

## GUIDING LIGHT LUKE 1:76-80 SERMON

Have you seen the crosses lit up at night on our church's bell tower? The crosses symbolize Jesus Christ's sacrificial death and the hope we have because it. The crosses also serve as a *guiding light*; for they seek to guide people to Jesus and His church!!

Today, I will preach on *light expectation*. God told his people that a Messiah would come; they could expect him! Turn in your Bible to **Luke 3:15-16**. In this passage John the Baptist has grown to adult hood, started his ministry and called the people to repent of their sins. We read, **“As the people were in expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie”**. John the Baptist made it clear that He wasn't the promised Messiah but God had chosen him to baptize and prepare the people for the Messiah's imminent arrival.

In his first chapter Luke informs us of God's selection of Elizabeth, a woman of advanced age, to be the mother of John the Baptist. John's father, a priest by the name of Zechariah, spoke the prophetic words I read in today's lesson. In His sovereign plan for the ages God chose these two human beings as well as John to prepare people for Jesus' arrival. This brings me to the main point of the message: **God uses people to accomplish His purposes!** Let me say this again: **God uses people to accomplish His purposes!** You'll see this point in the outline found in the middle section of your bulletin. Isn't it amazing that the God who created this universe with supernatural power would use human beings like us to accomplish His purposes?

I wonder: do you know the mission God has for you? How would you define it? God called Elizabeth to be the mother of John the Baptist; He called Zechariah to serve as a priest and prophesy about his son, God called John to help prepare people for Jesus' coming. What does God want you to do? What's your mission in life?

My mission in life the past 33 years has been to serve as the Lead Pastor of this church. Sometime next year when I retire from this position my mission will shift somewhat. I will move into a ministry of helping churches in our northwest presbytery, coaching pastors and church leaders that want their churches to be revitalized. Sometimes, our mission in life changes.

Let's do an exercise this morning. Take a moment and write out your mission in life as you understand it. It could be something like, “raising our three children to love God with all of their hearts; or “sharing the love of God with the neighbors who live on either side of me” or “providing leadership for our church as an elder”. If you're a young person you might describe your mission as “helping my two best friends find God”. Your mission, the mission God has for you should have something to do with your faith in Jesus Christ.

Did you write something? As you think about your mission, remember that **God uses people, people like you and me to accomplish His purposes!** As I said, God used John the Baptist to prepare the Jews for Jesus' arrival; He used Elizabeth to be the mother of John and Zechariah to prophesy about John. Later, God used the twelve disciples to spread the news of Jesus. But let's return to John the Baptist and the description of what he would do. We see that God used John the Baptist to:

**1. Prepare the way of the Lord.** Look back in your Bible to **Luke 1:76** where Zechariah prophesied of John: **“And you child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways”** Zechariah, this Jewish priest echoed Isaiah's words that were spoken many centuries earlier. Isaiah said, **“A voice cries, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken”.** Isaiah 40:3-5

What did John *do* to prepare the way of the Lord? Turn to Luke 3 where John was baptizing people in the Jordan River. We read in Matthew's gospel that the Pharisees and Sadducees came out to be baptized by him. John didn't mince his words when he challenged these pious, religious men: **“He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham...And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do? And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none and whoever has food is to do likewise. Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do. Soldiers asked him, “And what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation and be content with your wages”**

John called the people to repent of their sins and bear fruit in keeping with their repentance. .

If *we* live this way, the way John described, we can prepare people, our friends and loved ones to receive and accept the message of Jesus too! By living lives of humble repentance, lives of integrity and faith, we can point people to Jesus. We all know that actions speak louder than words. So we should live the way John described! On the other hand, if we engage in fraudulent business practices, fail to respect people, talk like we're believers in Jesus but don't live like it, we can turn people away from Christ and His kingdom. How you live your life makes a HUGE difference!! Let me say that again: how you live your life makes a HUGE difference!

God used John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus! Further, God used John to

**2. Give knowledge of salvation to His people.** Turn back in your Bible to **Luke 1:77** **“to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins”.**

John also had a teaching ministry. He imparted knowledge to his Jewish brethren. Notice how the tax collectors in chapter three called John, “Teacher”. I love the way that Luke summarized John’s preaching and teaching ministry in **Luke 3:18** “**So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people**”.

