

“A U-Turn!”

12-07-14

Open to Mark 1. John was a Messenger. It wasn't him that was the most important, it was the One he was talking about. He didn't come on his own, he was sent to be there. He had a direct purpose! Verses 1-3, *“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’ — ‘a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”*

John was to Prepare. John's job was to make people ready for the coming of Jesus. John made the people ready by preaching a baptism of repentance. He wanted the people to know, and to believe that they were sinners in the eyes of God, and that they needed the redemption that was coming in Jesus Christ.

John was asking the people to look at their own lives, and see their need for the One who was coming. John the Baptist was asking people to look at their lives of sin, and then repent, and to turn away from their sins.

Look at verses 4-6, *“And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.”*

Did you notice? John the Baptist was a little different! He wasn't in the middle of the city, he was out in the Wilderness. The wilderness comes up a lot in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years on their way to the Promised Land because of their sins. Just after Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Each of us has our own wildernesses caused by our sin. It's those desolate, lonely places when we can't see God, and we feel like He's abandoned us. But it's in that kind of environment that John went out Baptizing the people who came to him. This was according to Jesus in His Great Commission where He commanded us to go to all nations proclaiming Him and baptizing them in His name! John was the area of where the Jordan River.

John's whole message was a Message of Repentance. With the Holy Spirit's power, he was able to help people see through their own guilt, and see their sin and their need for forgiveness!

We're to repent, and turn away from those sins that hinder our work for Jesus. We don't do this to make ourselves worthy of Jesus, but because of His love and forgiveness for us, our repentance happens. Repentance is a turning point of our whole life toward God. The one thing we need to realize is that God acted first!

In our act of repentance, we're declaring that we're no longer relying on ourselves, but we're surrendering to God, so that He will, through the waters of your Baptism, recreate a new you, a you who's closer to the image God created you to be at the beginning of time. When you repent and turn, you're making a U-turn back to what God intended for you to be.

Repentance isn't like the man who couldn't sleep because he'd cheated the IRS on his income taxes. He sent \$150 to the IRS with a note that said, “If I still can't sleep, I'll send the rest.”

The Bible makes it very clear that God's not satisfied with anything less than perfection. Jesus Christ says, *“Be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”* But you

and I know that this isn't the case. We're not perfect. And, according to the Word of God, if you're not perfect, then you're sinful! That's why John the Baptist would say to you, "Repent!"

Do you remember what it means to repent? There are three "R's" to repentance. The first one is Recognizing Your Sin. Verse 5 tells us that this is what those first century Christians did: "*The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him, confessing their sins*".

Look back on your conversations, on the way you've dealt with people around you. Think about your relationship with God. Think about your thoughts. Where have you been less than perfect? Recognize your sin, and confess your sin to Christ.

The second "R," and is Receiving Forgiveness from God. Verse 4 talks about a "*baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*." The Lord God Almighty forgives you for all your imperfections. Because of Christ, your sins are gone. God holds no grudges, keeps no record of wrongs. He forgives you completely.

The people that came out to John received God's forgiveness through the Sacrament of Baptism. Today, you also confess and receive that same forgiveness, when you're baptized, and every time you hear God's forgiveness spoken to you, especially as you receive His body and blood.

The final "R" is Reforming Your Life. After you've been forgiven for disobeying God, doing wrong things, and making excuses, you begin to obey, not because you have to, but because you want to! You change from a self-centered worshiper of pleasure to an others-centered worshiper of God. The final "R" of repentance is when your life is reformed, changed, from how it was before.

But how do you do this? Where can you find strength to change, to reform your life? What would John the Baptist say to you? Look at verses 7, "*After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.*"

Jesus' the one who'll strengthen you and change you into a new person, a new creation. John said in verse 8, "*I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*" Someone greater, more powerful, more amazing than anyone that's ever lived, is coming. He'll demonstrate His power in all kinds of ways. His death. His resurrection. His gift of the Holy Spirit and faith, hope, and love to you.

Let your Advent preparation be a time to '*Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.*' Repent! Receive forgiveness! Make a U-Turn toward Him, Jesus Christ, the babe in the manger, your Savior!