

Preparing the Way
Matthew 3:1-12
December 5, 2010
Second Sunday of Advent

Second only to Jesus, John the Baptist is one of the first and greatest figures to leap from the pages of the New Testament. Just as Jesus' birth had been foretold, John's arrival was anticipated as well – even back into the Old Testament.

The first verse of Chapter 3 provides a geographical location that would have been familiar to the Hebrew people. It was into this same Judean wilderness that Moses looked as the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land. Jesus was preparing to lead people into a new kind of “Promised Land,” and John's presence out there in the Judean wilderness would have been a hard-to-miss symbolic reminder of a gateway into a new place in life. And since John had been compared to Elijah, the people should have realized that his arrival on the scene would be a precursor to the coming of the Messiah.

John the Baptizer's message was simple: Repent! John called everyone within earshot to look into their own lives...identify the places where what they were doing was separating them from God ... change their minds and souls...and then their actions. You see, repentance is first a heart change that then leads to a lifestyle change.

John didn't care who you were then, nor does it matter who you are now. John the Baptist was an equal opportunity baptizer. It didn't matter who you were, John knew that everyone had some part of their life that was keeping them from entering into an intimate relationship with the Lord. He knew that when you and I experience true repentance, our lives would be changed forever.

As I mentioned before, true repentance begins in the mind and the heart, and then results in a change in action. Some of us fall into the delusion that we can just change our actions and that constitutes repentance. “I won't ever do that again,” is something we hear a lot when an action causes pain in a person's life. The problem is that a change in action that is not born of a change in heart is short lived. Such a change is doomed from the beginning because it has no depth.

In Romans 7, the apostle Paul confesses:

I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

In other words, Paul's actions were controlled by a power that was a work against him as it sought control of his mind. The devil knows that if he can control your mind, then he can control your actions.

Even Jesus demonstrated that he knew that actions follow mindset when he lifted up the first commandment as Matt 22:37:

You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.

He knew if we loved the Lord with our heart, soul, and mind, then loving actions were bound to follow.

John the Baptist's role was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. When a king visited a city in biblical times, one thing people did to prepare for his coming was to repair the roads that the king would travel on so that his journey would be more enjoyable.

John's role was similar. He prepared the way for the coming of the King of Kings. He urged people to examine their lives then, and he does the same to us today.

What moral potholes do you have today that need to be filled?

What polluted mindsets do you have against other people that are poisoning your life, your family's life and your life with God?

What other trash is littering your life and keeping you from following Christ in the way that you know you want to?

At your invitation, the Holy Spirit can come alongside you and help you repent...so that you can prepare your life for the coming of the King!