

The message of John the Baptist

By FICKLEN GUIN
Pastor and Columnist
(Matthew 3: 1-10)

John the Baptist was the first messenger from God, our Heavenly Father, to come to Earth to tell us about Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, the Saviour for mankind from sins against God and mankind.

The message about John the Baptist begins in this way: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent ye; for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" (verses 2-3)

Then we are given a description of John's looks and mannerisms, to let us know that he was a special messenger from our Heavenly Father, God Almighty our Creator.

God's word says, "This same John had his raiment of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey." (verse 4)

God wanted all of us to know that John was a very special person, with a very special message from God to all of mankind. John not only had a special message to mankind from God, but he also had a special service to carry out.

Mankind hears the message of John the Baptist from God to mankind. "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (verses 5-6)

This was the real beginning of mankind, recognizing his

sinful condition against God our Creator, and a need to repent and change our ways in our relationship with God.

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'" (verse 7)

John knew they did not accept his message from God concerning mankind's sins against God. Therefore John said, "Bring forth therefore fruits, meet for repentance." (verse 8)

That message was true then, and it is still true for us in this day and time. We must see a need for us to repent from our sins and turn to God our Creator.

John the Baptist said, "And think not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.'" (verse 9)

None of us have a special place in God's Kingdom until we come to recognize that we are sinners against God our maker as humans on this Earth.

John the Baptist says, "And now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees (meaning of all mankind): therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (verse 10)

If we do not hear John the Baptist's message from God the Father of mankind concerning our repenting from our sins against God and His creation for mankind, we will be in danger of losing our relationship with God.

We are all in danger of this happening to us if we do not hear this message of God sent to us, through John the Baptist in the beginning of the New Testament of God's Word, the Bible. But thank God our Heavenly Father for sending to our world John the Baptist with this message of repentance from our sins that will begin the change in mankind toward salvation by God our Creator led in the name of Jesus, by God's Holy Spirit.



Ninth week of session with the Georgia General Assembly

...Continued from page 4

making for the last three years, would provide sweeping legislative changes to help improve insurance coverage and the delivery of mental health care, and I would like to highlight some of the bill's impactful measures.

The Georgia Mental Health Parity Act would:

Require health insurance plans, including our state health care plans, to provide parity for mental health and substance use disorders so that they are treated and covered to the same degree as physical care, as well as extend this coverage to a spouse and dependents covered under the same health plan

Establish procedures through the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance and Safety Fire to ensure compliance with mental health parity requirements, address compliance violations, as well as implement thorough reporting requirements for health care entities

Authorize service cancelable educational loans for Georgia residents for mental health/medical professionals who work in pediatrics, family medicine, psychiatry, mental health and substance abuse care. These loans would be conditional on the student agreeing to practice as a professional within an approved geographical area of the state with the greatest need

To help keep Georgians with mental illness from entering our correctional system and enhance resources for frontline responders this bill:

Creates a network of local co-response teams, comprised of behavioral health professionals and peace officers to promote pre-arrest diversion. These teams would respond to emergency calls and connect those that interact with law enforcement with community-based treatment services

Modify how our law enforcement officers interact with individuals in a mental health crisis who may require involuntary treatment so that these individuals can receive an emergency evaluation without being charged with a crime first

Establish mobile crisis teams to ensure the person's initial safety and security during the evaluation

Create a task force specifically designed to help communities coordinate activities that would keep patients with severe mental illness out of jails and detention facilities

DBHDD would oversee a statewide technical assistance center to share information across counties and distribute grant funding to help local authorities implement these deterrent initiatives

Authorize the state's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council to create a grant program to fund accountability courts that serve mental health and co-occurring substance use disorder populations to implement gender-specific trauma treatment, hire a technical assistance employee for these courts, and pay for emergency transportation costs associated with these courts

Allow the Office of Health Strategy and Coordination (OHSC) to partner with our state's correctional and juvenile justice agencies to evaluate mental health wraparound services for the state reentry plan, as well as partner with the Department of Community Supervision to share mental health data between agencies to facilitate tracking and treating people under community supervision who receive community-based mental health services

Promote greater opportunities for mental health treatment options by creating a three-year grant program that would help increase the number of outpatient treatment care facilities in our state. Overseen by the DBHDD, this grant program would establish an overall assisted outpatient treatment model in Georgia and measure the effectiveness of such facilities

