

Get Ready!

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[0 : 00] Show off the best of Chinese culture and the success of their society. Show. But interestingly, in the mind of the Chinese government, they thought, this is an important visitor.

And we want to prepare well for his visit. We want to be ready for him to come and for him to see. And be received well. Maybe you've done this. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but if you're dating or you just got married and your in-laws come to your apartment or your home for the first time, what do you do?

You clean up. You put the laundry in the basement. Right? The dishes are actually not piled in the sink.

You hang up the clothes that are in your bedroom. You make your bed. Now, some of this may not be revolutionary to some of you. It was to me when I got married.

[1 : 06] It was like, oh, this is good stuff. To prepare for them to come and visit and to be ready for them. Think about how you would respond if your favorite movie star, the president of your university, whoever would hold high esteem in your own heart.

If they're coming to your house, how would you prepare for them? The problem is, of course, as we begin to think about the Advent season and the coming celebration of the coming of Jesus, we are typically unprepared.

I don't know about you, but I am woefully unprepared, particularly this year. I got back from Thanksgiving, and I thought, oh, no, it's Christmas time.

I have not even thought about this. I had to scrounge on December 1st somewhere in the basement to find our little Advent candle wreath and our Advent book that we had set aside to read this year with the kids.

Because I didn't know where it was. I actually spent 20 minutes this week finally thinking about a Christmas list and actually bought one or two presents for my kids.

[2 : 30] I was so proud of myself. I thought I'm ahead of the game. It's only December 1st. It's so easy for us this time of year to be busy.

To be scrambling from one activity to the next. To be trying to do all sorts of things. To prepare or at least just to participate in our cultural celebration of Christmas.

And yet to get distracted from the preparation that we really need in our hearts. And I wonder if that's not always, in fact, a little bit intentional for us.

Sometimes we would prefer the busyness to stilling our hearts before the Lord and thinking about our deeper longings. Sometimes we would prefer the frills and the lights and the wrappings and the tinsels more than we would to think about the message of Christmas.

And the reality of Christmas. And sometimes the pain and the sorrow that comes along with Christmas for some of us.

[3 : 43] It's easy for us sometimes to try to take hold of all these surface things and allow that to drive us. Rather than slowing down and preparing our hearts.

We come to the scriptures this morning. We're beginning a four-week series on the man, John the Baptist.

And his role. And his place in God's plan of preparing the world for the greatest gift. And the first Christmas. We're going to be looking at him for four weeks.

And looking at different aspects of his life. And his ministry. And to think about how it is that God gave us the great gift of this man, John the Baptist.

And how he pointed us to the greatest gift. The gift of Jesus. Jesus. We hope that in looking at John the Baptist in the next couple of weeks.

[4 : 46] That we will together be prepared more to rightly celebrate Christmas as we ought to. We're going to look at Mark chapter 1 verses 1 through 8.

If you want to turn in your pew Bibles. It's page 836. I believe. If you want to turn there. We're going to read this passage and then pray together.

Mark chapter 1 verses 1 through 8. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet. Behold, I send my messenger before your face. Who will prepare your way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. John appeared. Baptizing in the wilderness. [5 : 53] And proclaiming a baptism of repentance. For the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea. And all Jerusalem. Were going out to him.

And were being baptized by him. In the river Jordan. Confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair.

And wore a leather belt around his waist. And ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached saying, After me comes he who is mightier than I. The strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

I have baptized you with water. But he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Let's pray together. Lord. This morning we come to you. And we do confess our unpreparedness. In our hearts. And we come to you. And ask that by your grace. This morning you would help us.

[7 : 00] In these few minutes to look at your word. And to be reminded. And Lord. More than just to be reminded. But Lord. That you would turn us. Lord.

Away. From the busyness. And the scrambling. Of this season. And our culture. Lord. That we might have these moments to be still.

Before you. And before your word. Lord. That you would prepare our hearts. To truly worship you. Lord. That you would prepare the way.

