

## WHAT DID YOU GO OUT TO SEE?

(Luke 7:26)

The whole Judean countryside went out to see John the Baptist (Mk. 1:5). Why? He was dressed in crude clothing, probably not eloquent, and certainly not entertaining. There were no dancing girls, no celebrities, and no entertainment.. Why would anyone stand in the stifling heat of the Jordan Valley to hear this rugged man rebuke a nation for its sins? Please consider that even though John worked no miracle (Jn. 10:41, there was still something supernatural about his ministry. Isaiah predicted his coming hundreds of years before his remarkable birth (Is. 40:3; Lk. 1:5 - ). Jesus said that he was the long awaited Elijah which was to come (Mal. 3:5, 6; Matt. 11:14). We repeat, there was something supernatural about his ministry. John's ministry was different! He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Lk. 1:15). It was God drawing men to hear him!

But now let us ask why people in the first century went to church? Just as in the case of John the Baptist, there was something supernatural about the church. As you know, a lot of people went to church in those days, just as a lot of people went out to hear John the Baptist. As you also know, there were no formal church buildings at that time. They had no air conditioned chapels with lighted signboards, stained glass windows, and well manicured lawns. These early believers met in private homes, synagogues, rented facilities, and sometimes outside by a river or under a tree. In Rome, when believers were persecuted, thousands met in the underground catacombs beneath the city. By the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, however, the Gospel had already been preached to "every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23). These early believers did not go to church for amusement, or entertainment. God was drawing them! There was something supernatural about those meetings.

The writer of Hebrews draws a distinction between Jewish worship, and Christian worship (See Hebrews 12:18 - 24). Jewish worship involved physical things you could touch like a mountain, physical things you could hear like a trumpet, and physical things you could feel like an earthquake. Christian worship, by contrast, involved spiritual reality that could only be experienced by faith. That spiritual list included Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God, thousands upon thousands of angels, the church of the firstborn ones whose names are written in heaven, God, the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and Jesus Himself, and His sprinkled blood.

It somehow seems inappropriate for John the Baptist to draw a crowd with clever advertising, famous athletes, and well known celebrities. Thank God he didn't have to.

Nor did Paul attempt to draw a crowd with the techniques of a huckster. In fact, he stated emphatically that he did not "peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Cor. 2:17). The Bible word translated in this verse as "peddle" is "kapeleuontes" which refers to a salesman without scruples hawking his wares in a deceitful way. Such men, like King Rehoboam, are forced to use bronze shields because the golden shields are gone (2 Chron. 12:9 - 11). Or to put it more crudely, dove's dung is what you have left after the dove has departed.

Solomon said: "what has been done will be done again" (Eccl. 1:9). Consequently, the warnings from the first century seem very appropriate in our own day and age. In those days they had preachers who taught for dishonest gain (Tit. 1:11); were greedy and exploited people with made up stories (2 Pet. 2:3); were experts in greed and loved the wages of unrighteousness (2 Pet. 2:14, 15); rushed for profit into Balaam's error (Jude 11); and boasted about themselves, flattering others for their own advantage (Jude 16). Paul was NOT like that and no one else should be either!

When Isaac seemed impossible, Abram settled for Ishmael. How sad when the Bride of Christ does the same. John the Baptist didn't compromise! His message and his ministry were not designed to please men and ours shouldn't be either!