OHSC would be charged with overseeing the coordination of behavioral health services for children, adolescents, and adults by monitoring ways to expand access to children's behavioral health services across the state

Required to provide annual reports to the OHSC, including nationally available research and best practices for schools and practitioners; complaints regarding behavioral health services; housing placements and needs; and programs for disabled infants, children, and youth, among others

The Department of Community Health (DCH) would also create a task force to examine a postpartum Medicaid coverage extension, Medicaid billing codes for behavioral health services for young children, mental and behavioral health care support for children and vulnerable populations, as well as community behavioral health service reimbursements. By October 2024, the state would be required to implement a statewide data sharing system between our agencies to protect and better care for Georgia children

Finally, this bill would also task the Georgia Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission and its subcommittees with continuing their vital work through 2025. The commission's Mental Health Courts and Corrections

Subcommittee would be authorized to submit recommendations to DBHDD to help expand the state's co-response program and continue exploring community supervision strategies.

Of the nearly 10.8 million people living in our great state, approximately 10 percent of Georgians have been diagnosed with a mental illness. I hope this legislation will serve as a reminder to Georgia families and individuals who are in crisis that they are not alone and that help is on the way. But, our work will not stop with this 80-page bill; the Georgia Mental Health Parity Act is only the cornerstone of our work to overhaul a broken mental health care system, which we will continually improve in the coming years.

Gas Tax Suspension

House Bill 304 to allow the governor to suspend the state motor fuel excise tax through the end of May 2022. We will continue to closely monitor how the Russian invasion will continue to impact us here at home, and we anticipate that our colleagues in the Senate will also pass this legislation so the governor can sign it into law as quickly as possible.

Constitutional Carry

HB 1358 allows law-abiding adults who are legally allowed to carry a concealed firearm, to do so without first having to obtain government permission.

It does not change the rules about who can carry firearms, and it does not change the rules about how firearms are purchased.

This legislation maintains the existing concealed handgun license system, so citizens who still wish to obtain a permit may do so.

Currently, there are 21 states that already have constitutional carry. Of those, five passed such laws just last year.

HB 1358 does NOT repeal any background check processes for purchasing firearms.

Rules about who can purchase a firearm are standardized nationally.

An Alabaman or Tennessean or Floridian has been subject to the same background check requirements to purchase a gun as a Georgian.

The House will return next week to reconvene for Crossover Day. Known for being one of the longest days of the session, Crossover Day is the last day that a bill can pass out of its chamber of origin. Please continue to reach out to me with any questions or concerns you have about legislation, policies or issues that impact our community.

ACROSS THE SAVANNAH

Rediscovering an old friend

By TOM POLAND
A Southern Writer

March 3rd is a day I'll long remember. A bit earlier I had given a talk to the Kiwanis Club at the Darlington Country Club. Returning home I chose to get lost. Just drive

and see where I end up. Thus did I arrive at a crossroads out in the country. I pulled up to a stop sign and looked to my right. There stood Rinda's Grill & Grocery where an old friend loitered. He looked bad. Abused even.

Your name, help me Rinda, how did it come about? And just how did my old friend, Mr. Pay Phone, escape the scrap heap? It's the first one I've seen in years. How many times did a pay phone save my day? Running late for an appointment? Find a pay phone. Lost? Find a pay phone? Missing someone special? Find a pay phone.

In 1999 some two million pay phones gobbled quarters across the USA. Since 2007 the number of payphones has fallen by 48 percent. I'd say the percentage has to be much higher. Approximately 96 percent of Americans own cell phones. Who needs a pay phone? An entire generation is out there that's never used a pay phone.

The old relic brought back memories of just how useful a pay phone was. In BC (Before Cells) there were times in my life when I knew just where to find a payphone. On my trips to and fro the Southland, a payphone was as essential as a mailbox. I kept quarters in my car. If a parking meter didn't eat them a payphone would. And many a pay phone put money

in my pocket. How many times did I check the coin return in pay phones and find quarters.