In our hearts. For the Lord to come. Lord. I ask for your help this morning. Lord. Will you speak through me.

Will you. Make all of us. Lord. Ready and willing. To listen to your word. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. As I said.

[7 : 58] We're going to be spending four weeks. On John the Baptist. I get to preach this week. And next week. So this week. I'm going to talk more about. John the Baptist. And his role. And next week.

I'm going to talk more about. His message. So if you're wondering. Why I'm going to completely. Not talk about repentance. And. Baptism. And confession of sin.

Come back next week. That's what we're going to be talking about. So. But we're going to be looking. This morning. A little bit. We're actually going to focus on verse three. As the lens through which.

We're going to think about. Who John the Baptist is. I think what we will see here. Is that God has spoken. In the wilderness of our lives. About a savior who has come.

This is what. This message says. God has spoken. The voice of one. Crying in the wilderness. God has spoken. Into the wilderness of our lives. Just as he spoke. Into the wilderness of.

[8 : 55] The lives of his people. Throughout all of history. And God has spoken about. The coming of his. Of the savior. Prepare ye. The way of the Lord. And I just have to say.

That I love these verses. Because every time I read them. I think of music. Right. I think of. God's spell. Which isn't. A gospel oriented story. But the beginning of it.

Is so powerful. Prepare ye. The way of the Lord. Do you remember that? Do you know that music? Or in Handel's Messiah.

This great bass solo. The voice of him. Who crieth in the wilderness. Prepare ye. The way of the Lord.

Make straight in the desert. A highway. For our God. There you go.

[9 : 55] I do that. I share that with you. Partly because. I want you to listen for it. I want you to listen for these words. As you listen to familiar Christmas carols.

As you listen to the jingles. And the malls. Or whatever. You know. Your Pandora. Or whatever you listen to nowadays. Listen for how much. Even in our secular culture.

These words still resonate. And are still out there. In our culture. And let them remind you. Of the passages. And the truth. That we're going to look at. This morning. That God is still speaking.

To us. About a savior. That he has sent. So let's just briefly look. At these three things. Together. That come out of verse three. One. That God has spoken to us.

And here what we see. Is that. The voice of one. Is talking clearly. About John the Baptist. Do you see how the verse. The verses flow.

[10:51] From one to four. It just says. The good news about Jesus. Okay. And then verse two and three. Are quotes from the Old Testament. God speaking about.

How he is going to raise up one. Who will have this message. Of proclaiming. That the Lord is coming. And to prepare God's people. To receive him. And then verse four.

Bam. John. No introduction. No background. No anything. Just this guy. John. Who's having this ministry.

In the wilderness. Well thankfully. We have other gospels. To tell us a little bit more. About his background. But the first thing. That Mark wants us. To understand.

Is that John. Was sent by God. To prepare the world. For the coming of Jesus. Now as we fill out the picture. We know some things. John was miraculously conceived.

[11:48] In the womb of a barren woman. John was. When John was conceived. The angel spoke to his father. And told him of the role.

That he would play. In preparing the world. By proclaiming. The coming of. Oddly enough. His cousin. It seems. If we get the relationships right. Between Mary and Elizabeth.

We know that. We know that he comes. In the form of a prophet. Did you see in verses. Look in verse six. Right.

This is a really weird detail. Isn't it? In the gospel. Why is it there? Well. It's there. Because in the Old Testament. In first Kings one. You see that.

The prophet Elijah. Wore. Similar garb. And you see. In the book of Ezekiel. How there's this promise. Of another one. Like Elijah. Who will come. And there was this whole expectation.

[12:48] In the Old Testament. That there was a prophet. Yet to come. Greater than Moses. The second coming of Elijah. One who would come. And proclaim.

The day of the Lord. The one who would proclaim. The time when God would finally. Tie up the bow. Of all of his promises. To deliver his people.

And establish his people. And his kingdom forever. Interestingly. When you look at verses two and three.

