

Sermon for Advent 2 (Series A)

Text: Matthew 3:1-12

Preached on 12-09-2007

Introduction:

How are your Christmas preparations coming? Are you getting everything done? Do you have presents bought for everyone on your list? Do you have all those gifts wrapped? Is the tree up? Are the lights on the house? Are you going out of town for the holidays? If so, do you have your travel plans made? Or perhaps you have guests coming to your place for Christmas. If so, are you prepared for their arrival? Do you have the house cleaned, the meals planned, and the guest room all ready to go? Without a doubt, there is a lot to do to get ready for Christmas. A lot of preparations need to be made. But even if we do not have relatives coming over for Christmas, we still all have a very important guest coming very soon: The baby Jesus! For that reason, the most important thing to prepare this Advent season is ourselves. We want to prepare our hearts for Jesus' return.

A man by the name of John, better known as John the Baptist, helped the people of his day to do that very thing. He helped them prepare their hearts for Jesus' arrival by preaching a message of repentance. And really John the Baptist helps us to do the same thing today. He helps us to...

Theme: Make the Proper Preparations!

Part I: By turning away from our sin

Part II: By turning towards our Savior

Part I: By turning away from our sin

People went out from much of Judea to hear John preach. No doubt the crowds started out small, but they kept on growing. As the people were cut to the heart, they were baptized by John. But John did not baptize everyone who came to him. When many Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized, John refused. He said to them, **“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (vv. 7-8)**. Wow! Those were some pretty strong words for the top religious leaders of the Jews. Why was John so harsh? He knew exactly what these “so-called” religious leaders were after. And it had nothing to do with being genuinely sorry for their sins. Rather, they were hoping to hold on to their power and prestige by going along with the crowd. Like always, they were only interested in winning the crowd's approval. But they weren't able to deceive John!

I'm pretty certain that, "**Brood of vipers**" (v. 7) is not a term of endearment. Rather, it is a term that identified these Pharisees and Sadducees as children of the devil. We all know that the devil took the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden. That's basically what John was calling these people, a bunch of little serpents (or devils). Just as serpents scurry away from a brush fire, so these Pharisees and Sadducees were also trying to escape God's judgment. But the truth was that these men were no more than lifeless, "**Stones**" (v. 9). There was no real love of God in their hearts, no real love for His Word. They were merely going through the motions of Baptism and John knew it. To be baptized in such a mocking state of mind would have only increased their guilt before God. That is why John urged them to turn away from their sin.

Application:

God kept His promise to send a forerunner, one who would prepare the way for the coming Messiah. In fact, God has faithfully kept every promise He's ever made. For that reason, we know that He will keep His promise about Christ's second coming as well. And so, we too better *Make the Proper Preparations* for Jesus' arrival! But how can we do that? Especially when all the ads, flyers, radio spots, and commercials are suggesting that we have to go out and buy more stuff. Our society puts a great emphasis on material wealth, but never so much as around Christmas time. But is this how we are to get ready for Christmas? All the retail stores pretend to help us get ready for Christmas with those countdown signs you see everywhere: "Only 16 more days to Christmas!" But all these things do is distract us from what we really need to get ready for.

To be truly ready for Christmas, we need to have our greed and selfishness pointed out just as the Pharisees and Sadducees did. We need to be warned against the same attitudes they had. We need John's reminder that this life isn't what it's all about. It's not all about fine clothes and great food. It's not all about living in the nicest homes and driving the nicest cars money can buy. It's not about the presents we get. It is about getting ready for the arrival of a very special guest. That means that we too need to have the Holy Spirit work in our hearts. Through the Law, the Holy Spirit works to convict us in our sins. Through the Law, the Holy Spirit enables us to confess all our sins before God and cry out for help. That is what it means to turn away from our sin.

Transition:

But turning away from our sin is only the first step in genuine, heartfelt repentance. In order to *Make the Proper Preparations* for Christmas, we also need to...

Part II: By turning towards our Savior

When John pointed out the people's sins, the majority of them recognized that there was nothing they could do to make things right with God. There were just too many sins. They desperately needed help. They needed a Savior. At first they thought John was that Savior. But he was quick to point out, **"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" (v. 11)**. Notice that John didn't say, "Hey, come to me. I'm the one you've been waiting for. I have what you need." No! Just the opposite was the case. John knew that he couldn't help these people himself. So he didn't want them focusing their attention on him. He didn't want to be thanked for his ministry. He didn't care to be acknowledged for anything. Instead, he simply pointed them to the one who could help.

Though Jesus came after John chronologically (being born later), He was and is greater than John. Jesus is the very Son of God. That makes Him the one with the real power. Although John was already baptizing people with water, Jesus would be the one to send the Holy Spirit to create and sustain faith in people's hearts. The Holy Spirit was already preparing people for this through John's message of repentance. Not only did countless numbers of people turn away from the wrong direction they were headed in, but they also turned in the right direction. They turned towards Jesus, their Savior.

Application:

My dear friends, when we become worldly minded; when we grow prideful and self-centered, God sends "Johns" into our lives to point out our condition. Those "Johns" come in many different forms. They may come in the form of a godly mom or dad, a loving brother or sister, a concerned friend or neighbor, or a faithful teacher or pastor just to name a few. No matter in what form these "Johns" come, however, they all proclaim the same message. We may not like what they have to say. Having our sins pointed out to us is never easy to take. But it is extremely necessary. How else can we know we have done what is evil in the sight of our God? How else can we cry out with David, **"I have**

sinned against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:13)?

As important as all those “Johns” are in our lives, we must recognize that our help does not come from any one of them. Forgiveness and healing doesn’t come from any pastor, friend, sibling, or parent. It isn’t found in praying the rosary 956 times either. We, like John, need to look away from ourselves and towards our only Savior! In Christ we find forgiveness for every sin. We find forgiveness for every covetous and lustful THOUGHT we have ever had. We find forgiveness for every potty-mouth WORD we have ever spoken. We find forgiveness for every hurtful DEED we have ever committed. Trusting that our sins ARE forgiven and that Heaven IS ours is what it means to turn towards our Savior.

Conclusion:

When we turn away from our sins and put our trust in Jesus, then we are truly prepared for Christ’s Advent and ready for His second coming. But we aren’t the only ones God wants to be properly prepared for Christmas. There are countless numbers of Pharisees and Sadducees outside our church walls who are living in complete defiance of God and His Word. They are working hard to take the “Christ” out of Christmas. That means that we need to speak up.

We need to speak up when people put Kwanzaa and Hanukah on the same par as Christmas. When accused of offending people of other religions, we need to side with the Bible and say, “There is only one true God! You need to turn away from your sin and turn to Jesus for your forgiveness and salvation!” That was the thrust of John the Baptist’s Advent message. And it is still the thrust of our Advent message today. That means we need to be blunt about sin with our family, friends, neighbors, fellow church members, and ourselves so that we all can be convicted in our sins and repent. True, genuine repentance involves (1) turning away from our sins and (2) turning towards our Savior. Doing both is the only way to *Make the Proper Preparations* for Christmas. Amen!