
“What Have YOU Heard?”

Matthew 3:1-12

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’

4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.’

11 ‘I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’”

Matthew 3:1-12 (NIV)

Children’s Sermon: A Candle

Why do we have candles for Advent? We have candles because they remind us to prepare for Jesus’ coming.

But there’s another reason we have candles. Let me know you. (Show the candle). I’m going to do a little magic. Abracadabra! (Light the match). See this candle? Now, watch this (light the candle). Presto!

What happened? That’s right! The candle lit. There was a big change that happened to that candle, right? Before it wasn’t lit. It was just dark and useless. But after lighting the candle, it’s bright and useful. And why is it so useful? Because it made a big change.

That’s what Advent is about. Making a big change. That’s what John the Baptist wanted people to do. He wanted them to change their lives for Jesus.

Should we change our lives for Jesus today? Of course! All we need is a little light, a little spark. Do you have that spark? Yes, you do! It’s in your heart. It’s called faith. When you were baptized, God lit a match that changes our hearts so that we’re His children.

Aren’t you glad you’re God’s child? I know I am. And do you know why God made you His child? Only because He loves you. And, now that Jesus is coming, why should we prepare for Him? Because we love Him too.

John the Baptist said, “Prepare the way for the Lord!” If a match can change a candle, let’s let God’s love change us.

Sermon:

Have you heard? For all of you golfers out there (I hope I’m not the only one), they’ve finally found a simple solution to become a professional. Just listen!

Once a player has mastered the grip and stance, all he has to bear in mind, in the brief two-second interval it takes to swing, is to keep his left elbow pointed in toward the left hip and his right arm loose and closer to the body than the left and take the club head past his right knee and then break the wrists at just the right instant while the left arm is still traveling straight back from the ball and the right arm stays glued to the body and the hips come around in a perfect circle and meanwhile everything is mucked up unless the weight is 60 percent on the left foot and 40 percent on the right not an ounce more or less and at just the right point in the turn the left knee bends in toward the right in a dragging motion until the left heel comes off the ground but not too far and be sure the hands are over the right foot but not on the toe more than the heel except that the left side of the right foot is tilted off the ground but not too far and be sure the hands at the top of the swing are high and the shaft points along a line parallel with the ground and if its a downhill lie The shaft is supposed to be pointed downhill too and pause at the top of the swing and count one, jerk the left arm straight down like a bell ringer yanking a belfry rope and don't uncock the wrists too soon and pull the left hip around in a circle but don't let the shoulders turn with the hips, they have to be facing the hole and now transfer the weight 60 percent to the left foot and 40 percent to the right not an ounce more or less and tilt the left foot now so the right side of it is straight that's the one you hit against watch out for the left hand, it's supposed to be extended but not too stiff or the shot won't go anywhere and don't let it get loose or you will hook and let the wrists uncock but don't force them or you'll smother the shot and don't break too soon but keep your head down then hit the ball!

That's all there is to it!!

Believe it or not, that’s easy compared to what John the Baptist was asking people to do. He wasn’t preaching about golf. He was preaching about life—your life and my life. And He was preaching about how—and why—we need to change it.

And this is what he said,

“‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

Easily said, hard to do. It can be easy to talk the talk, but not walk the walk. John knew that. That’s why he not only preached, “Prepare the way for the Lord,” but he also lived the part.

First, notice what he was wearing!

4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Second, notice to whom He was preaching: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These were the most callous, insensitive, hypocritical lot in the region.

Third, notice what he told them.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.'

Somehow, whenever I read these words, I don't get the impression that John is preaching to the choir. He's preaching to sinners—callous sinners—and telling them, “God has had enough!” “The ax is already at the root,” John proclaimed, and if you don't repent you “will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Frankly, those aren't the kind of words I like to say from the pulpit. But, they are words which God calls every prophet to proclaim. “God has had enough!” “The ax is at the root!” and “You will be cut down and thrown into the fire!”

Each year, as we celebrate Advent, these words are spoken. The question is, “Have you heard them?”

“Hearing,” of course, is not just a matter of receiving auditory signals. It's a matter of hearing, listening, pondering and applying what was heard in our daily lives. That's the hard part, right? But it can be done. Let me illustrate.

Have you heard about the Sunday school teacher who was teaching the story about Jonah and the whale? As she was teaching, the Sunday School teacher asked one of her students,

"Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the Ark?"

"No," replied Johnny. "How could he, with just two worms?"

You laughed, didn't you! You responded. Why did you respond? It was just because the joke was funny. It was because you heard it, listened to it, pondered it (if even for a moment), and responded.

If we can hear a joke and respond appropriately, maybe this Advent God is hoping that we will hear His word—and hear John the Baptist's words—and respond appropriately! “Prepare the way of the Lord! Make His paths straight!” John declared. “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”

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What area or areas of your life need straightening out? What things in your life are most crooked, confused and contorted. Left to ourselves, we will almost certainly discover that what Sir Walter Scott wrote is true.

"Oh the tangled webs we weave, when first we practice to deceive."

All of us are caught in that tangled web, aren't we. And no matter how tangled and enmeshed in that web we may be, John the Baptist calls us to come out of that web...and prepare our hearts to meet Jesus.

If you thought that the candle in the children's sermon went through great pain to change, don't think that you can escape it, either.

By now, I hope you hear what I am saying, because there's one more important thing I must ask. Have you heard of Jesus' love for you?"

That love tells us that no matter how entangled, enmeshed and mixed up our lives might be and awry our actions and intentions might have gone, that the real reason to prepare the way for Jesus is so that he can come into our lives...and forgive, redeem and restore us.

One of my favorite Christmas songs is, "Do you hear what I hear?"

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty king, do you know what I know
In your palace warm, mighty king, do you know what I know
A Child, a Child shivers in the cold
Let us bring Him silver and gold Let us bring Him silver and gold

Said the king to the people everywhere, listen to what I say
Pray for peace, people everywhere! listen to what I say
The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night
He will bring us goodness and light
He will bring us goodness and light

Listen to what I say: Jesus is coming to bring you goodness and light. Prepare the way! Light the candle of your soul and open your hearts to Him this Advent!

Amen.

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