It's actually a pastiche. It's not all from Isaiah. In case you're wondering. The first half of verse two. In the quotation. Is probably from Exodus 23.

God speaks of an angel. To lead his people. Through the wilderness. To the promised land. And then in Malachi. And then the second part. Preparing your way.

[13:44] Is probably from Malachi. Chapter three. Verse one. Then we get to verse.

To Isaiah 40. We see. And if you. If you were here. When we preached on Isaiah 40. A while ago. Or if you remember. Isaiah 40. Is this massive turning point. In the book. Where the prophet. Turns from. Pronouncing judgment. On the nations. Because of their. Rejection of God. And their. His judgment. Even on his own people.

On Israel. For their rejection of him. And their turning. To other gods. And other idols. And other alliances. And other things to trust in. Verse 40.

Is this turning point. That Antoine read. So well earlier. Comfort. Comfort my people. God is not done.

[14:41] With his people. God will bring. Something new. And this. A voice of one. Crying in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Because the Lord is going to come.

And the Lord is going to come. And make things right. The God. The God who you fear. Has abandoned you. Because of the exile. This is the message.

That Isaiah is speaking. The God that you fear. Has abandoned you. Because you have been taken into exile. Has not abandoned you. And he will come. For you. And he will come.

To rescue you. And he will restore. You to greatness. Of being his people. And he will establish his kingdom. A kingdom that will last.

Forever and ever. And this is. These are all the connotations. That are being brought forward. In this quotation. From Isaiah 40.

[15:35] And so with John the Baptist. Being brought into. There is a message. For.

The people in his day. As well as a message for us. That God has not abandoned you. God has not forgotten you. God is not.

Lost. Lost. In his plan. For you. But as. Second Peter says. He is patient. Not wishing that any would perish.

But that all would come to salvation. The coming. Of John the Baptist. Reminds us. That God has not forgotten us. And in his coming.

It raises a sense of anticipation. In the first century. Look with me again. At verses. Verse five. When John the Baptist came. People were coming to him.

[16:33] And it says that he was by the Jordan. If you can visually picture. The Jordan River runs north south. Jerusalem is slightly. Do I have this right? Yes. Slightly. On the.

Wait. West side of it. And these people were coming. Out of Jerusalem. And out of Judea. Over into. What would be called. The wilderness. Around the Jordan River. They were leaving. The familiar. Religious rights. Of the temple. They were leaving. The structures. Of Judaism. That. Had grown.

Cold. And formal. They were leaving. The political. Places of power. To go into the wilderness. To find. This one.

One. Because the message. That he had. Was of such great hope. And such substance. That they would forsake.

[17:30] All of those things. When they heard. John the Baptist. They thought. God. Is on the move again. God. Is about to do something great.

God. And I'm going to go. And find out. About that. I'm going to go hear. This one. A voice. Crying in the wilderness.

I wonder. If any of you today. Have wondered. Whether God. Has stopped speaking. Whether you've doubted.

Whether God. Has anything to say. To you. This morning. Maybe you grew up. In church. And you've. Known about God. For a long time. But it's also been.

A long time. Since he's ever. Really spoken. To you. In the sense of. You've. Heard his voice. And you've known. His presence. And he's.

[18:23] Been real. Maybe he's become. Distant. In your heart. Maybe he's become. Silent. In your life.

Maybe you've wondered. Is God still at work? And John the Baptist. Reminds us. He is still. At work. God has sent one.

A voice. Crying in the wilderness. And he continues. To speak today. He speaks. Through the word. That tells us. About the word of God. Made flesh.

Jesus. I know I'm preaching. To the choir. Because you're here. And you're hearing. The proclamation. Of God's word. Amen. We're so glad you're here.

Please keep coming back. And doing it. Every Sunday. Every Sunday. The voice crying in the wilderness. Invites us to go.

[19:18] To go and find him. Go and find God. God. God doesn't just speak to us though. He speaks to us. In the wilderness.

The messenger. John the Baptist. Doesn't come. Through the normal channels. He is. One sent from God. And yet.

