

I.N.I.

Second Sunday in Advent
Dec. 7, 2014
Mark 1:1-8

In Christ Jesus, whose coming into this world was proclaimed to mankind by John the Baptist, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we heard our Savior's Advent call to us. He calls us to be **ALERT** Christians, being aware of indifference. He calls us to be **RESPONSIBLE** Christians and He calls us to be **EXPECTANT** Christians.

Well today we are listening to God's Advent preacher, John the Baptist, the Forerunner, the one who came before the Lord to prepare the way for the Lord. John's message was one of **REPENTANCE UNTO FORGIVENESS**. This morning and next Sunday we will be looking at the message of this Forerunner, John the Baptist, as he helps us prepare for the celebration of our Savior's birth.

Everything about John was unique. His conception and birth was so miraculous that it was announced by an angel. Zacharias and Elizabeth had never given birth to a child and now both of them were beyond the age of child bearing. When Zacharias doubted the angel's message of this miraculous birth he was struck dumb. On the day of John's circumcision, Zacharias got his voice back and filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied what his son's calling and future activity would be.

But John was not only unique he was also very special. He was a Nazarite. He drank no wine or fermented drink. He lived alone in the desert wilderness. He dressed in camel skins and his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. He was a very forceful, powerful speaker. His courageous faith was probably his best-known attribute. But even as his person was unique and special, his message was even more special--for it was not himself that John talked about. His message was about the Coming One, the Promised Messiah, the Christ. His message was also about how to prepare for this coming Savior. And so this morning our theme is:

LISTEN TO GOD'S ADVENT PREACHER

I: He was sent by God

II: He calls us to repent

III: He announces that the Savior has come

Mark tells us this was no ordinary man on an ordinary mission. This was a special man, called by God for a very special purpose. Mark quotes from the prophets Malachi and Isaiah to show that John was God's messenger, who was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Savior. We read verses 2-3; **AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE PROPHETS: BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU. THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS: PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.**

Just as a messenger was sent ahead of a king to get people to fix and repair the roads on which the king was to travel, so John was sent ahead of the Son of God to prepare the hearts of the people for Christ's coming. We read this prophecy in our Old Testament reading. John was the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies. It was he who would come first and point to the Messiah. This was not a calling which John invented or chose for himself, but one which God chose for him. God appointed John as the herald, the forerunner, the messenger for His Son.

Since that is true, then we had better listen to this chosen one of God. What is his Advent message for us? What is he telling us today, December 7, 2014? In our text we are told, **JOHN CAME BAPTIZING IN THE WILDERNESS AND PREACHING A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS. AND ALL THE LAND OF JUDEA, AND THOSE FROM JERUSALEM, WENT OUT TO HIM AND WERE ALL BAPTIZED BY HIM IN THE JORDAN RIVER, CONFESSING THEIR SINS.** In Matthew's Gospel we hear John proclaim, **REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!**

II: John was PREACHING A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE.

The people of John's day were being told by the religious leaders to look for a worldly Messiah--one who would make life here on earth a utopia, one who would bring peace on earth. They were taught that they were basically good and that by their works they were able to achieve the kind of life God desired of them in His law. They were told not to worry about their sins, they weren't accountable for them, for they were God's people, and God is a God of love; just do your best and outwardly show love for each other.

Into this arena walks John--so unique, so special, like a blast of cool, moist air in the hot, parched desert. John's calling was to get at the heart, the heart of the people. He was to prepare the hearts of the people for their Savior-King. The way to do this is to begin with the Law--to show the people that they have not kept the Law of God as God demands. God demands that His commandments be kept **PERFECTLY** in thought, word and deed. We must have **PERFECT LOVE**, not just go through the motions, but a **PERFECT ATTITUDE of LOVE** from the heart toward God and our fellow man in all that we think, in all that we do, and in all that we say. We are accountable before God. Through the Law John showed them and he shows us that we are by nature dead in sins and the only way out of this terrible situation is to repent and to turn to Christ.

Repentance is not just talk, it is not just sorrow over sins committed. It is a complete change of heart and mind. It involves a turning away from sin and a turning toward that which cleanses us from our sins. It is a complete about face. The person who is led by the Holy Spirit to repentance has had his mind changed about sin. He no longer finds pleasure in it, but realizes that sin is the cause of death and eternal damnation. He is filled with a godly sorrow for having broken God's commands and realizes because of it he deserves separation from God in hell.

John's calling was to **PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, to MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT**. As we said a forerunner would go before the king and get the people to straighten out the crooked roads, level off the steep valleys and hills, and make the rough places smooth, so the king would have a safe, easy ride into their town. He would announce to the people that the king was coming, prepare your selves. So also John proclaimed the Law to prepare the people's hearts.

