

Untitled (45)

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[0:00] Okay. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

He's not exactly our sort, we might be inclined to say. Now, Anglicans can be pretty weird. I think we all know this. We can have our quirks, but they're generally of a different kind than what we see in John the Baptist.

Like, for example, I might have a portrait of King Charles I hanging up in my office at home. And by might, I mean that I do. But we're that tasteful kind of eccentric.

That's how we like to think of ourselves. We think of ourselves as sophisticated. John the Baptist, probably not so much. Think about the guy, what we would do if he walked through the door this morning.

We would be uncomfortable with someone munching on locusts and wild honey during coffee hour, I think, right? Especially me. I'm a vegetarian. I would have to eat, you know, tofu locusts, imitation locusts.

[1:30] Now, we might find it in ourselves to overlook the fact that the guy is decked out in camel hair until we realize that his garment didn't match the proper liturgical colors for the season.

And then he'd start talking all this intense stuff about the wrath to come. Start calling us to account. And it reminds me, recently I saw on the internet someone who was proposing that we send people John the Baptist Christmas cards.

Think about that for a second. Would say something like, Merry Christmas, you brood of vipers.

How would that go over? But, in all seriousness, John the Baptist was an intense guy.

He was an intense prophet. And he was given a really serious task. And that task, of course, was the task of calling people to repent.

To repent in preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus. In our gospel reading for this morning, we see him doing just that. And actually, in our epistle reading appointed for this morning, we see Paul doing something similar.

[2:50] Now, he is talking, of course, about the second coming of Christ, Paul is. But his tone is a little different. He is encouraging the Philippians. He is assuring them that they will be ready for the coming of the Lord.

So, on the one hand, we hear this voice of John the Baptist challenging us this morning. And on the other hand, we hear the voice of St. Paul encouraging us. And we need both voices, right?

Yeah. We need to be challenged and we need to be encouraged. So, we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord. So, let's look and let's listen.

Let's see what these voices have to say to us this morning. Let's look first at our gospel verses for this morning, found in Luke chapter 3. Now, we notice, looking at verse 3, that John's ministry centered around proclaiming a baptism of repentance.

That's why, of course, he's known as John the Baptist. The text puts it this way in verse 3. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[4:04] And, of course, verse 2 tells us that this call to repentance didn't originate from John's mind. He didn't make this up. But, the word of the Lord came to him.

And that's why he was calling people to repentance. And this baptism of repentance, you know, this can be a little confusing because it's not talking about what we think of as Christian baptism.

It's talking about a different and earlier practice. So, basically, when Gentiles wanted to convert to worshiping and serving the one true God of Israel, they were typically baptized in this sort of way.

Represented a sort of ritual washing or cleansing. Now, John the Baptist, in calling those who heard his message, this baptism of repentance, right, was making a statement.

His statement was basically this. Everyone, not just the Gentiles, needed to repent, needed to be converted, needed to be prepared for the coming of the Lord. In his teaching, and in his baptism of

repentance, he was basically doing two things.

[5:14] He was calling people to account for their disobedience to the law of God. Basically suggesting that they had gone so far off track that they just needed to start over.

And he was pointing people to Jesus, preparing them for the coming ministry of Jesus, preparing them to look to Jesus. And what John is doing here should be pretty familiar to us if we know our Old Testament prophets.

Calling people to account for their violation of God's law. Announcing that Jesus will be coming. Isn't that what the Old Testament prophets?

Those prophets who came before John did? It is. I mean, you can see Isaiah doing the same thing. You can see Jeremiah doing the same thing, right?

And that's why John the Baptist has usually been thought of basically as the last of the line of the Old Testament prophets.

[6:22] The prophets of the Old Covenant. The last prophets who came before Jesus, fulfilled the law, and brought in the New Covenant. So John, as a prophet, was doing what the law does.

The law shows us God's standards, shows us what God expects of us, and shows us that we have fallen short of what God expects, and that we need to repent.

The law, brothers and sisters, shows us that we are sinners in need of a Savior. It does.

It does. Don't we see that? Don't we feel that? When we go through the Ten Commandments, when we look at those, when we examine ourselves in light of God's law. That we've fallen short, that we cannot keep God's perfect standards.

That there is no health in us, and that we need help. John, like the prophets that went before him, like the law itself, that the prophets reminded the people of, shows us that we have sinned, that we need to repent, and that we are so far gone that we are dead.

[7:37] And then, like the other prophets, like the law itself, John points us forward to Jesus, our Savior.