Where he ministers. Is in the wilderness. And I want to just stop. And spend just a few minutes. Thinking about. What the wilderness has meant. Throughout the Bible. And particularly because. Mark.

Masterfully. Pulls out. Many significant. Places. Where. The wilderness. Has played a role. In the life. Of God's people. Throughout the Bible. Storyline.

So he starts. In Exodus. Do you remember. When God is speaking. To Moses. On Mount Sinai. Where are they? They're in the wilderness.

[20:15] They're somewhere. Between. Egypt. And the promised land. And what do they complain about. On the way? There's no food.

It's a desert. There's no water. There are no streams. No oases. We are in. A wilderness.

Not only are we. In a physical wilderness. Of being in a desert. But we are in a wilderness. Because we are in a place. Where there are many. Strong nations. There are armies.

That we face. There are people. That we are. Encountering. Who don't want us here. So we are. In a wilderness. In the sense of being. In a hostile place.

God speaks. To go. To his people. In the exodus. Wandering. As he's bringing them. In. Out of Egypt. Out of Egypt. And up to the promised land.

[21 : 14] He says. I'm going to go with you. And I'm going to be your protector. And I'm going to. Send an angel. To go before you. In this process. I will take care of you. I will be with you.

And then. I've already mentioned it some. But. The book of Isaiah. Is such a profound book. Because. He not only. Preaches. To.

The northern kingdom. As it's watching. Literally. Historically. The northern part of Israel. Fall to the invasion of Assyria. But looking ahead.

To when the southern kingdom. Will fall to the Babylonian empire. And he's preaching a word. Of condemnation. For their. Faithlessness. But also a word of hope.

Think about what it would be like. If we. Really believed. That God had established. Our nation. To be the place. Where God was going to.

[22 : 13] Display the glory of God. In the world. And then we were conquered. And our government was shattered. And we were an occupied country.

Think about the despair. Think about the questions. And the doubts. That would rise in our hearts. Now God hasn't called America to be that.

But God did call Israel to be that. And so their despair was real. And their questions. And their hopes. Where are you God?

The temple is broken. The throne is empty. That's what now. And God speaks. What now. And God speaks. In that wilderness.

You will see the glory of God again. Prepare the way of the Lord. For he is coming. And then we see.

[23 : 19] Mark quote from Malachi. And if you think about the history. So God brings his people back. From exile. He brings them back. And he rebuilds the temple.

In Ezra. In Nehemiah. There is a king who sits on the throne again. And yet there is a sense. There is a sense that the glory is diminished. There is a wondering of.

God's presence has not returned to the temple. The way it had been before. And there is this sense of. God is this really all there is? Is this really all you have for us?

And when you think of the intertestamental period. Before John the Baptist. Close to 400 years. Where it seems. Silence. God hasn't sent anyone.

To speak. Anywhere. In the temple. In the wilderness. Anywhere. This was the wilderness. Of the post-exilic peoples.

[24 : 19] Up to the time of Christ. And we ought to acknowledge as well. That as Mark is writing this book. It is after the life.

And death. And resurrection of Jesus. He is writing this book. And it is within 20, 30 years probably. Of Jesus' death.

The beginning of the church. It is being established. And yet the church is facing grave challenges. Roman Empire is.

Off and on. Severely persecuting Christians. And Jesus had promised that. Having been raised from the dead. That he will come back.

And establish his kingdom. And the first century Christians. Like us. Are wondering. God where. Where is his coming?

[25 : 16] When is. When is he going to finally do this? God. When are you going to come. And make all things right? When are you going to establish your kingdom. Where justice rolls down like a river?

When are you going to make. All the sad things come untrue. When are you going to establish all these things? That is the wilderness of the early church.

And the wilderness of the church even today. Where we long to see what we have not seen yet. And where we live with just the beginning. Just the foretaste.

Instead of the fullness of what God has promised. Now the interesting thing about this is that. If you. Are feeling like you're in the wilderness. One you're in good company. God's people have often been there. But two. Recognize that God has always used the wilderness.

