

Directions for Connecting to the “Mightier” One

2nd Sun. in Advent – 12/06/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Mark 1:1-8 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 7, [John the Baptizer says,] “**After me comes He who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.**”

Introduction

- ⊗ Okay, it’s true confession time. How many of you have ever purchased an item that required assembly? And how many, with that product, began to assemble it by first setting the included directions aside? Yep, I’m guilty of that as well.
 - ➔ Now, how many of you started that project but then regretted trying to do it with the directions? You realized that reading the directions should have actually been the first step all along, right?
- ⊗ The Gospel Reading before us today is the first eight verses or “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (v.1). In essence, when we look closely at this text, we see that God has sent us here a set of directions; directions, as we’ll talk about this morning, for Jesus, His Son; for John the baptizer, His prophet, and directions for you and me as the people with whom He wants His Son to be connected in a saving relationship for eternity.
 - ➔ Yes, there are actually times that directions are needed. And this, friends, is one of those times.

I. God’s directions for Jesus (v.2)

- ⊗ So let’s begin by opening up and referring to the brief word of introduction where Mark makes reference to the Prophet Isaiah and the directions that God gave to Jesus in verse two.
 - ➔ This is really quite a privilege folks. We are blessed to listen in here on a conversation among the three persons of the Triune God, where God prepares Jesus, before His birth to Mary, for His earthly coming as flesh-and-blood Savior of the world.
 - ➔ God tells Jesus that He is actually going to send a “messenger” in advance of Jesus to prepare people in heart and mind for Jesus’ miraculous coming as Yahweh in the flesh.
- ⊗ You see, God knows how hard-headed and stubborn we human beings are. He knows that many people have already presented themselves as the promised messiah; that many lies have been circulating throughout the nations about Him and how resistant humans are to even admitting that we need a Savior in the first place.
 - ➔ All of that is still true for you and me today isn’t it? Just admit it, you know how quickly you become defensive if someone even rightly and lovingly points out a flaw or mistake or sin that you have committed.
 - ➔ Well, some things never change. At the time of our text, the world needed to be confronted with their sin against God so that their hearts could be prepared as fertile ground for the seed of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. They needed a bit of prep work to be prepared for the coming of God in human flesh.

II. God’s Directions for John (v.3)

- ⊗ And so in verse three, Mark shares the directions God established for John the Baptizer in his role as God’s “messenger” who would “Prepare the way of the Lord” (v.3). That’s the first step;

that John understand he is NOT the end-goal himself. He is the one sent by God to do the prep work for the final glorious gift.

→ Now, this one hits home for me personally, because when it comes to painting or finishing drywall projects, I am always looking for some way to speed up and simplify the prep work. Whether it's woodwork, or drywall or painting the trim on my house, I admit it, I don't really want to take the time to scrape away the old peeling paint; to sand down the drywall joints one or two or even more times until everything is perfectly smooth or to remove all of the old rotten wood so it can be filled in with something to restore its original integrity and then to sand it down again so that there is no sign of any rough spots or bumps or valleys in the wall or the piece of furniture or whatever it is that I am hoping to make presentable in the end. Just saying that wears me out.

→ Why do I dislike this prep work? For two reasons: first because it's hard and tedious work; and second, because if you do it correctly, all of that time and effort in the end will typically go unnoticed as it is covered up by the paint or finish.

✘ This is John's task, but in spiritual matters. He is to come in among people who have no interest in talking with him in the first place, because just like you and me they are self-centered, egotistical sinners who think that no one in the world is more important than themselves.

→ He's got to get their attention and then address and convince them of the truth regarding their sin-problem in relation to God.

→ So, using the perfect prep tools in God's Word, John is to scrape away the old, no-good and flakey desires and priorities that people become attached to in this world. This means he has to convince them that their actions and words and ways are sinful; are destructive and deadly if they remain unchecked.

→ And then he's got to point them to the One who is coming who will take the place of those sin-rotted holes and valleys in their lives; the One who will strengthen and fill the weak joints that they've become comfortable with through their bad habits like addictions, or foul and hurtful language, or puffing themselves up to think that they are better than others, or worse – that they don't need any repair work or saving done at all.

✘ That's quite a task; quite a set of directions for one man to receive from God. How would you respond if God gave John's directions to you? "Sorry, God, I'm not up to it; I'm not trained for that; I'm too tired to serve You right now; I just don't want to have to do any spiritual work – even though I know its work for You, God."

III. God's Directions for Us (vv.4-8)

✘ So let's be honest, because the directions God gave to John are still intimately connected to the directions that God gives to you and me right now today, these are NOT directions that any of us want to disregard and just set aside folks.

→ These are God's directions for connecting to the One John says "is mightier" than all of us. These are not just directions to some piece of furniture or new toy or something that we've always "wanted".

→ No, this has nothing to do with what you and I "want". This is what every heart and soul of every person ever to live on this earth truly "needs" to be able to be presentable before God in the end, and to live with Him in eternal glory.

