

Title: When preparation leads to purpose.
Text Mark 1:5-8

Well we left off last week in Mark 1:4 which stated;

“John appeared, baptizing... proclaiming a baptism of repentance. (vs.4)

And we talked about how;

Repentance was the doorway into renewal and revival.

And we saw that repentance in fact was not a bad thing.

Rather, it is a holy gift given by God himself, to cleanse and refresh us.

And so this morning.....We're gonna continue that train of thought as we move into the next 4 verses.

So read with me if you will Mark 1:5-8 - and let's include vs.4 for context purposes.

And so let's read this together and then we will pray and get to work this morning.

Alright. Okay.

Read Mark 1:4-8 - (PRAY)

The emphasis we see this morning isn't just John's message.

We see that the camera pans to the crowd.

Q;

Why were thousands of people leaving their cities and going into the wilderness to hear a guy dressed like a camel-wearing survivalist who's eating bugs?

A;

Because God was drawing them.

1.) When God Starts Moving, He Draws Hungry Hearts.

“And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him...” (vs.5)

Notice. John didn't go to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was where the action was, It was where the Temple was.
It was where the religious leaders were, and where the crowds were.
It's where all the influencers and power players were.

Yet God sends John out to the wilderness.

And the crowds came to him.

That's backwards.

Usually the preacher goes to the people.

Here the people come to the preacher.

Imagine a church growth conference today.

“John, tell us your strategy.”

“Well, I moved to the desert.”

“And then?”

“I ate bugs., and dressed in garments that went out of style around 300 years ago”

“And then?”

“Well then...Then people just showed up!”

Here's the deal..... .Nobody is writing that Church growth book today!.

And here's the big takeaway here. The Bigger Lesson.

When God begins stirring hearts, people become willing to leave comfort zones.

You see. The wilderness represented inconvenience.

Dust. Heat. Distance.

Yet people kept coming.
Why?

Because hungry hearts will travel where God is working.

- John 6:44 says;
“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”
(John 6:44)

People were not merely responding to John.
They were responding to God.
God was already at work before John or they ever arrived.

One of the most encouraging truths in Scripture is that God started seeking us before we started seeking Him.

Long before you were looking for God...God was looking for you.
Long before you were asking questions...God was arranging circumstances.
Long before you walked into a church...God was drawing your heart.

Think about your own testimony.
Very few people wake up one morning and randomly think:
“You know what sounds fun today? Repentance.”

Nobody I've ever met started their relationship with Christ that way.
No. Typically something happened first.
A conversation. A crisis. A sermon.
A loss. A conviction. A moment happens.
And suddenly your heart becomes restless.

That's God drawing people.

And also it's important to note here that, - when people began coming to John, John's response wasn't:

“Look how successful I am.”

Instead...

He pointed away from himself.

Which leads us into Point 2.

2.) Know Your Role in God's Story. (vs. 6-7)

“And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I...’”

John knew exactly who he was. And he knew exactly who he wasn't. That's a rare thing.

Many people spend their entire lives trying to be somebody else.

Trying to live somebody else's story. Trying to play a role God never gave them.

John never had that problem.

He wasn't trying to be Moses. - He wasn't trying to be Elijah.

And he certainly wasn't trying to be the Messiah.

He knew his assignment.

Prepare the way. Point people to Jesus. Then step aside.

Let's be honest. John was a unique individual.

Camel hair clothing.

Leather belt.

Eating locusts and wild honey.

If John showed up at church today, half the congregation would think he was a prophet and the other half would think he was filming a **wilderness survival show.**

Either way I doubt we'd know what to do with him:-)

Yet God used him powerfully.

Why?

Because God isn't looking for people who fit a mold.
Rather. He's looking for people who will be faithful to their calling.

God didn't call John to be somebody else.
God called John to be John. **And he calls you to be you**, and me to be me:-)

The danger we face is that *one of the quickest ways to frustration* is trying to live out someone else's assignment or calling.

We compare gifts. Compare ministries. Compare influence.
We compare opportunities, and we compare platforms.

Meanwhile God is saying:
"I didn't ask you to be them."
"I asked you to be faithful where I've placed you."

This is where that old christian saying is true and really comes to life.
You know the one;

"Grow where you've been planted."

Meaning; **Be faithful to God in the place, season and circumstances where he has you right now.**

The Apostle Paul says in:
1 Corinthians 3:6
"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

Different assignments.
Same mission.

God never expected Paul to be Apollos.
God never expected Apollos to be Paul.
And God certainly never expected John the baptist to be Jesus.
It's important to know our position and place... To know our role.

O.K. - I'm about to ask you a dumb question but bear with me because it's connected to a great illustration:-)

(Construction ill.)

Have you ever driven through a construction zone?
Nobody pulls over to admire the orange "Detour" sign.
Nobody takes family pictures next to the flashing arrow board.
Nobody gets excited about the sign.

But without the sign, people never get where they're supposed to go.

