May the words that come out of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you while we await your coming Lord. Amen.

I have heard many a TV Evangelist trying to shame people while telling them how sinful they are and specifically will name a sin and tell people what a terrible sinner they are and then they ask them to donate money to them so they can spread this message to many others, often worldwide. Here is the irony. One of them told those watching and listening to them they had taken the Lord’s name in vain. You could see people’s heads hang in shame. Ironically, this preacher was overweight and did not talk about the sin of gluttony. My point being this is hypocritical to rail against people’s sins while not talking about themselves and the sins they have committed. They deal with the shalt not versus the shalt. This does not seem helpful because the language is condemning and Matthew 7:1-5 states **7**“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. **2**For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. **3**Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? **4**Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? **5**You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.” This preaching smacks you in the face. When we confess each Sunday we confess we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves, so when I preach I feel everyone agrees we are sinful and part and parcel to this since we are all sinners we do not judge other people’s sins, even though I believe it is sometimes easier to see others people sins (we confess both seen and unseen) than it is ours we understand we are all in the same boat. Since we can agree none of us is perfect, we don’t judge others, and we hope others do not judge us. We instead practice forgiveness and grace. The reality is we have someone much greater of which we await their coming this Advent season we defer to judge the living and the dead. The role of critic is taken already. When I had my marketing business I would put on seminars for bank and credit union customer service people. I would have two columns and would ask them to discuss the qualities of the people they dealt with on the phone every day. I would record positive comments in one column and negative comments in the other. After people have given their responses we would then look at the chart. Invariably there were many negative comments and maybe one or two positive comments about how the people they dealt with. Then I would ask what percentage of people they dealt with fell in the positive column and the responses were in the 95% level with the negative in the 5% negative. The point I then made was that 5% of the people had more influence on them than the 95% positive. Then we talked about strategies to reverse this and they al eagerly agreed and dug into the discussion of how not to let one rude or insensitive person ruin their day. This is human nature. The research says it takes 5 positive comments to overcome one negative, yet we can all see how our lizard brains take over and we rush to the negative. This is an important reminder in the all-important task of raising children.

Luke, who heralds the coming of the Messiah does the same with JB calling people who have traveled to the wilderness in hopes of hearing a message of hope who calls people a brood of vipers and asked who warned them of the wrath to come. The Old Testament is about the law and the law condemns so where is there hope. John asks them to bear fruit worthy of repentance and not to rest on Abraham since the religious leaders rested on their family heritage than on faith for their standing with God, but John turns this on its head. Our relationship with God, however, is not handed down from parents to children. Yes, we can nurture others faith but ultimately one must commit to God themselves. We cannot rely on others for our salvation but rely on our faith in Christ and exercise this faith daily. (John 3:16) So what motivates our faith, a gift from God, or to constantly strive to be a better person to carry out Christ wishes. You see, the brood of vipers John was talking about wanted to be baptized by John with the thought the water would wash away their sins -- but they, as children of Abraham, would not turn to God for their salvation. The ritual is not as important as the transformation that comes from the ritual, for example baptism. It is what we do when we are baptized.

Here’s the thing. The folks visiting were paying heed to what John was saying but did not understand who John was or what they needed to do. So, they wanted John to tell them what they should do calling him teacher. Teah us what to do! John specifically states that whoever has two coats should give one to someone who has none- In ancient times folks would wear more than one coat and then when one got dirty, they would simply switch them. John was telling them to give up a convenience to clothe someone who needed one. (Story of the drill Sargeant) Having food they should share. Both align with Jesus telling us to love others by sharing our food and help clothe others. John opened this up to everyone even the tax collectors and soldiers who were doing things to enrich themselves at the detriment of the people.

Another question the people had after hearing this was-who is this person who is saying these things. There has not been a prophet for over 400 years, but it was widely believed that when the Messiah appeared there would be prophecy. –can he been the one we have been waiting for--the Messiah? Totally understanding his role that God has prescribed for him he states clearly that someone more powerful is coming and he is not worthy to ties his sandals, displaying the same humility Jesus demonstrates. He baptizes with water and the Messiah baptizes with Holy Spirit and fire. John’s baptism symbolizes the washing away of sin urgently exhorting people to repent and reform their lives. Jesus baptism of fire (think God’s very Spirit), the baptism we practice, includes to God’s will. John’s word give us the law but also allow us to have joy because we know what ids coming. There is danger of thinking about good works, but the reality is we can never do enough to be saved. That is why the people the TV Evangelist are condemning, often by people preaching from the Old Testament, because of God’s love for us God intervened in history to give us the sacrifice so we, all who believe, can be saved. We do not choose Christ, Christ chooses us. What we need to preach is yes, we all fall short of the glory of God but because of our belief in Christ when we know we are open to God’s conditional grace and will be held blameless when the threshing floor is cleaned. This in turn allows us to help others hat Jesus has told us to help and we can do this knowing God will provide for u what is needed. That is the good news. Amen.