**Prepare the way of the Lord**

Mark 1:1-11

Key **Verse 3 “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD, make his paths straight,’”**

Introduction

We want to learn the purpose and meaning of baptism. Today we will talk about two baptisms:  John the Baptist’s baptism of water and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We also want to make our own baptism meaningful and efficient.

There are 5 baptism candidates for the coming Sunday’s baptism. Joanna Yoon, William Jr., Briana, Jaya, Joshiah (Andrw Cuevas’ son)

1. Look at verse 1**.** What does the word “gospel” mean? What do the two titles of Jesus, ‘Christ, The Son of God’ here tell us about him?

**V.1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

1. What does the word “gospel” mean?

“Gospel” means “good news” or “good news of great joy”

1. What do the two titles of Jesus, ‘Christ, The Son of God’ here tell us about him?

Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. John 20:31 says the same thing about Jesus. Christ means “the anointed one”. It means Jesus is anointed by God through his Holy Spirit. “The Son of God” means “One who reveals God the Father most”. Jesus claimed he and the Father are one.

1. Look at verses 2-3. What was John the Baptist's role according to Isaiah’s prophecy? What does it mean to prepare the way of the LORD and to make his paths straight?

**Verses 2-3 “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,**

**“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
    who will prepare your way,
3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
    ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
    make his paths straight,’”**

1. What was John the Baptist's role according to Isaiah’s prophecy?

He will prepare Jesus’ way and make Jesus’ paths straight.

1. What does it mean to prepare the way of the LORD and to make his paths straight?

John would prepare man’s heart to believe in Jesus and accept him. We can say all of the work of God’s servants is to prepare the way for Jesus. It is to help people to believe and receive Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God.

Additional notes from Question 1 and 2.  verses 1-3

**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

**“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,**

**“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
    who will prepare your way,
3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
    ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
    make his paths straight,’”**

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” - It shows how Jesus started his public ministry. Gospel means good news. Jesus had two titles - Christ and the Son of God.

Additional question: What is the meaning of these two titles and why are they important?

Mark quoted Isaiah 40:3. “I send my messenger.” God identified John the Baptist as his messenger. It means what John says is what God says.

Additional questions: Why is this messenger necessary? What does it mean “to prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight?” Why did he say it?

All the four gospels show the story of John the Baptist comes first before the story of Jesus. This shows that the role of John the Baptist is so important.

Additional question: Why is his role so important for Jesus’ messiah’s work?

Christ means “anointed one”. In Hebrew the anointed one is called Messiah. In the Old Testament, 3 positions were anointed: King, prophet, and priest. Later, the anointed one becomes the nickname of “the promised Messiah”. So the title of ‘Christ’ is used only for “the promised Savior.”

Mark says Jesus is the Messiah promised throughout the Old Testament. He is the one whom the people of Old Testament waited so long.

“The Son of God”. Jesus came in human form. But his origin is God because he is the Son of God.

These two titles tell us who Jesus is: the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

“The gospel”, the good news, is Jesus himself and what he did to save sinners. The essence of the good news is Jesus himself, and Jesus himself is the good news.

Now Mark mentions John the Baptist and his role. Additional question: John is the messenger, and why is this messenger necessary?

After the last prophet Malachi, there was no prophet and there was no word of God until Jesus appeared. There was spiritual movement between Malachi and Jesus, and there was a long spiritual silence. That was the reason why preparing people’s hearts to accept and believe in Jesus was necessary.

“Behold, I send my messenger”. John the Baptist was God’s messenger. He delivers God’s message. What he says is what God says.

God sent his messenger before Jesus shows we need the word of God first in order to accept Jesus in our hearts. We can help others to accept Jesus by teaching the word of God. The word of God is the best preparation for us to do for others.

“Make his paths straight.” It shows people’s hearts were crooked, distorted and rough. In the same way, the crooked, distorted and rough hearts of people of our generation become a barrier to accepting the word of God and Jesus.

Even a little bit of preparation counts and adds up. So we should never lose the importance of preparation even a little bit. One time of hearing the word of God and praying helps.