John’s initial call focused on repentance from sin. The word used in the original text for “repent” means to “*change one’s mind*”. It means much more than what we typically mean by a change of mind. It doesn’t mean something as simple as deciding to wear a different outfit to the Christmas party or whether to invite Uncle Bob who’s a “pain in the neck” to Christmas dinner.

The change of mind described by the word “repentance” means a change of mind about one’s condition, one’s life. It involves remorse, contrition, a turning away from sin. John the Baptist preached this to the people. He called them to repent, to become remorseful and contrite about their sin and he gave them knowledge of salvation. He told them this coming One, this long promised Messiah would give them the gift of salvation, deliverance from their sins. In doing this they would receive the gift of forgiveness of their sins.

It’s important for us to understand that this knowledge of salvation, the forgiveness of our sins extends to us today!! The Bible teaches us about salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus has purchased our salvation, our deliverance from the morbid consequences of sin by dying for us on the cross! By rising from the dead, Jesus conquered death! Because He lives, we can live too, all of us who place our hope and trust and belief in Him! God also used John to:

**3. Give light to those who sit in darkness.** Look in your Bible in **Luke 1:79** “**to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.**” John had a powerful ministry in which his words and his life shed light, light to those who sat in darkness. His light functioned as a guiding light, one that guided people to Jesus.

Consider that phrase for a moment, “**those who sit in darkness**”. Do you sit in some form of darkness today? You might be sitting in the darkness of depression or loneliness or addiction of some kind or self-indulgence. Listen: Jesus came to bring light to your darkness! He wants you to find your way out of your prison cell of darkness! Jesus as the light of the world can guide you to a way out! He can extricate you from your cell of darkness! He can help you change and give you hope!!

*In February, 1954 a navy pilot set out on a night-training mission from a carrier off the coast of Japan. While he was taking off in stormy weather, his directional finder malfunctioned and he mistakenly headed in the wrong direction. To make matters worse, his instrument panel suddenly short-circuited, burning out all the lights in the cockpit. The pilot “looked around and could see absolutely nothing; the blackness outside the plane had suddenly come inside”. Nearing despair, he looked down and thought he saw a faint blue-green glow trailing along in the ocean’s ebony depths. He knew in an instant what he was seeing: a cloud of phosphorescent algae glowing in the sea that had been stirred up the engines of his ship. It was the “least and most desperate method” of piloting a plane back onto the ship safely, but the pilot-future Apollo 13 astronaut Jim Lovell-knew that was precisely what he needed to do. And so he did.*

*Jim Lovell's life was saved because of light, tiny creatures in the ocean which emit light. "Bioluminescent dinoflagellates", tiny creatures that contain luciferin, a light emitting compound.*

Our lives have been saved by Jesus, the light of the world! **"Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life". (John 8:12).** Finally, God used John to:

**4. Guide people to the path of peace.** We read the final statement Zechariah made about his son John in **Luke 1:79b**. God would use John **"to guide our feet into the way of peace"**. John will be used by God to guide people to the way of peace.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus both makes peace and is our peace. Paul wrote to the Roman church, **"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"**. **Romans 5:1** Jesus *makes* peace through his sacrificial death on the cross. In this sense, Jesus serves as the perfect *priest* of God. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice of God.

But Jesus also serves *as* our peace. In this sense, Jesus serves as the perfect *sacrifice* of God. Several weeks ago Dustin preached from Ephesians 2:14. Referring to Jesus, **"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility"**. As the perfect and final sacrifice Jesus made peace between sinful humanity and a perfect and sinless God.

John came to guide people to the path of peace which we can only find in Jesus. In this day and age of senseless violence, conflict, turmoil, family dysfunction and brokenness, we need the peace of Jesus more than ever! I pray that the peace of God through Jesus Christ would fill your heart and every member of your family!

We've learned today that **God uses people to accomplish His purpose.** God used John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord, to give knowledge of salvation to His people, to give light to those who sit in darkness and to guide people in the way of peace.

I want to leave you this morning with this challenge: if you weren't able to write down your mission in life earlier when I gave that assignment, go home, pray and reflect on what God wants you to do with your life. God has a plan and purpose for you, He has a mission for you and He wants you to discover and fulfill it. I pray that all of us would know our mission and do it for the glory and kingdom of God. Let us pray.