

# Maranatha Mirror Message

Recent Sermon 12/15/19

## NO SYMPATHY



It's no secret that main-line churches here in town are all struggling. Attendance is down. The younger generation is drifting away. A few churches are connecting with the world out there, making an impact. But the church picture in general is pretty shaky.

Now suppose next spring we hear of a young guy preaching in an old barn way back in the hills above Musquodoboit Harbor. People are flocking to that old barn from all over Nova Scotia. So we go there and check it out. The field around the barn is packed with cars. We enter the barn. It's jammed with people---young and old, black and white, rich and poor. No fancy chairs. No band playing Christian music. Just this man, all by himself.

He doesn't smile. And when he opens his mouth he abuses everybody.

*“So what brought you hypocrites here today? Did you come to ease your conscience? If you're looking for something to help your self-esteem, you won't find it here! When are you going to repent? When are you going to quit playing games with God?”*

Week after week this man rakes them over the coals, commanding them to get serious with God. Week after week they keep coming back for more. In June the man starts baptizing people in the Musquodoboit River. Nobody has ever seen anything like it! Lives are changing. People are confessing their sins, making restitution. His message never changes. He never lets up. He performs no signs and wonders. But everybody knows that this thing has to be of God.

That's how it was in Judea, when John the Baptist came on the scene. The synagogues were boring. The Temple in Jerusalem reeked of corruption. But out there at the Jordan River, something powerful was going on.

***“You bunch of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Don't think that because you're descendants of Abraham you have an inside-track with God. God can raise up children of Abraham from***

***these stones! And don't just say the words, “I repent.” Prove it by the way you live! Get right with God! Get right with each other!”***

People came from all over Judea and Galilee. They began making changes in their lives, as John took them down into the water and baptized them. A rumor began to spread that John was the promised Messiah. So the big shots from the Temple came to check him out.

*“Are you the Messiah?”*

*“No.”*

*“Are you the Prophet promised by Moses?”*

*“No”*

*“Well, who are you?”*

***“I'm the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord!’ I'm preparing the way for One whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie. I baptize with water. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire! He's going to separate the wheat from the chaff. He will keep the wheat, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”***

Then one day, Jesus shows up.

***“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*** says John.

“Baptize me,” says Jesus.

“I can’t baptize you,” says John.

“Do it.”

When Jesus emerges from the water, the Spirit of God takes charge of his life. Jesus is now the Messiah, the Anointed One.

From that moment John the Baptist begins to diminish. But he never stops calling people to repent. He tells it like it is, no matter who he’s talking to.

When King Herod steals his brother’s wife, John tells the King, “You’re sinning.” Imagine Billy Graham telling Richard Nixon that he’s sinning. Imagine Franklin Graham telling Donald Trump that he’s sinning!

Herod doesn’t like to be told he’s sinning, so he locks John up in prison. John sits in his cell, getting his bread and water and waiting for Jesus to bring down fire from heaven. Waiting for Jesus to call big shots like Herod to account.

But Jesus doesn’t call Herod to account. Jesus ignores Herod and all the big shots.

What’s going on? If Jesus is the Messiah, how come he doesn’t take control? Why doesn’t he do something! The only thing John hears about Jesus is that he’s hanging around with tax collectors and sinners, rejects and losers..



*So John sends his disciples to Jesus for a little chat.*

*“John wants to know, are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for someone else?”*

*“Go tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear. The dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.”*

Why can't Jesus at least give John a little sympathy as he rots in prison? Why can't he say, "Give John my love, Tell him I'm praying for him."

But no, this man John, who once called Jesus the Lamb of God, this man who once hailed Jesus as the Messiah, needs to know that Jesus is indeed the Messiah; that the one thing he requires is faith. Faith!

As John's disciples walk away, Jesus turns to the crowd and says,

*“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed blowing in the wind? What did you go out to see, a man dressed in fancy clothes? Those who wear fancy clothes are in kings' houses.*

*What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet...Of men born of women there is none greater than John the Baptist.*

*But he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.”*



He who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven has one thing that John the Baptist does not have:

Faith---in Jesus.

Faith that trusts the Master when nothing makes sense.

Faith that repents when the Master says, “Repent!”

Faith that obeys the Master with a thankful heart.

The least man or woman in the Kingdom of Heaven has that kind of faith.

If we are going to live in God’s World, while we walk this earth, we have to have that kind of faith.

### **Faith that trusts the Master when nothing makes sense.**

Jesus is not that wimpy little fellow they told us about in Sunday School. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, God incarnate. He’s in charge of everything that goes on---everything! He lets things happen in our lives and in the world around us that make no sense.

