

## The Preparatory Work of the Wilderness Messenger -- Mark 1:2-8

### *Introduction, Outline*

- Scripture reading: Isaiah 40:1-11; Malachi 3:1-7; Mark 1:1-8.
- Teaching Scripture Mark 1:2-8 (NASB95): **2** As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way; **3** **The** voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.’” **4** John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. **6** John was clothed with camel’s hair and *wore* a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. **7** And he was preaching, and saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. **8** I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”
- In the ancient Roman Empire, the kings all had their own messengers. When the king went to a city, the messenger would go before him and herald the coming of the king and get the people prepared. When the King of kings, the King of the whole universe, came, He also sent forth a messenger. His name is John the Baptist.
- Outline:
  - Title: The Preparatory Work of the Wilderness Messenger
  - 1. To Fulfill the Prophecies of the Gospel (vv 2-3)
  - 2. To Preach the Message of Repentance (vv 4-6)
  - 3. To Proclaim the Coming of the Savior (v7)
  - 4. To Foreshadow the Baptism of the Spirit (v8)

### **To Fulfill the Prophecies of the Gospel (vv 2-3)**

- “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet”: One of the purposes of John’s work is to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. The verses cited are from **Isaiah 40:3** and **Malachi 3:1**. The latter is based on the former and both speak of the same event. There are different emphases of these two prophecies in their contexts: Isaiah focuses on the good news of salvation, while Malachi focuses on judgment and repentance.

**Isaiah chapter 40** is the turning point from judgment to salvation. The voice crying in the wilderness is to “clear the way for the Lord..... Make smooth.....a highway for our God.” So the good news in verse 9 is “Here is your God”, who will come to save His people. So,

when John the Baptist appears in the wilderness preaching, you should know that God's coming is near. He will come to save you.

Though **Malachi chapter 3** talks about the same thing, v2 says “But who can endure the day of His coming?” Because not only will He bring salvation, but also judgment (cf. v5). Are you ready to welcome His coming? The way to prepare is “Return to Me, and I will return to you.” (v7) Accordingly, the message John preached is a message of repentance.

### **To Preach the Message of Repentance (vv 4-6)**

- “Baptized”: At that time, Gentiles were required to be baptized into Judaism, a symbol for washing away the filthiness of their sins. But the people John baptized here are the Jews, who thought that they were God's people by birth. They, too, have to confess and repent of their sins in order to enter God's kingdom.
- “in the wilderness”: “As Israel long ago had been separated from Egypt by a pilgrimage through the waters of the Red Sea, the nation is exhorted again to exercise separation.....The willingness to return to the wilderness signifies the acknowledgement of Israel's history as one of disobedience and rebellion, and a desire to begin once more.” ——A scholar
- “all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem”: Jerusalem is singled out for emphasis, for it is the “holy city” where many Jewish rabbis lived. Under John's powerful preaching, even the people of Jerusalem went to be baptized, confessing their sins.
- “confessing their sins”: Not just the heart attitude. The Greek word emphasizes public verbal confession. This is why we require public testimony for our baptism, and the content must include confession of sins. Note: The thing to be confessed is sin! Not to confess that you want perfect love, but that you're selfish and prideful and only care about yourself; Not to confess you didn't know God before, but that you didn't honor Him as God even though you knew Him; Not to confess you didn't know God's moral standards, but that you deliberately violated the standards which you did know in your conscience, for you loved filthy things and worshiped the idols of your lust.
- “John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.”: What a strange man! Why? Some say he looked like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) which indicates that he is the successor of the prophet. But what about his diet? A better explanation – this is the most natural way to dress and eat for long-term desert life. Jesus specifically contrasts John's lifestyle to those who dressed in soft clothing and thereby condemning the luxurious and sinful lifestyle of those people (Matthew 11:7-10).

The message John preached is repentance, the place of preaching was the wilderness, and then his lifestyle - *the whole person* is a powerful message of repentance!

**Application:** In evangelism, does your life strengthen or weaken your message? Do your thoughts, speech and conduct demonstrate a separation from the world? Do you believe in the gospel of Jesus so much that you must re-examine every song you listen to, every show you watch, and everything in your life to see whether it reflects that you are a sanctified person?

### **To Proclaim the Coming of the Savior (v7)**

- “preaching”: This verb describes the heralding of the king’s messenger – loud, public and with authority and power from the king.
- “One”: Repentance was preached above, and here is faith. Repentance is to prepare their hearts so they can see their own sin and the serious consequences so they realize they need a Saviour. So the goal of repentance is faith. A repentance without faith is false repentance, and a faith without repentance is false faith.
- “who is mightier than I”: It implies that John is mighty and everyone knows it. How was he known to be mighty? He performed no miracles. His power is the power of proclamation! It is sharp, clear, and bold, piercing the soul, and attracting thousands of people to come out of the cities to confess their sins and be baptized.
- “I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals”: Untying the shoes is the lowest thing done by the lowest level slaves. If you are the slave to untie the shoes of your master, you are the lowest of the lowest. One ancient Hebrew literature says: “A Hebrew slave must not wash the feet of his master, nor put his shoes on him.” Those are done by the gentile slaves. John says: I’m not fit to do even that to my Lord. This humble acknowledgement is the motivation for his lifelong faithful witness.

**Application:** 1. Why do I keep missing opportunities to share the gospel? Often it is because we are not humble enough, not knowing how unworthy we are. 2. If John is not fit to untie the shoes of the Lord Jesus, what a blessing it is for us to arrange tables and chairs for His church? Let this humble recognition fill your life with gratitude!

### **To Foreshadow the Baptism of the Spirit (v8)**

- “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”: However mighty I am, I can only take some physical materials to wash your outside with water; but the one who is mightier than I, who is in control of all spiritual elements, He will wash your inside with the Holy Spirit.

John’s baptism is only a foreshadow to the baptism of the Spirit necessary for sinners to enter God’s kingdom. This will be the work of the Lord Jesus.

**1 Peter 3:21** “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—**not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience**—through the resurrection of Jesus

Christ,” Water can only remove dirt from the flesh. Only the Holy Spirit can cleanse the soul of a sinful conscience. The former is a foreshadow/witness of the latter.

**Ezekiel 36:25-27** “Then I will sprinkle **clean water** on you, and you will be clean; <What is the clean water here? The Holy Spirit. The clean water is a metaphor.> I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

The effect of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not merely the initial cleansing, but everything that is produced by that cleansing, which includes the desire to obey God’s law and to live by His commands. The only thing a cleansed heart longs for is an intimate fellowship with God, which will naturally express itself in joyful submission and obedience.

**Summary application:** *Have you prepared the way for the Lord?*

*John has prepared for His coming in the following ways. I. Fulfill the Prophecies of the Gospel. Have you seen the faithfulness of God’s Word? Do you believe all the Bible is God’s Word, the foundation of your life? II. John preaches the message of repentance. Have you genuinely and completely repented before God? III. John proclaims the coming of the Saviour. Have you put your hope of salvation entirely on the person and work of this Saviour? Is there evidence showing your longing for His coming in your daily life? IV. John’s baptism foreshadows the baptism of the Spirit. Did you receive the washing of the Spirit? Do you come to God with a totally clear conscience and seek His will every day?*