



CELL GUIDE

TOPIC	Prepare the Way	SPEAKER	DSP Edric Sng
THEME	A Disciple-Making Church	DATE	22 & 23 Aug 2026

MESSAGE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In his previous sermon, DSP drew parallels between Singapore and the great city of Nineveh. Jonah had been called by God to preach against Nineveh, a wicked city that he despised. After the city repented and turned to God, Jonah was angry that it would be spared from God's wrath. God then told Jonah that despite Nineveh's sins, He was concerned for its 120,000 residents, who were not yet saved. Likewise, we should have a heart for the pre-believers of Singapore. DSP delved into the story of John the Baptist in Matthew 3 to examine what we can do to prepare hearts for the Messiah.

PREPARE THE WAY

Before Jesus came into the time of His ministry, John was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, asking people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come" (Matthew 3:2). Isaiah had prophesied about John 700 years earlier, describing him as the "voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'" (Isaiah 40:3).

John's ministry drew the ire of the Pharisees and Sadducees—high-ranking Jewish religious and political leaders—and they came to where John was baptising. John criticised them for not "producing fruit in keeping with repentance", saying that the Messiah is coming and that "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:7-10). Matthew 3 reveals a stark contrast between John and the Pharisees/Sadducees:

1. Different Preparation

Patronage system vs Prophetic call

The Pharisees and Sadducees drew their political power from the patronage system. They underwent extensive education in the Temple court to demonstrate that they can hold fast to the letter of the law (e.g. upholding ceremonies and traditions), and the Temple kept them in power.

John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 as well as Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6. This was later confirmed by Jesus (Luke 7:27).

2. Different Presentation

Pompous vs Plain

The Pharisees likely dressed pompously, in fine linen and gold chains. John the Baptist lived in the wilderness, wore camel hair and ate locusts and wild honey.

3. Different Preoccupation

Prestige vs Preparing the way

The Pharisees loved prestige and being greeted with respect. Everything they did was “for people to see” (Matthew 23:2-7). John was preoccupied with pointing people towards someone else: the coming Messiah, one who is “more powerful than he is” (Matthew 3:11).

Prestige vs Preaching repentance

John paved the way to Jesus by preaching repentance. True repentance is understanding that we struggle with sin, and that we cannot save ourselves—we need a saviour. True repentance is not merely the words we say; the actions we take reflect the position of our hearts. True repentance means doing something to show that we want to make things right.

4. Different Power Source

Position vs Power of the Holy Spirit

The Pharisees and Sadducees’ power came from their high position in society, but John the Baptist drew upon the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:16-17).

5. Different Product

Pride vs Pointed to Jesus

The Pharisees thought of themselves as better than others (Luke 18:11, The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector). In contrast, John pointed people towards Jesus— “He must increase, I must decrease.” (John 3:28-30)

Praise of Man vs Praised by Jesus

The Pharisees “loved human praise more than praise from God” (John 12:43), but John the Baptist was praised by Jesus Himself (Matthew 11:11).

Perdition vs People saved

The Pharisees led others into hypocrisy, wickedness and eventual damnation (Matthew 23:15, 28). John succeeded in leading people to the Messiah (John 10:40-42).

CONCLUSION

John the Baptist, the Pharisees and the Sadducees all claimed to follow God, but only one truly did so. In Matthew 3, it is clear who God is calling us to emulate. Being a Christian is not about observing a religion. It is about building a true relationship with Christ, being hungry for God, and drawing all men into His presence.

Being like John the Baptist means producing good fruit, holding fast to the Word of God, and snatching souls of men from the fires of hell. People should be at the front and centre of our mission as a Church. We have to preach repentance and prepare the way for others to meet the Saviour.

QUESTIONS

1. In his sermon, DSP described ways in which John the Baptist differed from the Pharisees and Sadducees. Which of the Pharisees' and Sadducees' attitudes or behaviours do you see in yourself sometimes? Why?

2. What does "producing fruit in keeping with repentance" mean to you? How would that look like in your life? Share your perspective on how we, as Christians, can "produce good fruit".

3. In the upcoming Christmas in Bedok carnival, how can your cell group pave the way for people to come to know the Lord?