

THE LIFE-STYLE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist undoubtedly had a BOOMING voice, but he was also quite a sight. His whole lifestyle was one of self-denial, which portrayed the spirit of repentance that he preached.

Matthew 3:4 (NKJV)

4 Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

John was not a sophisticated man. His dress was made of rough camel's hair, and his diet was very basic. Locusts were essentially large grasshoppers eaten by the poorest of people.

He lived off the land, way out in the wilderness, away from everybody. He did not pursue the comforts of life but rather lived a separated life out in the wilderness, where his focus was uniquely on God and his special calling.

This rudimentary and austere lifestyle was characteristic of prophets in the OT (cf. Zech. 13:4). They did not live a life of self-centered comforts, but rather one of sold-out dedication to God.

Matthew 11:8–9 (NKJV)

8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?

Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

John was a rugged individual who came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” as revealed to his father Zacharias by the angel in Luke 1:17 (cf. Mk. 9:11-12; 2 Kg. 1:8; Mal. 4:5; Mt. 11:14; 17:10-12).

“Both Elijah and John had stern ministries in which austere garb and diet confirmed their message and condemned the idolatry of physical and spiritual softness.” – **D.A. Carson**

“John lived for one thing: to be a voice thundering at the conscience of his age. There was such a ring of genuineness to his voice and such evidence of sincerity in his life that people responded.” – **John Phillips**

Matthew 3:5–6 (NKJV)

5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him

6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

Many estimate that very possibly several hundred thousand people may have come out to hear John preach. For a time, it was the happening thing (cf. Jn. 5:33-35).

Remember his “keynote” message was REPENT as noted in Matthew 3:2. Repenters would confess their sins. To confess means to admit or to acknowledge. As they admitted their sins and repented (meaning had a change of mind resulting in a change of direction) then John would baptize them. Their baptism was simply identifying them as repenters who were taking John’s message to heart.

“John’s baptism was not the same as Christian baptism, for it was a religious rite signifying confession of sin and a commitment to a holy life in anticipation of the coming Messiah.” – ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

The most basic meaning of BAPTISM is that of IDENTIFICATION. In John’s baptism the people being baptized were IDENTIFYING with his call to repentance. They were openly identifying as repenters.

Christian baptism is IDENTIFICATION with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is a testimony of our faith that now identifies with Christ. Baptism doesn’t save us, but is a testimony that we have been saved by faith in Christ.