**1. Motivate**

When has someone failed to take advice from an expert and later paid the price for refusing it?

* car mechanic said “tires need to be replaced”
* captain of the Titanic ignored warnings about ice bergs
* engineers from NASA warned about O-rings failing in cold weather
* boss said “be on time”
* traffic news said “best to go around”
* cook book said “don’t forget \_\_\_\_ “
* Kodak engineer invented first digital camera – company downplayed its potential in order to keep up film sales – eventually bankrupt

**2. Transition**

Jesus gave us “expert advice” to be involved in the Great Commission.

* We must be involved in communicating the Truth of the Gospel
* Our faith stands unwaveringly on that Truth.

**3. Bible Study**

A video introduction to the Bible study is available. View it at <https://tinyurl.com/44dcjtdr> If you have no wi-fi where you teach, it is best to download the video file to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/yjwyu4mj>

3.1 A Voice

Listen for an eccentric.

Matthew 3:1-6 (NIV) In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" 4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

What do verses 1–3 tell us about John's mission and message?

* preached out in the country, away from the city
* almost seemed like he was holding tent meetings
* preached repentance – “turn away from your sinful lives”
* Matthew said John was a fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah’s writings
* he was the “warm up act” to prepare the way for Jesus as Messiah
* got people aware of their spiritual needs

What might his appearance and place of ministry represent?

* lifestyle demonstrated complete separation from worldly distractions and pleasures
* radical life was a visual sermon

Why do you think John lived such an eccentric life?

* he is not associated with the typical religious leaders
* lived a Nazirite-like figure – wholly focused on his mission
* seriousness, humility
* unusual lifestyle made people curious and challenged

What specific things did John the Baptist say or do in this passage that show boldness or fearlessness?

* you all need to repent – to change your ways
* you must change the direction of your lives
* the Kingdom/Rule of God is near

What kinds of reactions might he have risked?

* who are you to tell us we are sinners
* he’s a “nut” – look at how he lives
* he’s way too “in your face” with his preaching
* some would be convicted/convinced of the truth of his message

How can our faith make us stand out from the world?

* your language and conversation should be different
* your choice of entertainment
* the friends you hang out with
* honesty and integrity
* your life should demonstrate the Fruit of the Spirit … love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control

Note the meanings of some of the key words in the passage:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Repent | Kingdom of Heaven | Confessing | Baptized |
| * change direction of your life
* turn around
* give up sinning
* live life of righteousness
 | * Kingdom of God
* realm where God rules
* allow God to rule in your life
 | * agree with God that you are a sinner
* declare that you know you do wrong
 | * the word means “immersed”
* demonstrates a spiritual cleansing that has taken place
 |

3.2 Speak Out !

Listen for “in your face” comments.

Matthew 3:7-10 (NIV) But 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? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And 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. 10 The 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.

John directed part of his message of truth to the Pharisees and Sadducees. How did he characterize them?

* “brood of vipers”
* “snakes in the grass”
* sneaky, deceptive,

Why do you think he didn’t hold back?

* they needed to hear the Truth
* they required the confrontation
* they were very set in their ways, in their thinking, in their world view
* a soft sell would not work

What does this teach us about speaking the truth in love?

* a form of tough love
* they might not like hearing what he said, but they needed to hear it
* he was confronting them for their own good
* we might characterize him as a “fire and brimstone” haranguing speaker
* but he was concerned about all who came to hear him
* to be right with God they needed to confess and repent of their sins

What did he say was required of them?

* they needed to demonstrate a way of life that showed repentance, a change of direction in their life
* instead of playing the role of a “very religious person” they should be showing attributes like what Paul would later list as Fruit of the Spirit

To what would they be subject if they refused to confess and repent?

* speaks of the ax at the root of the tree
* no fruit means cut down the tree
* dead wood thrown into the fire
* says they are “dead wood” spiritually and deserving of spiritual death

How can believers strike the balance between confronting people lovingly but boldly?

* share how God has worked in your own life
* live a life characterized by Fruit of the Spirit
* consider the “15 second testimony”
	+ before I met Christ I was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
	+ He changed me
	+ Now I have peace with God and assurance of heaven
* tell them if they are dissatisfied with current life, Jesus can put them right
* pray for them … tell them that Jesus changes lives for the good

3.3 Proclaim Jesus

Listen for a prophecy.

Matthew 3:11-12 (NIV) "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Verse 11 refers to the Holy Spirit and fire. How might the Holy Spirit help us overcome fear and speak with courage?

* God’s Spirit indwells every believer
* the Spirit gives direction in living
* gives wisdom, courage
* convicts/convinces us of
	+ our own sinfulness,
	+ of God’s righteousness imputed to our lives
	+ of Satan’s defeat when Jesus rose from the dead (Satan can claim no power over us)

What two contrasts does John offer between himself and the mighty One to come?

* type of baptism
	+ John baptized for repentance … outward testimony of personal repentance
	+ Jesus would baptize “with fire” … with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer
* John said he was unworthy by contrast
	+ was not even fit to carry the sandals of the Messiah
	+ that was a task given to the lowest servant in a household – deal with dirty, stinky sandals after someone had been out in hot dusty roads

What is the significance of the images "winnowing fork," "gathering His wheat," and "burning up the chaff"?

* there is a coming judgment, God will make the determination of who is a true Christ follower
* the implication of the metaphor is that true believers stay in God’s presence
* unbelievers, skeptics are banished from God’s presence permanently
* they are the “chaff” who are burned – reference to fires of hell

In what ways can remembering that we are preparing the way for the Lord (like John) help us speak more confidently?

* Jesus said He would return when the Gospel message reached every people group
* be involved in spreading the message to more/peoples who have yet to hear the Gospel
* remember that we have the “cure” for people’s sin problem
* many people are struggling with wanting to rid their lives the misery of slavery to sin
* we can lead them, point them to the “cure” … confession, repentance, and faith in Christ

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

Application

Ask.

* Ask God to help you become a person who stands for truth, no matter the cost.
* Ask Him to give you courage for the journey.

Analyze.

* Look at your life.
* Are you willing to let go of disobedience to God’s Word that is keeping you from telling others about your faith in Jesus Christ?
* Make a list of those things that are obstacles right now and pray for God to remove them.

Act.

* Don’t wait for the perfect time, place, or opportunity.
* Put into practice the things you have learned about sharing your faith and do it.
* Practice with a family member or friend.
* The more you act, the more comfortable you will become in being a soul-winner.

Double Puzzle

A persecuted church in the Theris Puof galaxy (far away) has transmitted these two images which are to be used to send your Bible Study group an important message. To decode the message, unscramble the key words. They can be found in this week’s Bible passage, Matt 3:1-12 (NIV). Then use the numbers to place the proper letters into the message blank. Help and more Fun Family Activities are found at <https://tinyurl.com/yjwyu4mj>