wondering, I wonder was Nicodemus present as part of this delegation of Pharisees.

Because remember Nicodemus, he was the top man. So if there was a bunch of VIPs that would have been sent to investigate who is this man in the desert? I suspect Nicodemus was part of the crowd.

And I wonder was this courageous message part of what caused Nicodemus to realize his own need and to want to know more about Jesus.

[ 61 : 23 ] I don't know. But what we do know is that John had courage. He had compassion and he had courage.

And Christians today, we need to have courage. it takes courage to speak about sin. It takes courage to hold up the Bible and say this is God's word and it is not to be changed, it's not to be edited, it's not to be removed, it's not to be revised.

That will take courage for you to say that in your classroom, in your medical ward, wherever it is that the Lord has placed you. It takes courage today to tell people that we need to repent.

We need to believe in Jesus. It takes courage to tell people that Jesus is the only way. There's no other way, there's no other religion, there's no other route to heaven, except through Jesus.

God's word and that's not popular, but that's the truth and it will take courage for you and I to share that.

[ 62 : 49 ] The last thing here is the Christ-exalting ministry of John, which really just summarizes everything about the man and the ministry. The Christ-exalting ministry of John.

Now, whenever we look at John, whatever we go with John, whatever day we catch him on, whatever sermon we download of John, the Baptist, it's full of Christ.

So what does John say about Jesus just as we conclude here in these final verses? Well, he says three things very briefly. He says, first of all, that Jesus, he is mighty God.

So point A, Jesus, he is mighty God. I baptize you, verse 11, says John, 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. And so already John is preached in verse 2 that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[ 64 : 04 ] Already John has said to them in verse 2, the king is coming. To preach is the herald. To preach is not to have a conversation, it's to make a proclamation, just as the royal herald would proclaim to the villages as the king was approaching, the king is coming.

John proclaims that the king of kings, mighty God, he is coming. John is telling the people that this Jesus, he is not just another prophet in a string of prophets, he's not an interesting philosopher, he's not another religious teacher that you can stick on the shelf of your religious bookshop. He's telling the people that this one who is coming, he is mighty, he is king, he is God, the son, he is worthy of worship.

The second thing that John says about Jesus is that he is his savior. Verse 12, his winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn.

So John uses a picture, one commentator says the picture is of wheat thrown into the air by the winnowing fork.

[ 65 : 34 ] The heavier grain falls to the ground and is collected while the lighter chaff is blown away, swept up and burnt. So it's a picture that John uses and it's a picture that the people in that day, they understood, they understood the message.

It wasn't hard for them to grasp it. So what is John saying? Well he's saying that those who repent, those who confess sin, they'll be gathered up by Jesus.

The savior will gather these people up who have repented, who have confessed their sin. He will gather them up in his saving arms. There is a barn, says John, there is a heavenly barn where there is eternal security for those who have Jesus as savior.

J.C. Ryle says John taught that there was a barn for all who are Christ's wheat and they would be gathered together there in the day of his appearing.

And Ryle, the pastor, says this again is a teaching which human nature greatly requires. The best of believers need much encouragement. They are yet in the body.

[ 66 : 47 ] They live in a wicked world. They are often tempted by the devil. They ought to be reminded that Jesus will never leave them. Can you hear that?

Jesus, the savior, the mighty God, he will never leave his people. Those who have confessed their sin, those who have repented, he will never leave them. He will never forsake them, says Ryle. He will guide them safely through this life and at length give them eternal glory. They shall be hidden. They shall be in the barn. in the day of wrath.

So John is lifting up Jesus. He says he is mighty God. He is savior. And finally, he is judge. Verse 12, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

I don't like to finish on a negative in a sermon. But on this occasion, John did. So I follow the text.

[ 68 : 02 ] I suppose the last thing that we hear tends to stick with us.

And so John finishes his message with a word of warning. And again, this is a warning, it's a message that is driven by compassion, not cruelty.

unity. And John says, there is a heaven to be gained, there is a barn, for those who have Christ as savior.

And there is a hell to be shunned. There is an unquenchable fire for those who want to go it alone. And the way to avoid hell, and the way to get to heaven, is simply to repent of our sin, and to turn in faith to Jesus.

So I want to finish just by asking the question, have you done that? Have you done that? that was the question that John was finishing on that day.

[ 69 : 31 ] And that's the question that sits with us as we finish on this day. All of us are sinners. But have you repented of your sin?

Have you confessed your sin? Have you turned in faith to Jesus? ask the mighty God to be your savior, and not your judge.

And if you've never done it, will you do it now? He is calling, but will you come to him?

let's sing in response to that call of the gospel. Verse hymn 683, I hear thy welcome voice that calls me Lord to thee, for cleansing in thy precious blood that flowed on Calvary.

I am coming, Lord, coming now to thee. Wash me, cleanse me in the blood that flowed on Calvary. If you sing that meaning that, then that is the song, that is the prayer of salvation.

[ 70 : 49 ] So let's sing as we conclude. I hear thy welcome voice, and calls me Lord to thee, for cleansing in thy precious blood that flowed on Calvary.

I am coming, Lord, coming now to thee. Wash me, cleanse me in the blood that flowed on Calvary. Jesus calls me on to perfect faith above, to perfect hope and peace and trust, on earth and heaven above.

I am coming, Lord, coming now to thee. Wash me, cleanse me in the blood that flowed on Calvary. It is Jesus who confirms the blessed work within, by adding grace to welcome grace, living the power of sin.

[ 72 : 50 ] I am coming, Lord, coming now to thee. Wash me, cleanse thee in the blood that flowed on Calvary.

Oh, hail atoning blood, all hail redeeming grace, all hail the lift of Christ our Lord, our strength, our righteousness.

I am coming, Lord, coming out to thee. Wash shall bless me in the blood that flowed on Calvary. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.