“Wilderness” is the symbol of a neglected and abandoned area. Sometimes our spiritual life is like a desert. We need to cultivate it. Our hearts need preparation to accept Jesus.

John’s lifestyle is related to his mission. John’s mission was challenging because the condition of the people’s hearts was hard and dry like a wilderness. He needed to cultivate such hearts.

1. Look at verses 4-5. What did John do to fulfill his mission? (4) What is “a baptism of repentance?” In what respect did his baptism of repentance prepare the way for the Lord? How did the people respond to his message? (5)

Verses 4-5 **4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.**

1. What did John do to fulfill his mission? (4)

He baptized people in the wilderness and proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He helped people be baptized. It was for repentance. And the repentance was for the forgiveness of sin.

1. What is “a baptism of repentance?”

It is the baptism for repentance.

1. In what respect did his baptism of repentance prepare the way for the Lord?

Through the baptism of repentance, the hearts of people were ready for Jesus.

1. How did the people respond to his message? (5)

They all went to John and were baptized, confessing their sins. Confessing their sins shows that the baptism was a serious one. Usually people want to hide their sins. Therefore, confessing their sins is the great work of God. Sin should be identified and exposed through confession.

Additional notes from verses 4-5

**4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.**

When there is a true messenger, people come and hear.

**4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** - This is what John did to prepare the way of the Lord.

Additional question: How can people prepare their hearts to accept Jesus into their hearts?

People’s response: All the country and all Jerusalem came to him. It means so many people came to receive baptism from John. Additional question: What can we learn from people’s response? Why did John ask them to confess their sins when they were baptized? How did John prepare the way for Jesus through the baptism of repentance? What can we learn from this? Especially to prepare the way for Jesus.

When sin is there, we cannot have a right relationship with God. To recognize our sin, confess, and receive forgiveness is the way to restore our relationship with God. In order to confess our sins, we need the assurance of forgiveness.

Sin caused separation between God and men. Sin should be taken away for the restoration of our relationship with God. The Old Testament used expressions such as “turn away” instead of “repentance”.

Additional question. Why did so many people come to Jesus although John’s baptism was different from sacrificing animals in the temple?

John the Baptist and the people of his time were familiar with the sacrificial system such as animal sacrifice for sin forgiveness.

In the Old Testament, people experienced sin-forgiveness through their sacrifice because God told them he would forgive their sins through their sacrifice. He spoke through Moses.

When people came to John and confessed their sins, they could clearly see John as the man of God. So they must have believed in the forgiveness of their sins from God. John was highly respected as the man of God.

**2 and said to him, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.” 3 He answered them, “I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, 4 was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” 5 And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’ 6 But if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.” 7 So they answered that they did not know where it came from. (Luke 20:2-7)**

Through John’s baptism, forgiveness of sins was given. This is how John helped people. He prepared the people’s heart by helping them to repent of their sins and allowing Jesus to enter into their hearts.

Additional question: Why is repentance so important to accept Jesus? Sin blocked God’s work and Jesus who wants to enter into our hearts. Sin is the fundamental problem. People should recognize their sin as the most serious problem. If not, they cannot make any connection with Christ.

Some people say “I am good”. Others may recognize their sin. But if they do not want to repent their sin, there is no room for Jesus to work in them. So the first step is to recognize our sin and repent. It is so critical. There is no other way.

Pharisees thought they were right before God. So they could not come to Jesus and be saved. If our bible students recognize their sins or if we recognize our sins it is a good sign to accept Jesus. Repentance of sins is the way to come to Jesus.

In today’s passage, we see many people coming to John the Baptist. It shows that until that time people lived in sin and darkness. All the religious leaders and their religious system and temple did not challenge people to repent. So people lived in sin. When John came and preached repentance with God’s power and authority, they realized their sin, repent, and confessed their sins. This is how John helped them. In our own generation, many people are waiting for true servants of God to come and help them to repent of their sins.