[26 : 19] In the lives of his people. He's used it as a place of testing. You wandered these 40 years in the wilderness. And your sandals did not wear out. I brought you water from a rock.

And food that you've never seen before. Called manna. God uses wilderness times. To test our hearts. Will we trust God. When we don't see.

The fruitfulness and the fullness of it. It's also a place of judgment. God will strip us bare. During these times.

He will refine our hearts. Those trials of the wilderness. The longings that are unfulfilled. Will push us.

Do we believe. That we are able to live. On God alone. Do we really believe that?

[27 : 19] But the other thing that we see. Is that. It may be a time of testing. And a time of judgment. But it's also a time. Of starting over. It's a time of renewing. Our covenant with God.

It's a time of. As God clears. The decks. Of all of the fullness. Of our. Of our superficial lives. And superficial blessings. And as he helps us. To look at him.

And see. What's really true. And what's really important. There's a chance for renewal. Oh I see what this is about.

It's about you God. First and foremost. It's about you. It's the cliché of that.

Footprints. Poster and poem. Right? You know it well. Right? A poem about. You know. You're walking in the sand. And I look back. And God. It seems like. When you're with me.

[28 : 14] I could see your footprints. Next to me. And then. And then there are times. When in my greatest trials. I only see one set of footprints. And why did you abandon me? God says. Well.

It wasn't that I abandoned you. It's that I was carrying you. It's really cliché. But it's true friends. It's really important to see that.

That in the time. When we get to the bottom. And we have nothing. But God. We find that God. Is everything for us. This is what Jesus found.

When he went to the desert too. Satan came and tempted him. With the greatest glories. But not by God's means. And Jesus says.

No. No. I want God. I want all of God. And all of his ways. I will. And he quotes scripture again and again. To say. I will not.

[29 : 17] Leave or forsake. God. And how he has called me to do this. I will walk the path. That he has. Set before me. There is no shortcut.

And in doing so. He affirmed his sonship. He renewed. Had a refreshment. Of his relationship with God. Not that it had been lacking before.

But it was an affirmation. And a confirmation of it. God. I wonder friends. Whether for some of you. This season. Feels like the worst wilderness of all.

You wonder if God has abandoned you. You wonder why this trial. Doesn't end. You wonder why the darkness. Doesn't lift. And it's particularly hard.

This time of year. I know Nick mentioned it earlier. But this is what our longest night service. On the 17th in the evening is meant for. To acknowledge that our celebration. Of Christmas.

[30 : 23] And our acknowledgement. Of the pain. And the loneliness. Of those of us. Who have suffered loss. Can be together. In a worship service. Focused on God.

And the great gift. That he's given us in Jesus. Where there's an honest acknowledgement. And an expression of hope. God has not only sent.

One to speak to us. But he has spoken to us. In the wilderness of our lives. And finally. He speaks to us. About the coming. Savior. Nick's going to preach a whole sermon on this.

In two weeks. So I'm just going to. Give a brief. And lead us to the table. On this. But. But I want you to see that Mark. When he begins this account. He starts with chapter one.

Or with verse one. Look with me at verse one again. The beginning of the gospel. And gospel just means good news. The beginning of the good news. Of Jesus Christ. The son of God.

[31 : 29] And if you read through. The rest of the gospel of Mark. You would realize that. For all the things that Mark wants you to know. Being the son of God. Is one of the most important things.

Maybe the most important thing. That he wants you to see. About who Jesus is. It's fascinating. In his baptism. In chapter one.

Verse eleven. You see God coming and saying. This is my son. With whom I am well pleased. In chapter three. Verse eleven. In chapter five. Verse seven.

The demons. Whom he casts out of people. Cry out. You are the son of God. They acknowledge him. For who he is. On the mount of transfiguration.

When Jesus takes John. And Peter. And James. And goes up on the mountain. And there's this. Vision. This transformation. And a voice from heaven.

