

### **Title: Courage in the Cause of the Truth**

**Big Idea:** John's call for repentance caused a lot of arguments and trouble among the religious leaders and the king. Everywhere he moved, there was a reaction and often, even violence which resulted in his being arrested, imprisoned, and finally executed. Despite this, he remained faithful to God and his calling.

#### **Introduction:**

1. John commanded all people to repent, no matter who they were. Those who were descendants of Abraham were no more privileged in the eyes of God than the stones on the ground.
2. All people, regardless of nationality religion, or social status, were to leave their selfish and sinful ways and produce results in their daily lives that would prove their repentance to be genuine.
3. Although John baptized people to show they had repented and been forgiven their past sins, his baptism gave them no power to live a pure life. It was merely a preparation for one who was far greater than John.
4. Today, we are going to study and examine John's courage in the cause of the truth and God's salvation.

#### **Text: Matthew 3:7-10**

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9And do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." I tell you that out of these stones, God can raise children for Abraham. 10The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

#### **Learning John's courage in the cause of the truth:**

##### **I. Courage Overcomes Fear. (v.7)**

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

**Sadducees were "The Righteous one group"**

**Pharisees were "the Separate one group"**

- **The Pharisees were the separatists** of their day and considered themselves much holier than the common people (Luke 18:11, 12). even wearing special garments to

distinguish themselves. Although Pharisees were in number (about 6,000 according to Josephus, Ant.)

#### **Facts about Pharisees:**

- Many of them were middle-class businessmen and some of them were also priests.
- Of all the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees were the strictest in obeying the Laws of Moses and other Jewish laws and traditions.
- They were very concerned about keeping the Jewish people separated from the influence of the Gentiles around them.
- The name Pharisees comes from the word “separate.” – they were called “Separate ones or separatists”
- The Pharisees believed in life after death; they also believed in the existence of angels and other spiritual beings.
- The Pharisees and Sadducees actively opposed Jesus and the early Christians.

#### **Facts about the Sadducees:**

- The Sadducees were a political group of Jewish priests during the time of our Lord Jesus Christ. They supported Roman rule and did not believe in the resurrection.
- Many Sadducees were wealthy, upper-class Jews who held powerful leadership positions such as chief priests and high priests.
- The duties of the Sadducees included taking care of the temple complex and priestly tasks such as offering sacrifices.
- The Sadducees and the Pharisees strongly influenced the Roman leaders to crucify Jesus.
- Jesus spoke against these two religious groups because of their selfishness and hypocrisy.
- They were like poisonous snakes that were trying to escape from a fire in the forest.

#### **John The Baptist begins to rebuke the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

##### **You Brood of vipers – You offspring of vipers.**

Brood or Offspring (a metaphor) means having a characteristic of “Vipers are a kind of dangerous snakes and represent evil. This can be stated as a separate sentence as that of “You evil poisonous snakes! Or “You are evil like poisonous snakes.”

- See Matthew 12:34, Matthew 23:33 will use the same language of the Pharisees.

#### **Who warned you to flee from the wrath that is coming?**

- John uses a question to rebuke the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were asking him to baptize them so that God would not punish them, but they did not want to stop sinning,
- You cannot flee from God's wrath like this. Or do not think that you can flee from God's wrath just because I baptize you.

## II. **Courage promotes inner change rather than outward work. (v.8)**

8Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

### **Produce fruit - Bear fruit worthy of repentance:**

- Referring to a person's actions. "Let your actions show that you have truly repented."
- It's interesting that John tells the Pharisees and Sadducees to "Produce or bear fruit in keeping with repentance" rather than simply telling them to repent.
- Meaning true repentance is changing lives not just to grief but with the result of changing oneself for God.
- John demands proof from these men of the new life before he administers baptism to them.

It was courage or a bold action for John the Baptist to challenge as unworthy the very ones who posed as lights and leaders of the Jewish people.

- The best illustration of what true repentance is from Luke 15, the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:14-20).
  - After getting his inheritance from his father, he went off to a distant country where he squandered all his wealth in wild living and then the famine came. The famine was so severe that he even wanted to eat the food he was giving the pigs. Then, he came to his senses, he decided to go back to his father. Then, he arose and went to his father.

## III. **Courage Brings Confidence in the Lord. (v.9)**

9And do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." I tell you that out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham.

- The Jews of John's Day took great pride in being children of Abraham.
- For the Jews, their descent (lineage/ancestry) from Abraham caused the Jews to believe that they were saved from God's wrath.
- And so, the Jews believed that because they have Abraham as their father, they truly believed that salvation worked in them.
- But John says, "Don't say that you are Abraham's children, for God can take these stones and turn them into children of Abraham."
  - The God who made man (Adam) out of dust could certainly make children of Abraham out of stones.

- God had taken Abraham and made the Jews from him, but HE (GOD) could have done the same thing with a bunch of rocks to become children of Abraham.
- The Pharisees and the Sadducees to whom John was speaking had a role to play in their salvation—they could not claim righteousness based on their genealogy, they need to repent from all their sins and change their lives for God.

#### IV. **Courage Delivers Results. (v.10)**

10The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit **will be cut down** and **thrown into the fire.**

Other versions v.10 Already the ax has been placed against the root of the trees. So, every tree that does not produce good fruit **is chopped down** and **thrown into the fire.**

- This metaphor means God is ready to punish sinners. This can be stated in active form.
- V.10 that God has His axe and He is ready to cut down and burn any tree that does not bear good fruit.

Let's go back to verse 7 as a result of verse 10.

#### **The wrath of God is...**

1. **Divine** - because God Himself will judge the sinners and their actions.
2. **Deserved** - because they have rejected the Lord and did not need to repent.

#### **CHALLENGE:**

1. What can we learn about John's courage as he faces the Pharisees and Sadducees who were powerful people during his time concerning baptism and repentance?
2. Repentance and change in life are always part of the result as we turn away from sin. Share something about your life experiences as you received God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness in your life.