All people came to John. It shows John’s message was powerful. People wanted to repent. Even in our days, people want to repent their sins. But the problem is they do not hear such messages or meet such messengers who can preach repentance through God’s power and authority.

Whoever repents of their sin and comes to God, God is willing to welcome and forgive their sins.

Before John the people confessed their sin. And it was their confession before God.

Additional question: They could repent their sin generally. For example, they could say, “Father, forgive my sins.” But why is it necessary to confess one’s sin specifically and personally, and why is it important?

Personal confession of sin makes their forgiveness very personal. People have all terrible sins. But there are sins which bring major damage for their lives. They need to bring such sins and confess and can be changed. Then their relationship with God is restore and there will be major breakthrough for their lives. For example John said to tax collectors, “**Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” 13 And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”** (Lk 3:12-13)

**Luke 3:7-14**

**7 He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 9 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”**

**10 And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” 11 And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” 12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” 13 And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” 14 Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”**

When John gave baptism and people received the baptism, they did not think it was the replacement of the Old Testament sacrificial system. When John saw (many Pharisees and Sadducees came to John’s baptism, if they thought John’s baptism would replace the old system, they would not come. But they recognized John as the Lord’s servant and they came to him. In Matthew 3:7 John said, “**7 He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?**

To make their baptism real they should be real repentance. Just receiving baptism did not bring true change or forgiveness.

John helped the people coming to him to repent their sin sincerely instead of casually receiving baptism. Without true repentance, baptism does not mean anything. So he refused to baptize Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt 3:7). “I receive the baptism and from now on I am a Christian and I am saved.” This is a poor attitude. To receive true baptism, one should be really serious about repentance and decide to live a new life.

1. Look at verses 6-8. Describe John’s lifestyle. Why do you think John lived his life in that manner? What did John preach about Jesus? How is Jesus’ baptism different from John's baptism and what does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?

Verses 6-8

**6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

1. Describe John’s lifestyle

He lived in the wilderness. His clothes are from camel’s hair and he wore a leather belt around his waist. His clothes is similar to Prophet Elijah. His clothes could be a symbol of a prophet.. He ate locusts and wild honey. Simple clothes and simple food.

1. Why do you think John lived his life in that manner?

To focus on his mission, which is to prepare the way of the Lord. He removed all other things that could be a hindrance to his mission.

1. What did John preach about Jesus?

Jesus is mightier than he. He is not worthy to stoop down and untie Jesus’ sandals. Jesus will baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

1. How is Jesus’ baptism different from John's baptism and what does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit?

John’s baptism is water baptism. It is the baptism of repentance of one’s sin and the forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus’ baptism is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can generate a new person in one’s heart because he is God. True transformation can come through the work of the Holy Spirit.

 In a way, “water baptism” could be preparation for “baptism of the Holy Spirit”.

Additional notes from verses 6-8

**6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

People already could see the power of God from John. But John said, “**After me comes he who is mightier than I”.** He testified about the great power of Jesus.

John prepared people by (1) baptizing with water and then (2) testifying about Jesus.

John’s clothing and food. He lived in the wilderness. **6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.**

Additional question: Why did John live in this way?

John separated himself from normal city life. One of the reasons was he wanted to remove all the possible distractions. John really wanted to focus on having fellowship with God and serving him.

He lived in this way to prepare himself and live as God’s messenger. In order to prepare the people for Jesus, he had to prepare himself first in the wilderness, cutting off all possible distractions.

He did not choose this kind of lifestyle in order to live a lonely life or for his own purpose or pleasure. To receive the word of God and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, he chose the lifestyle. It was lonely and uncomfortable. But he gave all for his mission.

Depending on our lifestyle, we can lose our spiritual power. We should be very careful about how to live and where to live and even what we eat. In a small scale, for example, some pastors do not eat or fast before delivering messages. Dr. John Jun never eats before delivering the message. He said that if he eats, he loses his good spirit.

We live in a world there are full of entertainment. We have so many entertaining things on Youtube. When we see people who live a luxurious and comfortable life, we can be tempted. But we need to prepare ourselves first in order to make Jesus’ paths straight for other people.

