

Who are you FOLLOWING?

Read the story about John the Baptist

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, ²as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”— ³“a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:1-8)

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus to enter the hearts of the people. Jesus was coming soon, and the people were not ready, so John had work to do.

When Mark introduced us to Jesus, why did he start out telling us about John the Baptist? What is the point of John the Baptist’s story?

The point is that there is good news. God has sent His son, Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, to make salvation available to you. John the Baptist came to pave the way for us by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

What are the benefits of this good news? When God sent His son Jesus, what was God doing for you?

Here are some of God’s desires:

- God was making a way for you to come out of darkness
- God sent Jesus to atone (make up) for your sins
- God made a way for you to repent of your sins
- God made a way for you to receive forgiveness for your sins
- God was setting you free from the dominion of sin
- God set you free to follow Jesus and live in relationship with Him

All of this happens when you hear the good news, believe it and act on it.

Prepare to Follow

Read verses 2-5 in the (Mark 1) John the Baptist story.

How did God prepare the people of Israel to receive the good news? Who did God send to the people and how did they respond?

God sent John the Baptist to warn the people by telling them that they needed to repent. The people repented of their sins (acknowledged what they'd done wrong) and were baptized in the Jordan River. They prepared their hearts for the good news.

Read Isaiah 40:3-5.

Note that John the Baptist was the voice crying out in the wilderness. What happens when the condition of your heart is made ready for Jesus?

God is the master planner. He always prepares for everything in advance! To prepare the way for you, God also sent his messenger, John the Baptist, to call out in the wilderness, telling you to prepare the way for the Lord, to make a straight path for Him, right into your heart.

God knows what we need to believe. He did not send His son alone. He also sent a testimony in advance. He sent John the Baptist to give you instructions, to prepare the way, to make the path straight, to remove all obstructions, to clear away the clutter, to remove the idols, to destroy the allegiances that hinder your discipleship.

(Week 2 – Day 3)

God's Vision

God put this plan in action because He has a Vision of Glory.

Read Mark 1:8 to help you see this vision for your life.

Do you know what God wants to accomplish in your life?

John told the people that one day they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. It means God's Spirit will lead them through a process of conversion, sanctification, and empowerment. Some believe that the evidence of this baptism is seen in the speaking in tongues, as in the day of Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus received power to serve as his witnesses. Today, we understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit as the union of your spirit with the Holy Spirit so that you can enjoy communion (spending time) with Jesus Christ. This union of your spirit to God's spirit is like a marriage.

How is your spiritual union with God so far? Are you holding up your end of the relationship? In a marriage, both parties must value each other to make it work. It requires a daily commitment to keep the communication going. It is the same way with God.

Read Psalm 5:1-7. How comforting is it to be able to talk to Him?

Read Psalm 17:1-9. What are the benefits of entering His presence?

FOLLOW JESUS' Obedience

Read the story about Jesus' baptism

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." ¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:9-15)

After reading the story, go back and read verse 11.

What is the point that God wants to convey to His disciples?

What does God want His followers to understand?

The Father was pleased with His son. The Father sent His son, and His son did what He intended to do! If we are following Jesus, learning from His example, then the lesson here is to do what pleases our heavenly father. In this story, Jesus pleased Him by getting baptized.

As a child pleases his or her parent, we have to please our father through childlike spiritual obedience.

In what ways could we imitate Jesus' obedience and please our heavenly father?

We can imitate Jesus by:

- Following His instructions
- Going where He sends us
- Enduring suffering when we have to face it
- Overcoming temptation when we have to face it

As you learn to follow and obey, you will develop the habit of spending personal time with God. During your personal time, you will discover that God has a divine assignment for you to fulfill.

Read Mark 1:9. What is the first step in Jesus' divine assignment?

After His father spoke from heaven saying that “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased,” Jesus was led to the next step in His assignment. Where was Jesus' next step? How long did He stay there and what did he have to face?

Divine Assignment

As you discover the 1st steps of your divine assignment you will realize that it will not be comfortable. You will not like it. You will be a broken vessel, living in sin, transformed into a chosen vessel, for all to see and behold the glory of the Lord.

Jesus had a divine assignment. The 1st step of his path was cleared out by John the Baptist. John went to the Jordan and proclaimed the message and prepared the way. Jesus had to follow the path where He would be baptized by John, validated by the father and visited by the Holy Spirit.

When you are walking in obedience, you are on public display. When this happens, who is watching? Whose lives will be impacted by your actions?

How does it feel knowing that when you struggle, others can see it?
Since you are on public display, you might as well testify publicly!

Acceptance

Read verse 4 in the story and write down where Jesus had to do ministry. Do you think Jesus was accepted there?

The reality about life is that God prepares a place for us to live. We grow in front of others. We are transformed in front of others. We become disciples, so that others will see and believe.

The truth about God revealed in this text is that God does not give us private struggles and public recognition. Jesus had to surrender to public baptism. He modeled baptism for us. For us, it symbolizes public recognition of sin, redemption, forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal into a new life in Christ.

Discuss your trials and the lessons you have learned from them.

What you must know is that after baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness, the place of temptation, trouble, and trial.