Brood of Vipers

Zanesville, OH | January 12, 2020 | John Pollard | Sermon Notes

**Foundational Scripture:** Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33

**Intro**:

* In the days of John the Baptist, many were coming to be baptized by him in river of Jordan (cf. Matt. 3:5-6). As Matthew tells the story, many were coming to John from all over Judea. However, a unique group of people whom John saw and recognized, were rebuked for being there. The Pharisees and Sadducees had arrived on the scene and immediately when John saw them he rebuked them rather harshly in Matt. 3:7. This statement would have undoubtedly ruffled some feathers. Why would John be calling the religious elite, the spiritual leaders of Israel **“brood of vipers?”** We don’t fully understand the legitimacy of this claim until the gospel story comes to an end but for our purposes in this lesson this morning, what is the significance of this claim/description?

1. **Who were the Pharisees and Sadducees?**
   1. Let’s first note who these people were. The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews that were utterly devoted to the details in the Law of Moses and they were known for their “see me” attitude (cf. Matt. 23:5-8).
   2. The Sadducees, also a sect of the Jews, were a political group from which the priestly and temple hierarchy were drawn (cf. Acts 5:17). They did not believe in the doctrine of the resurrection (Matt. 22:23). Undoubtedly to the mind of any reader, these people don’t necessarily sound like the folks for which a description of snakes would befit.
   3. John however was around long enough, and like anyone who is completely devoted to God and His ways, he was able to see them for who they really were: **Brood of Vipers**. The description John uses is not one of mere coincidence, but purposeful and striking.
2. **What does this description say about them?**
   1. Vipers are among the world’s most poisonous snakes. One bite from the creature and one would be dead in minutes. Yet snakes in general are among the wisest animals in the wild and even Jesus used such a description for them (cf. Matt. 10:16).
   2. John’s description of these so-called model citizens of Jewish society is two-fold in nature. Firstly, they were a poisonous people (metaphorically speaking) who were very crafty in terms of speaking to the crowds.
   3. They fed poison to many of the Jews of the day and unfortunately it was received widely (cf. Matt. 23:15), and they were blind just like these leaders. (cf. Matt. 15:14). Does that sound at all familiar to the religious culture we live in today?
   4. Secondly, they would often display a show to convince the crowds they were who they said they were (cf. 23:1-33). John knew better. He knew that their intentions weren’t sincere in keeping with repentance and thus he admonished them to bear fruits worthy of penitence (cf. Matt. 3:8).
   5. It is important to note, however, that John was not the only one who called them offspring of snakes. In a similar manner to John, Jesus rebuked them harshly for their hypocrisy and lawlessness (cf. Matt. 12:34; 23:33).
   6. Let’s consider the big picture. In Gospel of John, Jesus criticizes the scribes and the Pharisees calling them sons of the devil (cf. John 8:44). Consider how important that is since we know the serpent in the garden of Eden was the devil (cf. Rev. 20:2).
   7. Harmonizing what Jesus said here in John 8 and what John the Baptist says in Matthew 3, we are made aware that these men were clearly followers of the devil. He was their father, not God. Everything isn’t always what it seems to the naked eye.

**Conclusion:** It’s amazing how the scriptures draw examples from other places to demonstrate a sobering point. It does not matter how religiously inclined we think we are and how much things we do for others to see and praise us. When all is said and done, God’s approval is what we all should seek and that does not come by seeking public attention nor by being hypocrites. Don’t underestimate the quality of humility. God is pleased with those who seek to put Him at the forefront of everything they do. He is delighted when we look out for our neighbor and not just ourselves. Let’s be careful not to get sucked into the devil’s way but may we bear fruits in keeping with repentance and God’s love. May God shine forth in us.