I recall pay phones had a smell about them. It was metallic and a tad perfumy. For sure a pay phone housed in a booth reeked. It was a human sweat kind of odor, and you could count on seeing graffiti and obscenities, the work of dirty minds. I daresay in this era of viruses running amok the old pay phone—if one dared use it at all—would require hourly cleansings.

The old phone was an American institution that made its way into song. "Long distance information, get me Memphis, Tennessee" written by Chuck Berry and famously sung by Johnny Rivers. I don't think I'd like a song about cell phones.

The old pay phone. We used it so often even now we can hear it clanging as quarters make their way into its innards. You'd drop your coins in and there would be a click, a moment of nothing, then you'd get a dial tone. Dial tones. Remember those?

Another recollection comes to me. In the era of the pay phone you memorized people's numbers. Not so now. You enter a number in your cell phone's contacts and just touch the name or ask the phone to dial the person. If you lose your contacts somehow, good luck calling someone. You probably won't remember the actual number.

If you're in a remote place where there's no cell signal it'd be nice to come across a pay phone would it not? Wires prove reliable. I can't recall a landline call ever dropping.

The telegraph is long gone and the pay telephone for all practical purposes is gone. Well, this old friend's still around when most of its kin are missing. A wounded warrior, it's still standing as the song goes, a reminder of how life was before everyone and his brother began ringing and chatting in just about any place you can imagine.



VINTAGE WILKES

A Teacher's letter from 1838

By SKEET WILLINGHAM
Local Historian

In 2007 on eBay a letter post-marked Washington Ga. Aug. 28, 1838 was offered for sale. I made a copy of it, forgot to bid on it!, and then tucked it away in my piles of research notes. The other day its path recrossed mine and I was struck by its remarkable first-hand historical content, so now I share:

Rachel Lyman James (1812-1890) was a young New England school teacher, the granddaughter of a Revolutionary War minuteman. In 1838 she found her way to Washington GA joining the faculty of the newly organized Washington Female Seminary. Supported by the local Presbyterian Church, the school, until the Civil War, relied upon teachers primarily from New England for staffing and administration. From Goshen, Massachusetts, Miss James had first come South to Darien GA. Her description of Washington and its people is enlightening and her descriptions of the shame of slavery honest and unveiled:

"...Washington is a charming village, such a contrast to Darien. I never felt at home there, and could not be very happy...By changing my residence I have a good opportunity of learning the customs and manners of different sections of this large State.

Their dress here is what you would call extravagant...Many of the wealthy planters live in fine



oak groves which are perfectly enchanting. I attended a tea party on the 4th of July in the grove of Judge Andrews...The society is good, the people polite and refined more so than in the small New England towns...but it is to be attributed in a good measure to Slavery. None of them put their fingers to the slightest kind of manual labor and many of the young men are consequently dissipated. There are about a dozen young lawyers and Doctors who have recd. a collegiate education and are quite intelligent and gentlemen-like, but they love the wine bottle too well and are indolent...But they think it is no matter, their Fathers are rich...

There are 4 teachers in the Seminary and our rooms are adjoining each other, so you may believe that we enjoy ourselves finely. We read, talk, walk and laugh together...Peaches are as common here as apples are at the North...We have also fine watermelons, grapes, plums, figs, etc. The climate is delightful...But this fair land is stained with a foul crime. I can never become reconciled to Slavery. The longer I stay the more deeply I feel its evils, both on Master and Slave. A few days since I saw a woman whipped most awfully and I heard her shrieks for

mercy. She was whipped twice and I could not ascertain that she had done anything wrong. She has since run away. I dread to think what her fate will be if she is taken. I ought however in justice to say that many Masters treat their Slaves very kindly. But it is the system I dislike. One man ought not to have the power of life and death over his fellow beings. The daughter of a physician told me that her father was often sent to dress the stripes and gashes made by the whip. I could say much more but have not time or room. With regard to my success, I must say that I have had much better than I could have anticipated. I believe I have a good many warm friends here, and also the respect and affection of my scholars...They are erecting a new Seminary in a beautiful grove which will not be ready before Jan...I feel that I could never be contented to settle here for life. I could not be a partaker in the sin of Slavery and the southerners are not a religious people. Their thoughts are wholly bent on pleasure and making money."

Rachel James would eventually return to the North, marry David Storrs in Amsterdam, NY in 1845, and later reside in Michigan and then Chicago.

