

Sermon:

“Make Straight...A Highway For Our God”

(Isaiah 40:1-5 & Luke 1:77-79)

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Introduction: Why the Birth of John the Baptist is Important...

- A. Next to our Lord Himself, he was the greatest prophet (Luke 7:28) in the sense that he was the last prophet under the old covenant and this was so on account of his close connection to Jesus.**
- B. He announced Jesus’ advent and preceded our Lord in a martyr’s death.**
- C. John the Baptist and the Lord were so closely related that Herod confused the two of them (Luke 9:7-9) as there was some question as to whether or not John the Baptist had been raised from the dead.**
- D. But the reason John was truly great was because the Word of the Lord was in this great prophet and furthermore it is not a message that can be consigned to and restricted to ancient history. It is rather a message that is as much needed today as it was the first time John the Baptist proclaimed it!**
- E. The message is put forth in the Old Testament where another great prophet (Isaiah) predicted that John – the voice crying in the wilderness – would indeed proclaim these words:**

Isaiah 40:3-4: “A voice cries, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.”

Part I: Take note that God sends His prophet John to proclaim, “In the wilderness.”

- A. When John finally came on the scene, he actually came from the literal wilderness.**
 - 1. It’s easy to get the sense that John was practicing a form of early monasticism and separation from the world.**
 - 2. But in truth the wilderness is an appropriate description for a hostile environment. There are many dangers in the wilderness. This is an environment that represents a threat to your life.**
- B. In this sense, it is a reminder of where we live. What? South Orange County...a wilderness? I was around an old friend recently who now lives in the Los Angeles area and she referred to South County as “the Orange blanket”...it is so beautiful here that it is tempting to think we live in a type of Disneyland; or a special**

“bubble” that isn’t quite like the rest of the world. To this day, I drive around and pinch myself as I appreciate the raw beauty of this place!

- C. And yet...we live in a culture that is like a spiritual wilderness. We are inundated and steeped in false religion; and even where the Christian Church is identified, it is often a version of Christianity that is caving in to the juvenilization of the faith; water-downed versions of the faith; “Christianity lite.” In the meantime, the cultural distractions are ludicrous. I heard a song on the radio this past week that was in-your-face immoral...and it is considered a popular song by young people today. Make no mistake about it: we live a kind of wilderness today where Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking to devour (1st Peter 5:8).**
- D. But the point here is that John is preaching that the preparation for the Lord is not going up a high mountain or into a monastery, but meeting the Lord where you are at!**
- E. I believe that it is important that pastors are willing to make house calls, and over the years I have had the privilege to visit many of my people in their homes, but sometimes I encounter a basic response that for some reason the house needs to be in pristine condition in order to host the pastor. As a result, some folks will never feel comfortable having the pastor over.**
- F. I share this illustration not to make you feel self-conscious about not having me over -- unless you’re having steaks or enchiladas tonight -- but to apply it to our relationship with the Lord. Somehow we assume that He won’t want to come to us where we are at in life...that somehow we really need to put “our house in order” *before* we can meet up with Him.**
- G. Not so, John said that this encounter with the Lord is in the hostile, barren, and dangerous place...the Lord doesn’t wait for you to clean up or move up to the heights before meeting you. He comes to you where you are at. In fact, our meeting Him is to occur when we are utterly convinced that things are a mess! That our wilderness conditions just can’t be hidden! That is, when we really know that we need Him!**

Part II: John preached therefore that the only real preparation needed for meeting the Lord Jesus Christ in your life is REPENTANCE!

A. Isaiah uses three main pictures to describe what this repentance looks like:

#1 Every valley shall be lifted up = valleys are said to symbolize weakness of faith, discouragement, and lack of trust in God’s promises!

#2 Every mountain and hill be made low = mountains and hills represent the opposite extreme of valleys; here John is proclaiming that haughtiness of spirit, pride of intellect and heart, presumptuous judging of God’s will and criticizing His ways!

#3 Uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain = this condition describes sinful conduct, taking a person away from the straight, smooth path of God's commands!

- B. When we meditate on that which God is here saying we need to repent of, we realize that our spiritual houses are a disaster area!**
- C. When we take stock, we realize that we really are NOT prepared to meet the Lord!**
- D. Think about it. Let's say that someone you admire more than anyone (under the Lord) is coming to your home. All of a sudden the problems and deficiencies in your home become magnified.**
- E. As you try to remedy them, however, some of the problems just seem to get worse.**
- F. This is often the case when we look within our own hearts. We easily see these categories listed by Isaiah the prophet:**
 - 1. Some of us are in valleys! That is, we're depressed...I am not trying to distinguish levels and types of psychological or spiritual depression, but simply giving the general description of feeling overwhelmed with weakness and discouragement, as though God is 1000 miles away. Why does this happen? Sometimes, we are disappointed that our prayers were not answered a certain way. Sometimes it is because we are resentful that the Lord has allowed so much hardship at once. Sometimes, we are just disappointed in our performance, peering up from our valley towards what we wish we were. We live as if forgiveness cannot reach us deep in our valley.**
 - 2. Some of us are on mountains and hills! We are way too full of ourselves; preoccupied with irritation and frustration towards other people. We are so self-absorbed, that we don't even notice that we behave like Pharisees. We can easily be resentful and every step of the way as judgmental as judgmental can be. We live as if forgiveness is below us as we look down on the people around us, including the people we say we love the most.**
 - 3. Some of us are uneven ground and rough places! We are deceiving ourselves by the way we are going along with deliberate and active sinning. An amazing statistic characterizes our country that more \$ is invested into immoral "entertainment" than our professional sports industry! Do you support that industry? Others have made alcohol their comfort, and still others are quite simply taking what does not belong to them. In this case, it is not so much thinking that forgiveness is too far up or that forgiveness is too far below, it is rather that we don't care about forgiveness to begin with.**

Part III and Conclusion: But John's ministry was not simply to reveal our sin, but to reveal our Savior; he was born to point to the Messiah Christ!

A. John's mission was also this:

"to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:77-79)

B. The simple and yet glorious Gospel is this: All of the sins I have previously described are forgiven in Christ. Which category were you in? Listen Christian: you are forgiven, and God no longer sees you in a "category" of sin at all!

C. By His tender mercy, Jesus the light of the world has invaded our darkness by joining us in our wilderness:

- 1. Jesus entered our valleys to the point of becoming a curse (Galatians 3:13).**
- 2. Jesus placed Himself on our mountains and hills by absorbing our self-absorption.**
- 3. Jesus journeyed through our uneven and rough places by becoming sin for us (2nd Cor. 5:21).**

D. And as a result, your life in the Christ that the Baptist proclaimed is no longer marked by darkness and the shadow of death, but is now marked by the way of peace for Christ is your life and Christ is your peace.

E. Dear Christian, thank God for the nativity and mission of this prophet named John because he predicted your sinful wilderness, but more importantly the Savior who entered it and saved you...did you hear that? Jesus has saved you! Now live in your faith, you've been made straight by the blood of the Lamb and His victorious resurrection!