

I.N.I.

First Sunday in Advent
Dec. 1, 2019
Matthew 3:1-12

In Christ Jesus, whose coming we prepare for during this Advent season, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“Ye sons of men, Oh, hearken; your hearts and mind prepare; to hail th’ Almighty Savior, O sinners, be your care!”

In a little more than three weeks we will be celebrating one of the greatest events ever to occur in the history of this world—God the Son born in human flesh and blood. The Incarnation! God become man. Immanuel—“God with us!” Are you ready for it? Are you prepared?

Most of you have seen that the stores were ready and prepared for Christmas already by mid October. Christmas music started playing in the malls by mid-November. Someone said that Thanksgiving is now being swallowed up by the Christmas rush. Perhaps some of you already have most of your Christmas shopping done.

Ruth and I have not gotten out our decorations yet; we’ve been a little busy. Unfortunately, that is what will happen to countless millions of people this Advent season—they will be too busy, they will not take the time to prepare, properly prepare for the coming of the Christ-child.

Proper preparation is not getting out the nativity scene. It is not sending out Christmas cards. It is not putting up the Christmas tree, or even lighting the Advent wreath with candles. For these are all outward decorations or observances.

PROPER PREPARATION FOR CHRIST CAN ONLY COME FROM THE HEART!

Now there is nothing wrong with all of the things just mentioned—for they help us to focus our hearts and minds upon the real meaning of Christmas, the gift of the Christ-child being born for us as one of us. But only the Word can properly prepare us for Christ. There is no way one can properly prepare to celebrate Christmas without the Word of God. For it is the Word alone that works **REPENTANCE** in the heart.

And that is why: **ADVENT IS THE SEASON FOR REPENTANCE!**

**1) FOR THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO PREPARE OUR HEARTS
FOR CHRIST’S COMING!**

John the Baptist appeared rather suddenly, as if out of nowhere. He was not trained by the religious leaders of his day. He had no credentials, no degree from any well known schools in Israel. He simply began preaching. Preaching what? **REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS NEAR!** The heart of his message was repentance. The word means a change of one’s mind; to perceive or see differently. It involves a complete change of heart and mind, a complete change of direction in one’s life. Scripture is very clear that we who are by nature spiritually dead in sins and unbelief cannot bring about this change. It must be worked in us by God the Holy Spirit. Repentance, true godly sorrow is always a miracle; a miracle of God’s grace and the power of His Word upon the heart and mind of a human being.

And this was John’s life calling--to prepare the way for the Lord--to make straight paths for Him--to level mountains and hills for the Lord. This was not done by building roads and highways and bridges but by preaching the Word, so that the Word would enter the human heart and straighten it out, level its pride and lead it to acknowledge its own sin and look to Jesus alone in faith and then walk the straight path!

It’s interesting to note that God sent John out in the wilderness, the desert--a most unlikely place to set up a preaching station for people. He did not appear in the synagogues or the temple in Jerusalem where the other religious teachers and leaders were. The present religious system was corrupt. They had lost sight of their own lost sinful condition and of course had then lost sight of the promised Messiah. The Lord wanted His people to take a fresh, new look at themselves and at their relationship with Him. And that is what John led them to do by boldly proclaiming God’s Word!

The only way the people would be ready and able to receive Jesus as their Savior was with a repentant heart--a completely changed heart and mind. They needed to be turned around from serving self, living in sin, looking for the pleasures of this life...to serving the Lord and others, living in Christ, looking for the eternal pleasures to come. **NO ONE** can appreciate the birth of Jesus; in fact **NO ONE** can truly understand the birth of Jesus if he has not first been led to a confession of his sins. Without a knowledge of

our sins and the condemning nature of our misdeeds, and the eternal wrath which we deserve because of them; there is no way we would look to Christ for anything but an example of how to try to be good. We would surely not see in Him a Savior. The Bethlehem story then would only be a warm, touching, sentimental lesson on humbleness, poverty, and the great ability of man to adapt to his surroundings.

John's message brought results. Crowds began to flock to him out in the desert. They confessed their sins and were baptized. This baptism of John was essentially the same as that of ours, except that John baptized in anticipation of Jesus' great saving work, while we baptize on the basis of His completed saving work. The guilt of their sins was washed away because of their belief in the coming Messiah, the One promised to bring salvation.

But not everyone who came to John was sincere. The Pharisees and Sadducees also came out to see what John had to offer. They too felt they were entitled to receive this baptism, but for the wrong reasons. Both of these groups believed that they were right with God because of who they were and what they did. They were confident in themselves, in their own works, in their own supposed goodness.

John did not mince words did he? He did not speak in a politically correct manner. He told it like it was. He asked them a very penetrating question. Who had given these people a warning to escape the wrath of God? John knew their hearts. They had not come seeking forgiveness; they were not sincere in their desire for baptism. There was no repentance of their sins. And John called them a "brood of vipers!" The word "brood" means an offspring. John is saying, "You offspring of serpents!" To be a descendent of the Serpent means you are a deceiver, even as the Serpent, Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. These men were parading around as believers but in reality they were unbelievers and hypocrites.