That's John. - **And that's who we are..**

You see...John wasn't the destination. He was the sign.

His whole ministry was one **giant arrow** pointing toward Jesus.

And here's the thing: God calls us to be signposts as well.

Not the attraction.

Not the destination.

Just faithful enough that somebody else finds Christ because we pointed them in the right direction.

That's greatness in the kingdom.

C.S. Lewis wrote:

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."

-C.S. Lewis

And John embodied that idea.

He wasn't obsessed with himself. He was consumed with Christ.

One of the most freeing truths in the Christian life is realizing that you and I, *we*..... - are not the heroes of the story.

Jesus is.

One of the biggest traps we can fall into is allowing the enemy or even our own flesh to convince us that.....Without me there's no victory.

Without me there's no successful outcome or breakthrough.
And that's a trap
because here's the truth;

We're not carrying the church.

Jesus is.

We're not responsible for changing hearts.

Jesus is.

You're not responsible for saving your family.

Jesus is.

Mine and your responsibility is faithfulness.

So...Know your role. And play it well.

And let's all trust God with the results.

And conveniently, that's exactly where John takes us next.

Because he knew there was something Jesus could do,... that he never could.

John could preach. John could challenge. John could baptize with water.

But only Jesus could fill people with the Holy Spirit.

And that's the promise we find in verse 8.

3. Jesus Does What No One Else Can Do.

"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (v. 8)

John ends this section with a comparison.

And it's a comparison that actually points away from himself.

John says:

"I can do good things." - "But Jesus can do greater things."

"I can put you in water." - "But Jesus can fill you with the Holy Spirit."

"I can call you to repentance." - "But Jesus can make you new."

“I can point you toward God.” - “But Jesus can bring you to God.”

John understood the limits of his ministry.

He could preach powerful sermons. He could challenge people, and call them to confess, and John could baptize them in the Jordan River.

But John couldn't change a single heart.

Only Jesus could do that.

It's important to realize that behavior modification and spiritual transformation are not the same thing.

- A person can clean up habits without changing their heart.
- A person can improve their behavior without being transformed.
- A person can get wet in baptism without ever surrendering to Christ.

John knew that repentance could prepare the way, but he also understood that only Jesus could make a person new!

(Diet ill.)

Have you noticed that every year there's a new miracle diet?

One expert says, “Eat more protein.”

Another says, “Eat less protein.”

One says, “Avoid carbs.” Another says, “Carbs are your friend.”

At this point, if somebody released a diet based entirely on bacon, cheesecake, and sweet tea, half if not more of us here would sign up before we left the sanctuary today.

But the reality is most of us don't suffer from a lack of information.

We know what we're supposed to do.

The challenge is actually doing it.

And spiritually speaking, that's what John understood.

You see;

John understood that he could give people the information. He could tell people to repent, and he could point them in the right direction all day long.

But only Jesus can transform a heart.

Jesus can do what no one else can do.

And Jesus knew his Role. He knew His mission.

Hundreds of years before John stepped into the wilderness, God made a promise through Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 36:26 says;

***“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.”
(Ezekiel 36:26)***

That’s what John is talking about. Jesus came to give us a new heart with;
New desires.

New affections.

And a new Spirit within us.

Maybe that’s why some of us get discouraged.

We’ve tried harder. We’ve made promises. We’ve started over.

We say things like, “This time it’ll be different.”

Only to find ourselves wrestling with the same fears, failures, and struggles.

But here’s the deal;

The Christian life my friends, was never meant to run on human willpower alone.

It runs on the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit;

- Comforts, Convicts, Guides, and Empowers.

The Spirit transforms us.

Not overnight. But genuinely. And over a lifetime.

That’s the promise John is pointing toward.

St. Augustine once prayed:

“Command what You will, and give what You command.” - Augustine

In other words:

“Lord, if You call me to live differently, I need You to give me the power to do it.”

And that’s exactly what Jesus does.

He never calls us to something without providing the grace and power to walk in it.

So as we’ve seen. - John could preach repentance.

John could baptize with water.

John could point people toward Jesus.

But only Jesus can forgive our sins, change our hearts, and give us his Spirit to live within us, that transforms our lives!

And that’s what makes communion such a fitting response to Mark 1:8.

Because when John says,

“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit,” he is pointing beyond the Jordan River.

He’s pointing to the cross.

(Call Worship team up)

The Holy Spirit comes because Jesus gave His life.

The new heart comes because Jesus shed His blood.

Forgiveness comes because Jesus was willing to take our place.

Communion reminds us that, “Our Hope” has never been in our efforts.

But rather it is only found in our relationship with Jesus and his finished work on the cross.

So as we come to the Lord’s Table today, don’t ask yourself,

“Have I tried hard enough?”

Ask yourself,

“Am I trusting the One who died for me and did what I could never do?”

Because that's the message of Mark here.

Jesus does what only he can do.

He forgives sinners. He changes hearts. He gives His Spirit.

And He welcomes us to His table. Let's remember Him together.