

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

The Forerunner of Christ

By
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Mark 1:1-8 Cf. Matthew 3:1-12

¹The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; ³ THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.' "

⁴John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. ⁷And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. ⁸"I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist occupies a very important place in the program of redemption. Long before he was born Isaiah prophesied that he would appear on the scene of history. His job was to clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness, to make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

We learn two important truths from the ministry of John the Baptist, truths that are essential for any person to know in order to be saved from God's wrath against sin.

I. We Learn That God Became Incarnate In Jesus

When John began to preach it signaled the coming of the Son of God. He was the long-prophesied forerunner of the Lord. Both John the Baptist and Jesus were miracle babies at their birth. In the case of John his parents were beyond the age of child-bearing when the angel Gabriel came to his father, Zacharias while he was performing his priestly service in the temple and told him that his prayers had been heard and that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son.

The angel also told him some things that help us understand the ministry of John the Baptist. In Luke 1:14-17 ¹⁴"You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. ¹⁶"And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷"It is he who will go as a *forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:14-17

His mother Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary who

also had a visit from the angel Gabriel when Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John the Baptist. The miracle in her case was that she was a virgin. So John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus were only six months apart in age and they were kinsmen, cousins.

But John knew by the Spirit of God that he was the herald of the Messiah. He said during his ministry 1:7-8} **"After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. ⁸"I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

The second thing we learn from John the Baptist is that repentance is a condition of entering the kingdom of God. We must repent in order to know the forgiveness of sins. The people that were to come to know Jesus had to have their hearts prepared to receive him by the kind of preaching John did.

Isn't it interesting that God did not send a silver-tongued orator when he wanted the people to repent? John was not a pleasant speaking announcer like we hear in TV commercials. He was a plainspoken yet authoritative personality. He got right to the point and he didn't soften it up for those who came to hear him. Nor was he dressed like most preachers you see today. He wasn't in a business suit or a robe. He had on a camel's hair garment, very plain and unstylish. He had a leather belt around his waist, probably one of those wide belts like Texans wear. He must have appeared strange to most folks. And his diet is mentioned. He just ate honey and locusts.

The Arabs prepare locusts for food by using the thorax of the locust, which contain the great wing muscles. They pull off the head, which brings with it the mass of the viscera and they remove the tail, wings and legs. They can then eat the thorax or dry them and eat them during the lean season. This may have been the way John the Baptist did it. Locusts constitute one of the clean foods allowed the children of Israel by the Law of Moses (Lev. 11:21f)

But what is repentance? First of all repentance begins with an honest, critical self-examination. The Baptist said, **MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT**. We are to look within ourselves and discover the crooked, the deceitful, the dishonest things we have done. We are to renounce those things, confess those things, have done with those things that we know in our heart are sinful.

The story is told of a lady who went into a garden to gather some flowers. She came upon a rose bush that was heavy with beautiful roses. There was one rose that seemed above all the rest in beauty, so she reached far over to pluck it. Just as she did a black snake, which was hidden in the bush, wrapped itself around her arm. She was frightened to death. She ran from the garden screaming, almost in hysterics. All that day she was in a state of fear. She couldn't get over the experience. It was a long time before she quieted down. Now she had such a hatred for all snakes that she wasn't able to even look at one, even a dead one. No one could persuade her to venture into a cluster of bushes, even to pluck a beautiful rose.

Now this is the way a sinner acts who truly repents of his sins. He thinks of sin as that serpent like a boa constrictor that once coiled around his body. He hates it. He dreads it. He flees from it. He dreads the places it inhabits. He does not willingly go into the haunts of sin. He will no more play with sin than this lady would fondle a snake.

A Biblical example of repentance is the city of Nineveh after Jonah had gone there preaching. The king of Nineveh got up from his throne, laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on ashes. Then he issued a proclamation and it said, **"In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸"But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. ⁹"Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."**

Jon. 3:7-:9

The king didn't even have the promise of forgiveness, but such was his faith in God's mercy that he believed if there was sincere and honest turning away from a sinful life that God would spare the city. And God did.