The one whom the Old Testament said was coming. Points us to the one in whom we find health, salvation, forgiveness, and life. John challenges us here to repent.

Challenges us to admit our failures. Challenges us to start over. Challenges us to make a new beginning and look to Jesus.

In our epistle passage from this morning, from Philippians, Paul is doing something similar. He is also directing us to look to Jesus.

But there are some differences, too. Now, you can see the differences really starkly illustrated by looking at statements from each of these guys side by side.

[8:40] John says to his audience, which probably isn't going to turn up on a Christmas card anytime soon, you brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come. Now, on the other hand, look at what Paul says to his audience.

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. See the difference?

Really, it's the difference between the law and grace, right? The law rightly points out that we are under wrath and condemnation because we have dropped the ball.

And that's important because we need to know that. If we don't know that, then we don't know that we need mercy. We don't know that we need Jesus. But grace does more than the law can do.

Grace assures us that Jesus has fulfilled the law. That we have forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. And grace assures us that God will finish what he started in us.

[9:47] And grace gives us the desire and the ability, even if that ability is imperfect in this life, to be obedient to God because grace writes God's law, not on tablets of stone, but on our hearts.

So let's dive a little deeper into what Paul has to say in Philippians. Because he's talking here to those who know the grace of God in Christ Jesus. And that means that what he's saying is pertinent to us.

So let's look again at verse 3. I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. Our whole hope, our sure confidence, is in the grace and power of God.

God is the author of our salvation. God is the one who will bring our salvation to completion. God is saving us. We're not saving ourselves.

[11:00] We're not going on our own steam. We're not pulling ourselves by our own bootstraps. God is doing it. And that's important. That is hugely important.

And it's hugely encouraging. So we have to ask, what does this specifically mean for us in light of Advent? Since, of course, the liturgical seasons matter, we have these readings picked out for a reason.

What does it mean for us in light of Advent? As we remember that Christ is coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Well, conveniently enough, Paul tells us, because the lectionary is set up that way.

Paul writes in verses 9 to 11, It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. So on the day of Christ, when Christ comes again, we see, reflected in Paul's prayer, what the outcome will be on that day for those who know the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

[12:24] What God has started will be brought to completion when those who are in Christ Jesus stand before God pure and blameless, their sins washed away by the blood of Jesus, sanctified and made holy by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, filled with the righteousness of Christ through faith in Christ.

That is where the way of grace, the power of grace, leads, my brothers and sisters.

And it is awesome. So this morning, we hear two voices.

We hear the voice of John the Baptist. And we hear him as a challenge. We hear the voice of St. Paul as encouragement.

Now we hear the law in the voice of John the Baptist, right? We hear that we've sinned, that we need to repent, that we need to start over, and ultimately, that apart from God's mercy in the cross of Christ, we're in trouble.

[13:39] We hear grace in the voice of St. Paul as we consider what God has already done for us in Jesus, what God has started and what God will finish.

That God will actually make us holy and blameless through Jesus Christ in a way that the law could never do. But the two voices, for all their differences, have something in common too.

Both voices direct us to look to our Lord Jesus Christ for our hope and for our salvation. To keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

And we need both voices this Advent season. And always. So we look to Jesus in repentance, realizing that we have fallen short of what God's perfect holiness requires of us.

Realizing that there is no health in us, as the classical prayer book says. Looking to Jesus, realizing that we are sinners in need of a Savior. That we need Him to wash us in His blood.

[14:54] But we also look to Jesus in hope. Thinking of what God has already done for us in Christ. How He has rescued us from our sin and our guilt. And how through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, God is making us holy.

Through what He has started and what He will finish. We remember all of these things in Advent. This time of repentance and this time of hope as we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord. Now, a practical suggestion how we can live this repentance and hope out in daily life, especially during Advent, something I would recommend each of us do if we're not already in the habit, is to do an examination of conscience on a daily basis.

Probably in the evening. In a time where we call to mind God's commandments, especially the Ten Commandments, right? And think about how we've fallen short during the day. Then we recognize those sins.

We confess them. We repent. Then we ask God for the grace to amend our lives. Ask God to make us holy and make us obedient to His will.

[16:16] And so that's what this repentance and hope, that's an example of what it can look like in daily practice. And Advent presents us with a great opportunity to remember to put this stuff into practice.

Now, brothers and sisters, as we look to Jesus in hope, as we draw near to Him, as we wait for His coming, we will find assurance that God will bring to completion what He has started in us and that He will fill us with the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ so that we may be pure and blameless before Him when He comes again.

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.