

“Prepare”

12-06-15

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by using a proclamation which joined him with the prophets before him. Today, we join the church on earth proclaiming that Jesus will be coming again, and our message remains the same as John's. That message is 'Prepare!' Jesus is coming soon. How are you preparing for His coming, not just at Christmas, but also His coming again?

Open to Luke 3. John the Baptist called people to repentance. He called the people to prepare themselves for the Messiah's arrival. How were they to prepare themselves? John gave four ways to prepare for Jesus to come, and they're the same for us. **We Confess Our Sins to God.** Verse 3, *“And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*

From time to time, we need to be reminded of our sinfulness. We might live good, honest lives, but we're still sinners! We had a lotus tree in our backyard. The trunk had split and was held together by a string of lights we had used to decorate the yard for our daughter and son-in-law's wedding rehearsal. The tree had to come down, so the three of us cut it down and had someone come in and dig out the trunk.

We thought we were done! We were deceived! Even though we cut it down two years ago, we're still digging out roots because otherwise, we have little trees growing all over the yard. Sin is a lot like that tree. It's hard to get rid of. You can remove the acts of sin from your life, but the root remains. As long as the root remains, it can sprout new growth at any moment.

When we confess and repent, it means that we agree with God that we have sin. You may not be able to think of a sinful act right now, but you still have a sinful nature you must bring before God every day. We all do. Only God can keep the root of sin dormant.

Repentance also means turning away from sin. When John addressed the Pharisees who were coming to hear him, he condemned them for being hypocrites. Look at verses 7-9, *“He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

Sin can be very subtle. If we don't confess our sinful nature everyday, we'll find ourselves slowly moving away from God. We'll wake up one day and ask, “How did I ever get here?”

After we confess our sin and repent, **We Receive Forgiveness From God.** The psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75% of them could walk out the next day! We have a deep need to know that we are forgiven.

What God forgives, He forgets! The problem with forgiveness is that while God may forget our sin, we don't. We allow the thought of the sin haunt us and bring us continued guilt. In a dream, Martin Luther found himself being attacked by Satan.

The devil unrolled a long scroll containing a list of Luther's sins, and held it before him. On reaching the end of the scroll Luther asked the devil, "Is that all?" "No," came the reply, and a second scroll was thrust in front of him. Then, after a second came a third. But now the devil had no more. "You've forgotten something," Luther exclaimed triumphantly. "Quickly write on each of them, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son cleanses me from all sins!'" When you accept Jesus to be your Savior and Redeemer, all your sin is forgiven!

To prepare for the coming of Christ we confess our sin and receive forgiveness from God, and then, **We Live A Holy Life**. Verses 10-14, *"And the crowds asked him, 'What then shall we do?' And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.' Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than you are authorized to do.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.'"*

John knew what the Law of God taught. He knew the Shema from the Torah: *Hear, O, Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.* John also knew Leviticus 19:18, which reads *"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."*

Being a Christian begins with a relationship with Jesus out of which you also love the people God brings into your life. How do you show your love for them? By showing the love of Christ when you do things that meet the needs of the people around you. Others need to see Jesus through you!

As we live holy lives, **We Expect the Lord to Come Anytime**. Philippians 1:6 reminds us, *"And 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."* Rather than fearing what's to come, we're to be faithful until Christ returns. Instead of fearing the dark, we're to be lights as we watch and wait!

Confess your shortcomings to Jesus Christ, and then rejoice, because He forgives you all of your sins. *"I forgive you,"* Christ says. *"I died on the cross for all those faults you have. I was punished for your weaknesses. I forgive you."* And that's when you can experience true Christian joy! And as Christ forgives you, He also gives you strength to forgive others. He'll strengthen you to be a brand new person. That's repentance. That's what John the Baptist was talking about pointing the people to Christ as he talked in verse 6: *"All mankind will see God's salvation."* Jesus Christ is God's salvation!

On Christmas Eve, the shepherds found Him in the most humble stable. And still today, if you want to see God's salvation, Jesus Christ, you'll find Him here in the humble Word of God. Here in the humble Sacrament of Baptism. Here in the Lord's

Supper. Here in humble bread and wine, you'll find God's salvation, the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

Are you prepared for Jesus Christ? Are you prepared to celebrate His first coming? Are you ready to receive Him, when He comes again in all of His glory? If you listen closely, over the songs about Rudolph and Frosty and Santa, you'll hear a voice of one calling in the desert, "*Prepare the way of the Lord.*" That's the message of Advent!

Let Jesus Christ take away your sins, and change the direction of your life. Let Him prepare you for the day you'll see Him, not in a Christmas card, or a manger scene, but face to face forever!