II. You Must Be Willing To Change

John saw those Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him for baptism and he said to them, **"You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (Matt 3:7)**

What is it that keeps us from repenting? It may come down to two small voices deep in our consciousness -- two small voices that speak to us all during our waking hours. The first voice tells us "we are too good to change." That was the problem of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They thought they were good enough already. They may have been willing to be baptized but unwilling to repent.

They were like the woman who was bitten by a mad dog and it looked as if she were going to die from rabies. The doctor told her she had better make her will. Taking her pen and paper she began to write; in fact she wrote and wrote. Finally the doctor said, "That is surely a long will you're making." She snorted, "Will nothing! I'm making a list of all the people I'm going to bite!"

Like many people, she really did not want to change. Repentance means changing. We want the world to change, but not our attitudes, our habits, our life style.

The story is told of two men sitting beside one another at a revival meeting. One was very poor and ragged, the other rich and well dressed. When the invitation was given to receive Christ the poor man responded immediately. The rich man, though under great conviction waited until the end of the week to finally confess his sin and accept the grace of God in Christ.

Later the rich man asked the poor man how he could make up his mind so quickly. The poor man looked at him and said, "There comes along a prince who wishes to give you a new coat; you look at your own and say it looks pretty good, it will do a little longer. I look at mine, torn and tattered, good for nothing, and I accept the gift.

But there is another voice that speaks to many of us. It is a voice that says we are too bad to change. I won't ask you to hold up your hand if you have ever bought a self-help book or if you have ever gone on a diet or made a New Year's resolution. What is it that defeats many of us when we try to make a meaningful change in our lives? Isn't it a small voice that says, you can't do it? You haven't got what it takes. You never see anything through to completion. You're irresponsible. You're a bum. You'll never make it. For some of us there is a voice that says, "you are too good to change." But for many more of us there is a voice that says, "You are too bad to change."

The change that comes about is because God gives us a new power to live for Him. The Baptist said that those who repent are baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. He will gather the wheat into his barn but the chaff will be burned up with unquenchable fire. Coming to Christ brings into our lives the Holy Spirit who does a work of cleansing and renewal. Don't listen to that voice that says, "You are too good, or you are too bad. Listen to the One who said, **12But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, John 1:12**

His Spirit works within to purge away sin, to cleanse the soul from all defilement. But there must be that readiness to be changed, that desire to repent.

In the stage play; *The Man of La Mancha*, the idealist, Don Quixote meets a harlot named Aldonza. He tells her, "You will be my lady," and then he gives her a new name, Dulcinea. She laughs scornfully, but he keeps affirming her and declaring her to be what he wants her to be. When she appears

on stage later, hysterical and disheveled, after having been raped, she again hears the voice of Quixote saying, "My Lady."

"Don't call me your lady," she says. "I was born in a ditch by a mother who left me there naked and cold and too hungry to cry. I never blamed her. I'm sure she left hoping I'd have the good sense to die. Oh, don't call me a lady," she screams. "I'm only a kitchen slut reeking with sweat. A strumpet man use and forget. Don't call me a lady; I'm only Aldonza. I am nothing at all."

As she runs off into the night, Don Quixote calls after her, "But you are my lady Dulcinea !."

At the end of the play the old Quixote is dying, scorned, laughed at, rejected. Suddenly to his side comes what appears to be a Spanish Queen in a beautiful garment studded with lace. She is beautiful and proud. When the old man asks, "Who are you?" she responds, "Don't you remember? You called me your lady. You gave me a new name. My name is Dulcinea."

Christ gives us a new name, a new heart, a new will. He transforms us by his power into a beautiful person fit for heaven. He puts faith into our heart and courage into our soul. Our confidence is not in ourselves but in Him and His Word to us... Behold, I make all things new. If any man is in Christ he is a new creature; old things have passed away, all things have become new.

There needs to be a John the Baptist who prepares us for Jesus Christ. We need to look at ourselves and repent, but as we repent we come to Him who is able to take away our sins and make us into someone fit for heaven. We become a child of the King and we are robed in His robe of righteousness.

Have you heard the voice of John the Baptist saying, **MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.** ' " Have you turned to the one who came after him, who is greater than he, who has the power to transform you into a new person? Come to him today. Repent of sins and come to Him right now.

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Please be gracious to forgive typos and errors of expression. These notes are faithful approximations of what has been preached. May God be glorified in the preaching of His Word.

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