They rejected the truth. They rejected the truth that they were sinful and unclean and therefore could not inherit the kingdom of God. They rejected the truth that in Christ alone is there atonement for sins, full and free forgiveness and justification before God the Father. They were still under God's wrath and condemnation. John is calling out to them to honestly look at themselves from God's viewpoint, from God's unchangeable Law and see their sins, confess them, repent and believe.

So John cries out, **"BEAR FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE."** One of the first fruits of repentance is an open, honest confession of ones sins. No excuses, no blaming others, no condoning wrong behavior, no trying to justify what was said or done, but openly admitting to ones' total corruption. And secondly the fruit of repentance is to depend upon the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness, life and salvation. There was no evidence of this at all in their lives. There was no confession of sins; there was no confession of faith in the Messiah. They sought to earn heaven by their own efforts.

John did not let them answer his question. Even before they could respond John says, **AND DO NOT THINK TO SAY TO YOURSELVES, 'WE HAVE ABRAHAM AS OUR FATHER.' FOR I SAY TO YOU THAT GOD IS ABLE TO RAISE UP CHILDREN TO ABRAHAM FROM THESE STONES. AND EVEN NOW THE AX IS LAID TO THE ROOT OF THE TREES. THEREFORE EVERY TREE WHICH DOES NOT BEAR GOOD FRUIT IS CUT DOWN AND THROWN INTO THE FIRE.** Don't even think you can rely on your ancestry. They loved to boast in the fact that they were children of Abraham. But that meant absolutely nothing. What they needed to have was the same faith Abraham had in the promised Messiah before they could really be called Abraham's children. The Lord could turn stones into His children if He wanted to.

John doesn't let up with the Law. The ax of the Law was laid at the root of their hearts. If there would be no response, but only a rejection of God's plan of salvation, then their fate would be sealed. The same Jesus who would soon be coming would come again some day and chop them down. They were the religious leaders who were to lead the people to the Lord but instead they were leading them away from Him. They were leading the people down a path of self-righteousness which could only lead to eternal death.

John continues with another graphic picture of the Judgment which the Messiah will bring. We read vs. 12 **"HIS WINNOWING FAN IS IN HIS HAND, AND HE WILL THOROUGHLY CLEAN OUT HIS THRESHING FLOOR, AND GATHER HIS WHEAT INTO THE BARN; BUT HE WILL BURN UP THE CHAFF WITH UNQUENCHABLE FIRE."**

Just like a farmer throws up the wheat and chaff together on his threshing floor thereby separating the two, so Jesus will separate the believers and the unbelievers on Judgment Day. And just as the farmer then takes the wheat and puts it into his barn and burns the chaff in the fire, so also the Lord will gather His believers with Him into His heavenly home and the unbelievers will be cast into unquenchable fire.

We are reminded by these words that life is not a game. It is serious, serious business as we heard two weeks ago, and we need to seriously reflect on our actions and words. The Lord who seeks to kindle the flame of faith in our hearts will also control the fire of judgment in the end. Either we will be gathered to be with Jesus forever or we will face the unquenchable fire of damnation.

John's finger is also pointing at my sin and your sin! We live in a world that is sin-saturated and yet so little sin-conscious that it accepts sin as the normal way of life. In such a sin-denying world, I need John's finger pointing at my sins and God's Law pressing hard on my heart every day. I need to have the Holy Spirit get out the bulldozer Law and through repentance level the mountain of sinful pride in my heart on a daily basis. Sinners all, let us repent!

WHY IS ADVENT THE SEASON FOR REPENTANCE? There is no other way to prepare for Christ's coming. Without a knowledge of our sins we miss the purpose of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. With a repentant heart of godly sorrow over our sins and a trust in Jesus for forgiveness we receive Him properly.

Then we can clearly see John's finger also pointing to our Savior and say to us, "**BEHOLD! THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!** "

But Advent also is the season for repentance because

2) THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT TO COME.

Unfortunately many who think they are welcoming the baby Jesus this Christmas season through outward Christmas worship and celebration; going through the motions like the Pharisees and Sadducees; speaking of Jesus and making a big fuss over the Christmas holiday and the giving of gifts will not be prepared at all for Christmas or for the judgment to come if they believe that it is their works, their own goodness, their own deeds and actions that saves them and they see no need for repentance.

We need to ponder what Jesus has saved us **from** and what He has saved us **for** if we are to have a true appreciation for what He did for us on the cross. He saved us **FROM** eternal damnation in hell, an eternal separation from our God. He saved us **FOR** the eternal joys of heaven and life forever with our God.

May our Advent worship be one of continually preparing our hearts for Christ's coming with daily repentance and the hearing of the joyful assurance that all of our sins have been forgiven in Jesus. Amen.