Something inside us says, “If Jesus is in charge, how come all this corruption, all this sadness, suffering and violence?” Something inside us wants to say,

*“Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for someone else?”*

But faith says, “Hold on! The Lord knows exactly what he’s doing! Trust him!”

**Why** there’s so much suffering, why we ourselves are suffering, baffles us. And we cry out, “Lord, what’s going on?”

If no answer comes back, we still trust the Lord.

The least person in the Kingdom keeps trusting the Master when nothing makes sense.

### **We need a faith that repents, when the Master says, “Repent.”**

Sometimes we’re out of line in our walk with God. Sometimes we are out of line in our walk with each other.

Pretty soon his Spirit calls us to repent.

It could be a word spoken by a friend. Or words of rebuke that jump off the printed page. Maybe a dream that uncovers our hypocrisy.

Once we get the message, we don't mess around. We immediately do whatever we need to do to make things right.

*“If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar and go.*

*First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.*

*Matthew 5*

The least person in the Kingdom of Heaven knows how to repent instantly.

**We need a Faith that obeys the Master day in and day out with a thankful heart.**

If the Master says, “Forgive,” we forgive.

If he says, “Pray for those who give you a hard time,” we pray for them.

If he says, “Give”, we give.

If he says, “Pray for laborers,” we pray for laborers.

The least person in the Kingdom of Heaven obeys the Master day in and day out with a thankful heart.

### **No Sympathy**

But let's face it; there are times in your life and mine, when we're in that prison with John the Baptist. Things are falling apart. Nothing makes sense. We are hurting badly.

Instead of saying, “Lord, I'm baffled, bruised, and bloody. Help me!” we harden our hearts and say,

*“Are you the one who is to come, or shall I look for someone else?”*

When we ask that question we get no sympathy.

The best the Lord can do for us when we threaten to walk away is to tell us again what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about.

*“The blind receive their sight and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear. The dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them.”*

No, Jesus didn't heal all the blind in Israel. He didn't get rid of all leprosy, or raise all the dead. Jesus went among the hurting masses and gave them signs of the coming kingdom.

He's still doing it out there among the forgotten ones.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**

**Matthew 5**

Jesus gave us the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus. Lazarus the beggar lies at the Rich Man's gate, ignored by all but the dogs who lick his sores. The Rich Man averts his eyes as he passes Lazarus on his way to the Temple to do his religious duties. No one cares about Lazarus.

Where is Jesus in this parable? He's standing unseen by Lazarus the beggar. Then Lazarus dies and is lifted to Paradise.

Wait a minute! How can Lazarus be in Paradise? He never prayed the "sinner's prayer." He never got saved!

At this moment the Spirit of the Lord Jesus is with a billion Lazaruses all over the earth--- in refugee camps, war zones, city streets and alleys, nursing homes----wherever humans are left to suffer and are forgotten.

When our faith begins to falter, what we need to do is follow Jesus out there among the forgotten ones who are right under our noses. People we know who are falling through the cracks.

That's where Jesus is.

That's where we'll find him again.

The minute we reach out to one forgotten soul, allowing the kindness of God to actually flow through us, our faith will awaken. We will begin again to see the glory of God.

Faith in Jesus is not that warm fuzzy feeling that comes over us when we get "religious". That kind of faith evaporates as soon as the storm comes.

Faith in Jesus is an all-weather faith, tough and resilient.

It trusts the Master when nothing makes sense.

It repents instantly when the Master says, "Wake up!"

It obeys the Master's day in and day out commands with a thankful heart.

Lord, give us that faith, and keep us close to you through the approaching storms

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, we ask to live in your world, to be counted as part of your kingdom while we live our lives on this earth. Give us the faith to be able to do this. May faith rise in us even if things around us spin out of control and make no sense. May we lift our hearts and know that despite it all... you are in control. We trust you. And Lord may our faith in you keep us open to when we need to repent. May our faith cause us to instantly mourn when we move away from the path of love and mercy you call us to walk. May we obey day in and day out, with a heart that overflows with thankfulness to you. Holy, merciful Lord, keep our hearts turned towards you when times are hard, may our faith stay unmoved as we bow before you, seeking you when we feel lost and abandoned. Move us out among those who feel lost and abandoned, as well, the forgotten ones who suffer, and find you there among them. May our faith awaken, bloom and flourish as we allow your love to flow through us to those in need of kindness and mercy. May our very acts of faith cause us to be wrapped in your glorious presence and living as the citizens of heaven that you mean us to be.



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