

Mark 1:1-8
Advent 2; December 6, 2020

2020 has been quite a year, hasn't it? So, many things look different. For example, how people shop has changed dramatically during 2020. People have changed where they go and how they will get there. People have changed their habits of going out to eat; where they will travel.

One of the biggest changes that have happened for some people is how they prepared to celebrate Thanksgiving and how they will prepare to celebrate Christmas. For many families, Thanksgiving is usually a time to be together as a family. If families did get together, it was on a much smaller scale than any other Thanksgiving in the past. Yet, even if you hosted a Thanksgiving celebration that was small, there were still preparations that needed to be accomplished. My guess is that you still vacuumed the carpets. You might still have mopped the floor. Food needed to be bought and made. Maybe it changed to what extent you went to get things ready for Thanksgiving, preparations still needed to be made.

As you look back on Thanksgiving 2020, one can't help but wonder how 2020 will affect the way that we celebrate Christmas of 2020. With all the restrictions and guidelines in place around us, it will change how Christmas is celebrated. Yet, there are some things that most people will do to try to have a feeling of Christmas being normal. People are still going to setup a Christmas tree. Gifts will still be purchased and given, even if it is done through Amazon or online. Gifts may still be wrapped but given in a much different way. Food will still be prepared for Christmas dinner, even if it is just for your own family. All these preparations will be done to make Christmas seem to be normal even though it is not.

So, what's your expectation of Christmas 2020? I think all of us have some kind of picture in our minds of how the perfect Christmas should look like. Even though Christmas 2020 will look different, it doesn't mean that we don't have a picture in our mind. Many families have their own traditions of Christmas. Probably most of us will try to celebrate at least some of those family traditions. All of those family traditions have one thing in mind. They are all designed to bring families closer to each other. The message of Christmas will also draw us closer to Jesus as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

That was what the message of John the Baptist was meant to do. His message was meant to bring people closer to Jesus. Everything that John did was meant to point the finger at Jesus. What a site that John the Baptist must have been. He is living in a desert. He is wearing clothes made from the rough hair of a camel and eating grasshoppers and honey in the desert. If you were to just look at his outward appearance, this guy must have looked really weird. Yet, it wasn't his looks that were bringing people out to the desert to see him. They were coming to hear his message. It was a message that was so different from the messages that they were hearing in the temple. Instead of being taught that in order to have a right relationship with God that they needed to follow a whole bunch of rules. There is someone who is coming soon who will fix the problem of sin.

Mark begins his Gospel and gets right to the point. He doesn't spend any time talking about the birth of Jesus. He starts with the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus. **"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.'"**

When a King would travel through a town, he would send a messenger or a herald to go into that town ahead of him. His job was simple. He would make sure that the town would look like a town that was fit for a king. The potholes in the road would be filled. The road straightened up. The garbage removed. In a similar way, that was the job of John the Baptist. However, John's job of preparing the way for Jesus had nothing to do with the way things looked on the outward side. It had everything to do with what was in the heart.

What do you want to hear? Good news or the bad news? By far, most people want to hear the bad news first. They answer that way because they hope that the good news will offset the bad news that they will hear first. So, you might as well get the bad news out of the way. But Mark begins his Gospel in the Good News first. **“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.”** Mark’s point is simple. This Messiah, this Jesus is going to be the Son of God. This is the one that the entire old testament was speaking about. This is the one who was promised in the Garden of Eden. This is the one who was promised to Abraham, Moses and David. This is the one that the great prophet of God, Isaiah spoke about. This savior who is spoken about the entire Old Testament isn’t just coming in the future. He is here now.

Why did Jesus need to come? He had to come because of the bad news of the human heart. This human heart is filled with sin. This human heart is dark inside. This human heart cannot be fixed by anyone of us. The good news is that at the very beginning when sin entered this world, God had a plan to fix that sinful heart. He calls us to repentance. He moves us to be sorry for our sin, and then he brings us to trust in his forgiveness. **“And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** What if you had planned a big party, but forgot one tiny detail? What if you forgot to invite the guests? God invites sinners to be his guest in heaven. Why has God invited us? Repentance is a miracle of God’s amazing grace. How did God fix the problem of sinful hearts? He accomplished it through the perfect life, innocent death and suffering, and resurrection of Jesus.

2020 will soon be over. Our preparations for Christmas will be done and over. Christmas 2020 will soon be over. But what that baby brought into this world will not be over. The repentance that he causes to happen in our sinful hearts will continue till he returns again. His promise of the forgiveness of sins will be there for us. May God help us to trust this **“good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.”** Amen.