Let no one be indifferent about this message of the King's coming. It is not the outward appearance that counts. It's what is in the heart! The mountains and hills of pride and arrogance, of work-righteousness and self-centeredness must be leveled with God's Law. The crooked paths of fraud, deceit, lies and hypocrisy must be straightened out by God's Word. The valleys and potholes of indifference, depression and despair must be filled with a zeal for the Lord and the rough places of sinful habits need to be replaced by the Spirit working on our hearts leading to repentance and faith.

But John also preached a **BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS**. In the Gospel of John we are told that when John saw Jesus he proclaimed, **BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!** John proclaimed the Good news of forgiveness, alone through Jesus.

Repentance in the broad sense means the Law condemning, leading to despair in oneself and the Gospel turning the sorrowing heart to Jesus, the one and only Savior from sin. When God's Law and Gospel works on man's heart there is a change in how man looks upon his own salvation. He no longer believes that he can get to heaven by his own works, by being good enough, going through the motions of obedience, doing his best. He realizes that by himself he is lost and condemned, but in and through Jesus he has everlasting life, forgiveness and salvation. That was John's message and that was the baptism that he performed, a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

III: He announces that THE SAVIOR HAS COME.

We read verses 7-8 **AND HE PREACHED, SAYING, THERE COMES ONE AFTER ME WHO IS MIGHTIER THAN I, WHOSE SANDAL STRAP I AM NOT WORTHY TO STOOP DOWN AND LOOSE. I INDEED BAPTIZE YOU WITH WATER, BUT HE WILL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

As a forerunner, John's calling was to point the people away from themselves to the Savior. He knew that his role was not to draw attention to himself. He was only a witness to the Greater One who was to come. Yes, John was born first, but Jesus as the eternal Son of God is from

eternity. Yes, John was a great and powerful prophet, but Jesus was greater in that He was and is God and the Savior of all of mankind. John wasn't even worthy of doing slave labor for His Savior and Lord, like unloosing the straps of His sandals.

The last verse has been taken by some to say that John's baptism was not sufficient, that the Holy Spirit was not involved in the baptism performed by John. John is not saying that his baptism was without the Holy Spirit and without forgiveness and faith. He is talking about the power of Jesus who would pour out upon His disciples on Pentecost the special gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself testified of this as we hear Him tell His disciples before He ascended into heaven, **JOHN TRULY BAPTIZED WITH WATER, BUT YOU SHALL BE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT NOT MANY DAYS FROM NOW.**

John's baptism is no different than ours, except that ours is after Christ's sacrifice, his before Christ. Baptism is God's visible seal or guarantee of forgiveness to the sinner. Baptism in Christ does forgive sins, a baptism **FOR REMISSION OF SINS**. Paul writes, **WE WERE BURIED WITH CHRIST THROUGH BAPTISM INTO DEATH, THAT JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, EVEN SO WE ALSO SHOULD WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE**. Peter declared on Pentecost, **REPENT, AND LET EVERYONE OF YOU BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS**. Ananias said to Paul **ARISE AND BE BAPTIZED AND WASH AWAY YOUR SINS**.

Baptism is not merely a sign of forgiveness. Those who have been led to repent of their sins and were baptized actually received the forgiveness earned for them by Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

The purpose for all of John's preaching and baptizing again was to prepare the way for the Lord into the hearts of the people. This preparation is ALL God's doing upon man's heart. God the Holy Spirit works through the power of the Word turning the people around, away from sin and damnation toward Jesus Christ and everlasting life. Still today the Lord uses this same message of John, almost 2,000 years later, proclaimed by pastors, teachers and lay members to take hold of stony, dead hearts and work a miracle of conversion.

God comes to man, not man to God. God saved us by Christ's substitutionary life and death and now God prepares the way for Christ to enter man's heart as this salvation message, the Good News of Jesus' miraculous birth, perfect life, substitutionary death and victorious resurrection works a change in man's heart.

LISTEN TO GOD'S ADVENT PREACHER!

John is speaking to you and to me today. Repent and believe from the heart. God has shown us the way to salvation in His Word through His Son. Jesus Christ has come. He has paid the price for our redemption. He has taken our place. He has satisfied God's justice. He has atoned for our sins. We have peace with God for we have seen our Salvation with eyes of faith. That is the Advent message. That is what Advent is all about.

May the Holy Spirit **PREPARE** our hearts once again for the Good News of our Savior's **COMING** by first of all leading us to acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our sins and then in joy and gladness move us to worship Jesus with hearts of faith this Christmas season and always.

Let us rise and join in reading together Hymn 75.

Amen.