John chose such life lifestyle to serve God better.

His preaching: **And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

John led people to come to Jesus, although some people thought that he was the Messiah. John was highly recognized. Instead of enjoying people’s recognition, he led people to Jesus by humbling himself so much that he told them, “I am not worthy to untie his sandal.” So people could really think about Jesus. He could think that Jesus was really mightier than John.

He baptized with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Two baptisms.

John’s baptism of water.

1. It is the symbol of repentance or confirmation of repentance.
2. By giving the people the baptism, he confirmed that they repented and that the person’s sin is cleansed and purified. Water is a symbol of repentance.
3. They repented and live a new life. They are totally becoming new. This is the meaning of water baptism.

Convert to Judaism, Gentile people were baptized. It means they are “new” people. It is the meaning of baptism. Baptism of water shows a person has really repented, and his sin is purified, and he starts to live a new life.

“Baptism of the Holy Spirit”: The Holy Spirit comes to a person and dwells in the person’s heart and does the salvation work in the person and his life. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus’ salvation work effective in the person’s life. The first work of the Holy Spirit is transforming. He makes a person to be born again. Water baptism is a symbol, and the work of the Holy Spirit is an actual work of transformation.

**Ezekiel 36:25-27**

**25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

1. Through the work of the Holy Spirit , God changes our hearts. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, transformation happens.
2. Empowerment. The baptism of the Holy Spirit empowers man to live a different life, even to do God’s work
3. Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Gifts of the Holy Spirit can be given such as encouragement, prophecy, and healing. Actual salvation of Jesus takes place in the heart of the person.

**Acts 2:38**

**38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Peter told them they were not drunk. The baptism in the name of Jesus Christ completes the baptism. Repent of their sin for the forgiveness, and they will receive the Holy Spirit.

Baptism of water is the beginning of baptism, and the ultimate baptism is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 19, Paul saw disciples who did not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They had only received the baptism of John.

**Acts 19:1-7**

**And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” 3 And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John's baptism.” 4 And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. 7 There were about twelve men in all.**

We should recognize the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a gift. We may think the Holy Spirit for granted. But the Holy Spirit is the best gift from God for any Christian. We need to recognize the Holy Spirit and honor him.

1. Look at verses 9-11. What happened to Jesus after he was baptized by John and came up out of the water? How were the Spirit and God the Father involved in this event? What is the significance of this?

Verses 9-11

**9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”**

1. What happened to Jesus after he was baptized by John and came up out of the water?

Jesus immediately saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And he heard the voice from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

1. How were the Spirit and God the Father involved in this event?

The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. God the Father is involved by speaking from heaven.

1. What is the significance of this?

The Trinity God was there when Jesus was baptized.

Additional notes from verses 9-11

**9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”**

Jesus did not need to repent.

Additional question: But why did Jesus receive the baptism?

The baptism of Jesus has several explanations.

1. Jesus received baptism as a man. He identified himself as humanity. He lowered himself and identified himself as human.
2. He received the baptism as the representative of the second Adam
3. He obeyed God’s will. **( Mt 3:14-15). 15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”** Then he consented.
4. Affirmation of John’s ministry. Jesus recognized his ministry. Jesus did not start his own [ministry.](http://ministry.he) He really affirmed John’s ministry as God’s work
5. Affirm John’s testimony is true. Through his baptism Jesus confirmed John’s words are true. John said, “He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”
6. Jesus received the Holy Spirit when he submitted himself. Jesus started his Messianic ministry through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ baptism is the starting point of Jesus’ public ministry. It is like the inauguration of his Messianic work.

Jesus’ baptism was a very special work as the Messiah.

As a whole, Jesus’ baptism is important. It prepares people’s hearts but also prepares Jesus’ public ministry.

To make all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, baptism is an important part of God’s ministry.

Many different baptisms depend on the denomination such as sprinkling or immersing under water.

For us, we need to think about our own baptism and renew it.

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