[32 : 26] Affirms. What was said at the baptism. This is my son. In whom I am well pleased. In chapter fourteen.

Verse sixty one. When the high priest. Is questioning Jesus. He says. Are you the son of God? And Jesus says. You have said that I am. Which means yes.

By the way. That's not him talking around the bush. It's the way he says. Yes. I am. The son of God. It is as you have said. And then.

As he hangs upon the cross. And offers up his spirit for us. And offers up his life for us. Chapter fifteen. Verse thirty nine.

The Roman. Gentile guard. The prison guard. Who was there simply to. Restrain the crowds. And make sure.

[33 : 20] That the execution. Was carried out. Watch as Jesus die. And he says. Surely this man. Was. The son.

Of God. And this is the anticipation. This is the one. Whose way.

Is meant to be prepared. John the Baptist. Is saying. There is one coming after me. Who is greater than me. One for whom. As great as you think I am.

I am not worthy. To take. The form of the lowliest servant. Who would kneel down. And take off. Untie the laces of his sandals.

A job that wouldn't even be given. To a Jewish servant. Would only be given. To a Gentile servant. In a Jewish household. Compared to the one.

[34 : 17] Who is coming after me. John the Baptist says. I am like that. The one who is coming after me. Will do a much greater thing. Because the baptism. I give you.

Is a baptism of repentance. It washes your skin. But he is going to come. And baptize you. With the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit. Will wash your soul.

Clean from your sin. This is the one. Who is coming. This is the one. Whom John has been sent.

To prepare the way. By his proclamation. Of a message. Of repentance. And faith. By his act.

Of baptizing people. He is saying. There is one who is coming. Who is going to do. So much more. Than what I am doing to you. Today. Today. Says prepare.

[35 : 18] Prepare for his coming. You have heard it from me. That I. I am just one. Who has come to.

Send it to you. I found this great quote. Says that since the time. Of Bernard of Clairvaux. Christians have spoken. Of the three comings.

Of Christ. He comes in the flesh. In Bethlehem. He comes in the hearts. Of believers. Daily. And he comes in glory.

At the end of time. Friends. As we celebrate Advent. Advent. Advent. Advent simply means. He's coming. He's coming to.

Us. He has already come to us. In the first Christmas. In the incarnation. In the life and death and resurrection. That Jesus had for us.

[36 : 16] That Jesus has done for us. Two thousand years ago. He will come again. And there is a hope that we have. Looking ahead.

That Jesus will come back. And he will finally fulfill. All of those promises. To make all things new. And to make all wrongs right. And to deliver us from our sin.

And from our fallen world. Where we will live. In a renewed world with him. Where God will dwell among his people. What a great glory that is.

But friends. The invitation today. Is that. Jesus wants to come to us now. In our hearts. Will you prepare room.

In your heart for him. This Advent season. Maybe some of you are here. And you are. Like I mentioned earlier.

[37 : 16] In the service. Maybe church has become. A pattern for you. A cultural practice. But there has been no real. Relationship with Jesus. Friends.

Let this Advent season. Be an invitation for you. To seek him again. And to prepare your heart. To let him come in. Maybe for some of you.

You know you have believed in him. But you have lost sight of him. In the wilderness. Let Jesus come. Minister to you.

Comfort you. Bring you the hope. Of his presence. And his salvation. Prepare you the way of the Lord.

In your own heart. This day. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord.

[38 : 22] I ask this morning. You would do this. Holy Spirit. I ask that you would be at work. Even now. Lord. For in the quietness. And the stillness. Of this. Moment.

And Lord. In our celebration. Of the Lord's table. Lord. That we would. See this as a time. Lord. To be still before you. And we ask that you would work in our hearts.

Do what you need to do. Lord. That our hearts would be. Ready. For you to come. To minister to us. To remind us of who you are.

What you have done for us. Lord. That we would know. That we have not been abandoned. By God. But that in fact. That you have come. To rescue us.

And make us yours. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.