

Are you Prepared  
Mark 1: 1-8

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The whole idea of Advent is preparing the way for the Lord to come. To prepare for the child that will be born on Christmas Day.

It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: "Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him!'"

This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

John announced: "Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

If we read further into the scripture, In Matthew 3: 13-17, Jesus came to John to be baptized. <sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

There was a Sunday school teacher that was teaching her children about the story of John the Baptist and the fact that he was preparing for the Lord to come. The teacher was telling her students that this world is only a place in which God lets us live a while, and that while we are here, we need to prepare for a better world.

It was a confusing story for one of the Sunday School students. She saw her mother decorating the house, making cookies and preparing to celebrate Christmas. She knew the rest of her family was preparing to come to their house for Christmas, but she didn't see anybody preparing to meet the Lord. So if John the Baptist was preparing for the Lord, why didn't they have to get prepared also?

It's a good question isn't it. I could ask all of you, "Are you getting prepared for the coming of the Lord?" The time is coming when we need to get everything right with the Lord. We need to ask for our sins to be forgiven. We need to be the kind of people that God will welcome into his kingdom. So how do we get prepared?

Everyone enjoys the finished product, the decorated cookies, the homemade pies, the beautifully decorated Christmas tree and fireplace. The finely served dinner, the finely built home, the well raised family. We love all of

these finer things in life especially around Christmas time, but how many of you enjoy the preparation, the work that went into the finished product?

Let's be honest with ourselves. For the most part we don't like the preparation work. We would rather be on the trip than packing for it. We would rather be living in the house than building it or remodeling it. We would rather not have such a busy time in December and we would enjoy someone else preparing the food, shopping, wrapping presents, fighting the weather.

Life requires preparation and we can't depend on other people to do the preparation for us. We need to do it ourselves.

**When I was thinking about John the Baptist today, I was trying to imagine what it would be like for him to come into our town, preaching and loudly proclaiming to people, "Prepare the Way of the Lord. He is coming". How would we react to his camel hair clothes, his walking stick, his sandals? Could we join him for lunch eating honey and locusts which are no more than grasshoppers? Would we cook them? Would we dry them first? Would he want to baptize us in the Little Sioux River as he did the Jordan?**

**John would baptize all of us in the town and then he would send us on our ways to go make disciples for Christ. But before we can go out into the world to share the good news of Christ, we must first prepare our own hearts.**

When was the last time that you got on your knees and confessed your sins before God...All your sins? By confessing our sins, we empty out our hearts and prepare for the forgiveness Jesus Christ offers. We are called to continue the work of John the Baptist...to go out and proclaim the good news of salvation. We are commissioned by Jesus Christ to go out into the world and prepare the way for the celebration of Christmas.

This is the first step we must take before we can go out into the world each day to share the gospel. In order to prepare our hearts for Christmas, we must open our hearts to God and repent from our sin.

Christmas is a special time: a time when hearts are being opened for the reception of Christ. Old grudges need to be set aside – Hardened hearts should be softened – Old wounds need to be healed and Joy replace bitterness. People begin to think of others rather than only themselves. In this they are finding the true joy of Christmas. We have a responsibility in preparing the way. We are to be the ones crying out in the wilderness. It's our job to proclaim Jesus Christ...To be the ones to go out prepare the way by sharing the good news.

Today we lit the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent candle, the candle of Love. Last week we heard about the Hope that God gives us. The hope that Jesus will return. We know that what we see here around us is not all there is and that God has so much more in store for us. That's definitely something to HOPE for. Today as we are talking about God's LOVE, How can you look at Christmas and not talk about the love of God that came to this earth to redeem mankind. The thing that kept coming back to me when we lit the candle of Love was the fact that without Christmas, there could be no Easter! .

We know that God loves Jesus because it is all throughout scripture,. It might have seemed odd that today during Advent, our scripture focused on Jesus' baptism... but it is one of the most striking messages from God as a

parent in the whole of scripture. Such words of feeling from God the Father to His son, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

But this is not the end of the message. God loves Jesus, yet he handed him over to death for you and for me. What a powerful message. Knowing how much God loves Jesus, knowing the price that was paid. Think about what that means about God's love for you and I, how great that love is. It is one thing to say, "God loves you." It is another to see the babe in the manger, see him through a father's eyes, and know that that is the sacrifice that has been made for you... in love, and then say, "God loves you."

God loves you so much, he gave you the greatest gift he could possibly give, His Son.

During this advent season, I want you all to know that God loves you and wants to give you of his very best. What Christmas represents as the love of God, is shown to each of us and sometimes we don't realize it. Have you had a cashier ring up your sale, put your item in a bag and then as they are instructed by their employer, say, "Happy Holidays". What they don't realize is that the word "Holidays" stems from the phrase Holy Days, so in effect they are wishing you Happy Holy Days! A greeting that was meant to be politically correct is really wishing you a religious greeting.

Every year we hear of the same battles to maintain Christmas mangers, Christmas plays, Christmas carols in school that might mention the word "God". We need to be politically correct while still calling the holiday Christmas, a name with the word Christ in its name.

I never feel I have to be politically correct when it comes to saying Merry Christmas. I just need to be correct, correct in the eyes of God, that is. Isn't that what really matters?

What does matter is that we do not weaken the word "love". We have gotten so casual about the word love that it sometimes loses the true meaning of what love is. It is so easy to open a box of chocolates and declare your love for them, or get a new car, pickup or motorcycle and declare your love for them. So much of our TV advertising also mentions the love for a product they are selling.

Love for people as opposed to love for TV products are two entirely different kinds of love, but do you remember the last person you said "I love you?" to? Did you really mean it or was it simple a response to something they said to you. Do you have a list of those people you really love? How about remembering someone who told you they loved you 10, 15 or even 20 years ago. Do they still love you?

There is someone who loves you as much today as he did five, 10 or even 20 years ago. HIS love never changes. HE never has loved you more and will never love you less. GOD loves you the same, all the time. HE loves you so much HE sent HIS only SON to die on that cross so you can live with HIM forever.

John 3:16-17 tells us: "For GOD so loved the world that HE gave HIS one and only SON, that whoever believes in HIM shall not perish but have eternal life. For GOD did not send his SON into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through HIM." Have you forgotten those verses? GOD has not

forgotten you. Jesus says that is how much He loves you and how much He loves me!

God so loved the world- that love was the motivation for our plan of salvation. That was the most meaningful and life changing gift that God could give. It exceeds any gift we could possibly give or receive. It was the ultimate act of love. It was the most sacrificial gift ever given.

We are reminded of the Love chapter in Corinthians. Love is patient, Love is kind, Love is not boastful or proud, Love will last forever. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful.

There are three things that will endure forever, faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is Love. Amen and Amen.

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