✘ So what did John do? What is it that Mark says prepared hearts for the coming of Jesus? Verse four, "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins".

- Notice where John started – in “the wilderness”. John didn’t start in palaces where everything is shiny and fancy and comfortable. He started in the “wilderness”; the desert, which is where every human soul starts in our relationship with God.
- From conception, our souls are parched and lifeless in this wild world of evil and sin. Every person, left to him/herself, is on the cusp of death. Water is what gives life; what we need. Without it our end is certain – eternity in that place of burning separation from God as the source of life.
- ✘ So John helps to make that connection, verse five says, for “all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem”. The connection is to be baptized and it is intended for all people everywhere.
 - Notice what John teaches us here about baptism as God’s gift of spiritual, life-giving water for our parched and dying souls. He says first that repentance and the confessing of sins is a part of it.
 - This is where Mark’s account teaches us something very important that is so often misunderstood in the wider body of the Christian Church. Repentance and confession of sins is NOT a separate act or work that is required for man to conjure up and perform on his own BEFORE he can be baptized and receive forgiveness.
- ✘ No, the text gives no suggestion that these things happened prior to the washing with water. On the contrary, the Greek grammar indicates that repentance was just as much a result of John’s baptism as was the forgiveness of sins.
 - Look at it this way: A person could not be said to have repented unless and until one had been baptized. In fact, the only way to attain repentance is through God’s (not man’s) work of holy baptism.
 - God is the one, not John or any other individual – God alone makes people prepared to receive their coming Lord through His work in baptism of washing away the sins committed and the sins inherited from conception. And He also is the one who gets all of the credit for applying the final glorious result – the forgiveness of sins; an eternal loving connection with the one who John says is the “Mightier” One (v.7).
- ✘ Again John is just the instrument, the one who had the privilege of helping out with the prep work. He humbly shows his understanding of how great Jesus is. In verse eight John says he is not even “worthy to stoop down and untie” the straps of Jesus’ sandals.
 - But Jesus said of John in Matthew 11:11, “among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”
 - But in the next breath Jesus says something amazing about anyone – including you and me – who is properly prepared in baptism and now connected to Jesus in faith. He says, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than [John]”.
 - To be “in the kingdom of heaven” is to be saved; to be washed clean of all sin by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross; to be washed with the water that God uses to connect us to that saving work of Jesus and as a result, to then have repentance of sin and to confess it openly to the Lord, confident that He has done everything needed for you and me to be forgiven.
 - That’s what it means to be “greater than John the Baptist” at the time that he was “born of” his mother Elizabeth. But of course John also was prepared and came to faith by the work of God so that now, he too is “in the kingdom of heaven”; connected to Jesus as well.
- ✘ There’s still one more part of God’s directions that He gives to us in verse eight. Remember, John was sent to take care of God’s initial prep work for the coming of Jesus. So in verse eight

John directs us to see the final product; to the time in which we live in today; the time when Jesus has come to us here as our Savior.

→ John says, “I have baptized you with water, but He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Much has been written trying to answer what the difference is between John’s baptism and Jesus’. But as Mark shows us today, both are still God’s work. Both include God’s gifts of repentance and forgiveness of sins and so both worked to make a saving connection for the baptized to Jesus.

→ The difference that John shows us is that John’s prepared people for Jesus to come in the flesh as the “Mightier” One. Of course Jesus was “mightier” than John because John was still a man, steeped in sin. Jesus is the second person of the Triune God.

→ John could not send the Holy Spirit for only God can do that. And once Jesus came, baptism in His name had, and still has today, the added gift of the Holy Spirit who not only prepares and repairs sin-filled souls, but also connects and seals us to Jesus with a bond that is so much better than any “life-time guaranteed” sealant you or I can apply as the finishing touch to our home projects today.

→ Yes, with the Holy Spirit, now living and active inside of us as people connected to Jesus by His water of Word in baptism, we are sealed and bound to Jesus with a seal that no power, no demon or devil, no disease or disability, no trial or tribulation here on earth can ever permeate or break. We are connected to Jesus for life...for eternity.

Conclusion

⊗ Now that is some set of directions, isn’t it? So now that you have heard and read and reviewed them with me, I have to ask, “Are you prepared for the coming of the Mightier One?”

→ Actually, that’s not the best way to ask the question, yet it is how we often hear it asked today, because it easily implies that you – that you might be able to do something about your preparation, which you can’t as a sinner.

⊗ The better way to phrase it is like this: “Have you been prepared for the coming of Jesus?” And your answer? “Yes”, because “I have been baptized where I received from God His preparatory gift of repentance; His repairing and rejuvenating gift of forgiveness; and His sealing gift of the Holy Spirit who gives and sustains me in faith.”

→ Thank the Lord, you are prepared for eternity with Jesus! Amen.