

“Clear The Way!”—Luke 3:2-6

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is “Clear the Way!”, is Luke 3:2-6 → *The Word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

It is interesting how many Christmas shoppers expect others to clear the way for them so they can obtain what they believe will make them “ready” for Christmas. It’s almost as if they’re oblivious to the fact that the others around them are preparing for Christmas as well. This dynamic was witnessed by a person who related to me her experience the day after Christmas at a Hallmark store.

People were standing at the entrance, waiting to take advantage of the

bargains, especially the half-priced ornaments. Upon entering the store one lady took a basket and grabbed up one ornament after another, making sure she had one of each. She then took the basket to another part of the store and started to sort through the ornaments, keeping only the ones she wanted. Why? She wanted to make sure she got her desired ornaments before they were gone, apparently in a desperate effort to be ready for Christmas **next year!?**

So, what does it mean to be “clearly” ready for Christmas? Apparently for some people “clearing the way” means “I’ve got a shopping cart and you better watch out!” Maybe the following poem can shed some light on what it means to be ready for Christmas.

“Ready for Christmas,” she said with a sigh,
As she gave a last touch to the gifts piled high;
Then wearily sat for a moment and read
till soon, very soon, she was nodding her head.
Then quietly spoke a voice in her dream,
“Ready for Christmas? What do you mean?
Ready for Christ, when only last week
You wouldn’t acknowledge your friend on the street?
Ready for Christmas, while holding a grudge?
Perhaps you had better let God be the judge.
Why, how can the Christ-child come and abide

In a heart that is selfish and filled with pride?
Ready for Christmas, when only today
A beggar lad came and you turned him away
Without even a smile to show that you cared.
The little he asked—it could have been spared.
Ready for Christmas? You've worked it is true,
But just doing the things you wanted to do.
Ready for Christmas? Your circle's too small.
Why you're not ready for Christmas at all!"
She woke with a start, and a cry of despair,
"There's so little time, and I've still to prepare!
O Father, forgive me, I see what you mean,
To be ready means more than a house swept clean!"
Yes, more than the giving of gifts and a tree,
It's the heart swept clean that He wants to see,
A heart that is free from bitterness—sin,
Ready for Christmas—and ready for Him!

The Advent season of the church year focuses on preparation for meeting our Lord. Usually we think about it in terms of preparing for all that's involved with our Christmas celebrations. However, from God's perspective it has to do with a relationship with Jesus Christ Who has made the way to God "clear" for us!

In our text we are introduced to John the Baptizer who came to "clear the

way” for Jesus and His earthly ministry in response to God’s call. He was sent to prepare the people to be ready to meet the Lord Jesus when He came on the scene of human history.

This was not a “call” that just “popped into his mind” one day. Rather, John’s birth and call was based on the written Word of God as recorded in 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. 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.* The time had come for God to bring about His ultimate salvation for people so He began by sending His special messenger who would clear the way for people to meet Jesus!

The picture here is that of preparing a highway for the travel of a king by removing any obstacles which would hinder his subjects to see him as he entered their presence. They would improve the roads by fixing the potholes or whatever else would hinder the smoothest travel possible. I think about train tracks cut through mountains and going across valleys by huge trestles in an effort to make the train travel as easy as possible. John’s call was to clear the way **for Jesus**, the King of kings!

John’s “call” to “clear the way” was one which had to do with people’s hearts—clearing a way through the spiritual mess and obstacles in our lives.

John knew that the real “housecleaning” needed to take place in the “house” where sin resides. Genesis 6:5 describes our hearts being utterly sinful, so bad *that every intention of **the thoughts of our heart is only evil continually***. Since our hearts are so sin-filled the clearing process has to begin in the heart and be cleansed by God Himself.

Therefore, clearing the way does not take place simply by making things look good on the outside—simply a change in behavior. It happens by a complete inner change in us—a change of the heart’s disposition. John came to call peoples’ hearts back to the Lord by the recognition of their sin in the presence of the LORD and confessing that sin to Him.

This special “call” of John the Baptizer’s was foretold to his father even before he was conceived. The angel said to Zechariah in Luke 1:16-17 that John would *turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God* by going before Jesus *in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, **to make ready for the Lord a people prepared*** to meet Jesus properly.

Did you notice the order of the actions described? First he would *turn the hearts* and then the obedience would follow. Proper “clearing-house” reveals itself with proper behavior flowing from a heart cleanse from sin in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ alone! John prepared the way for the One Who came

to clear your heart of all guilt and all sin—Jesus, the Christ!

According to verse 3 of our text, John's method for clearing the way for Jesus was through *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. What is repentance? Repentance flows from a godly sorrow which recognizes in all humility before the LORD that you alone are absolutely responsible for your sin and then confessing it to Him! Repentance involves a change of your heart which will produce a change of behavior in your life.

The word “repentance” actually means “to turn around” or “go the other way.” Proper repentance recognizes that you are totally accountable to the LORD for your sin and you need forgiveness **on His terms**. Such repentance prays along with King David in the words of Psalm 51:4 → *Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment*. It is crucial to understand this concept of repentance in the *sight* of the LORD **daily**.

Sin messes up peoples' lives. It hurts others and breeds itself in the actions of those who have been hurt! However, true repentance confesses first and foremost that sin hurts Yahweh, your God. In the midst of such confession you receive His forgiveness and such gracious forgiveness in Christ changes your behaviors toward the people around you. Thus, **godly sorrow and repentance** (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10) will produce a change in your

outward behaviors, reflected in the way you deal with others, flowing from a heart completely cleared of sin in Christ!

Luke records this desire for change of behavior in the midst of confession and absolution. Various people wondered how they could display gratitude for God's forgiving them by asking: *What then shall we do?* John gave them specific ways to change their sinful behavior in their various vocations of life. (cf. Luke 3:10-14) They were looking for ways to display God's wonderful gift of forgiveness in their lives! They had the desire to see God's salvation being acted out in their own lives because the way had been cleared for them to see Jesus clearly by faith!

Are you ready for Christmas, seeing Jesus clearly by faith? Are you seeking the coming of the Lord Jesus into your heart and life every day? God says He wants everyone to see His *salvation*. Living with a constant attitude of humility in repentance before your God you will clearly see God's salvation in Christ. By the power of His Holy Spirit you will have the desire to display that salvation in the way you act toward others in your daily life and they will clearly see your changed behavior! In so doing you will have many opportunities to share that forgiveness in Jesus Christ, helping people clear the way for Jesus in their own lives so that they too can truly be ready to meet Christ! Amen.

*If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable,
he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy,
useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

(2 Timothy 2:21)