

Sermon Discussion Guide

Encounters with Christ: John the Baptist

John 1:19-34

December 28 & 29, 2019

Part 1: Pray

Every time we study God's word, we should ask God to give us the Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts, teach us and mold us into who he created us to be. Ask God to reveal his truth to transform you through your discussion time.

Part 2: Read the Text

Read the passage(s) from the sermon, consider also going back to Luke 1:5-25 to read about John's birth and his parents, Zachariah and Elizabeth.

Part 3: Reflect on the Sermon

Introduction

1. This week we began our new sermon series on "Encounters with Christ." What kind of memorable encounters have you had in your life? Have some fun sharing stories of some celebrity encounters.
2. Was there a particular event or moment in your life when you've encountered Christ. Describe this experience and how it changed you.

Changed by Jesus: Clarity (Clarity in the Darkness; Clarity of Voice)

1. John had clarity about who Jesus was despite the darkness he and his family experienced. Have you experienced similar darkness in your history, like that of Zachariah and Elizabeth? What is so painful about broken dreams and missed expectations?

2. Wilderness life for John was surely very challenging. What were some of the challenges and why did you think John spent a large portion of his life there?
3. In addition to having to trust God, move towards him in companionship and spend seasons in repentance and reflection, John also likely experienced a 'dark night of the soul' when he was in the wilderness. Have you experienced a time like this. Reflect on the following quote from there sermon:

It is this night that strips you of everything that is not you. It is a gift, God's gift. It is God's way of exposing every mask, every false self, every protective layer that keeps you from living your life whole and holy. In the dark night, you become aware of your addictive need to come through for others at the cost of your own heart. You see the idolatry of usefulness and helpfulness and the esteem you get from being the hero. You see how far you are from living from your deepest core, from a place of longing and desire.

4. Trusting God in the darkness and during a dark night of the soul will ultimately lead to clarity of voice about who God is and his goodness. The darkness can show us the beauty of God's love and it can strip away the distractions of our idols and comforts. How has this been true of your experience?
5. John's greatest concern is that people hear him as a voice proclaiming Jesus, with no personal regard for his own identity. We talked in the sermon about being a clear piece of glass between the world and Jesus. What does it look like to do this well?

Changed by Jesus: Fulfilled Promises

1. For John, the greatest joy of Jesus' arrival was that he was the fulfillment of God's promises of a perfect sacrifice to take away the sins of the world. Why is this such good news for you and for the rest of the world?

2. We talked in the sermon our sin being too great a burden for us to carry? How/why is this true? Have there been times when you've tried to atone for your own sins and experienced that it was too heavy a weight?

3. The response to the joy of these fulfilled promises is one thing: come to Jesus. This seems almost too good to be true - why is that?

4. So, who is Jesus to you? Reflect on this final quote from the sermon:

All great characters in stories are the the ones who give their lives to something bigger than themselves. And in all of the stories I don't find anyone more noble than Jesus. He gave his life for me, in obedience to His Father. I truly love Him for it. I think the difference in my life came when I realized, after reading the Gospels, that Jesus didn't just love me out of principle; He didn't just love me because it was the right thing to do. Rather, there was something inside of me that caused Him to love me. I think I realized that if I walked up to His campfire, He would ask me to sit down, and He would ask me my story. He would take the time to listen to my ramblings or my anger until I could calm down, and then He would look me directly in the eye, and He would speak to me; He would tell me the truth, and I would sense in his voice and in the lines on His face that he liked me. He would rebuke me, too, and he would tell me that I have prejudices and judgment in my heart against other people and that I need to deal with that; He would tell me that there are poor people in the world and I need to feed them and that somehow this will make me more happy. I think He would tell me what my gifts are and why I have them, and He would give me ideas on how to use them. I think He would explain to me why my father left me as a boy, and He would point out very clearly all the ways God has taken care of me through the years, all the stuff that God protected me from. This is Jesus to me.

Part 4: Summarize the Message

How would you summarize the sermon to someone who has never heard it? What are your two or three key takeaways from the message and your discussion?

How does this sermon change your perspective on God? Your own heart? And/or, how to follow him?