



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“What Are You Praying For?”

Mark 1:1-8; John 1:6-8, 19-28; Ephesians 2:4-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 Healing Ministry

Like most adults, we may pray for good health for ourselves or others close to us. We may pray for peace in Iraq and Afghanistan, bringing home our troops. We pray for the recovery of our economy, or the recovery of our personal economy, with a job. Those are more adult prayers, at Christmas, or anytime. There's nothing wrong with those. But notice--so far, nothing about Jesus. Even adults can miss the meaning of Christmas, and get off track about what we're praying for. Today we'll find out what to pray for, above all else.

Now we're going to meet John the Baptizer head-on. I'm going to read Mark's brief account of The Baptizer, and also read portions of John the Evangelist's portrait of John. Then we'll use those portraits of The Baptizer to hear from God the real message and purpose of God here.

This is going to be a bit of a Bible workout, so first, find Mark's gospel, chapter one. Mark is one of the Synoptic gospels—that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke focus on the actions of Jesus and his message in narrative, chronological form. John's Gospel, on the other hand, focuses more on Jesus' identity. Both are important, as we'll see, for “Jesus is the reason for the season”. Of course, no one would care about his birth (which we are getting ready to celebrate with Christmas), and no one would care about his death (which we will celebrate on Good Friday) were it not for his life and his resurrection that put God's AMEN on that life. Here in Mark 1 is “Johnny B.” Listen with me for God's Word TO US TODAY, as I read verses 1-8 of Mark, chapter 1. *[text]*

Verse 1 is really Mark's title for his whole work, isn't it. “Gospel” means, “good news”. “This is the good news about Jesus Messiah, Son of God.”

Mark begins with quotes from Isaiah, which talk of a new beginning, the arrival of God Himself.

Then, in verse 4, Mark says, “And so, John came...” This John is the fulfillment of Isaiah's words. And, this guy baptizes people who respond to his call (fully recorded in other gospel accounts) to repent and receive forgiveness.

John obeyed God's call to baptize, but that act carried its own meaning for the Jews. Jews were not baptized at the beginning of their life with God. Baptism, a rite of cleansing, was only for proselytes—that is, pagans who were converting to Judaism. By urging JEWS to be baptized, the acted-out message is, “I'm starting anew, because I haven't been living as God wants, and I need his forgiveness, just like pagans do.” We don't know if the individuals John baptized repeated some sort of formula like this, but their baptism was proclaiming that message to any and all who had eyes to see.

But there was also a subversive piece to John's baptizing Jews. Those who came for baptism were also saying, "The Jewish official religion is not all-sufficient. There has to be more, and I'm seeking that 'more'." No wonder we find the religious officials from Jerusalem coming out to quiz John, as we'll see in the next account. Lots of people—even from Jerusalem, the Holy City—were responding to John's call.

What do you make of John's "low couture", his lifestyle? For one thing, it's almost as if he was saying, by his appearance, "I'm not from here. I'm not part of this hollow religion." He's dressing in the most basic clothes, and he's living off the land—not seeking to impress by his dress, nor seeking invitations to fine meals with the elites.

And finally, John speaks (in this account). His message is to point to another, and he says, "I'm not good enough to be the lowest household servant to this other guy." Remember, most people in those days walked everywhere, with the animals on the roads. When you arrived at someone's house, if they had servants, the lowest servant was assigned the task of welcoming you by taking off your sandals, and washing your feet so you'd be less smelly and more comfortable during your visit. It wasn't pleasant duty for this slave. John says, I'm not even good enough for that, compared to the One who is coming.

Now, let's take in John the Gospel-Writer's account of The Baptizer. Find John, chapter , starting at verse 6. I'll read 6-8, then skip to 19. Listen again for God's Voice in these words from Scripture. [*text 1:6-8, 19-28*]

This account is similar, but seems to emphasize the "pointing purpose" of Johnny B. It's not about me, he is saying.

Now, which account is "right"? The answer is, "Yes." Yes, both are right; yes, both are needed. Johnny B's purpose is to point to the One who is greater. As a way for you to get ready for this One Who is to come, repent and receive God's forgiveness.

Putting those together, we see the meaning and importance of repentance and forgiveness; but we also see how minor that is, compared to continually connecting with God, with Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. Baptism gets you ready; it's just the beginning of a whole new life.

Sometimes we Christians behave as though the point of our mission is to get people baptized. No, that's only the beginning. It's like taking a pregnant woman to the hospital, making sure the baby is born safely--then leaving the baby in some alley to grow up by itself. That's criminal neglect, and you can go to prison for that.

It happened recently in Columbia, South Carolina. Firstcoastnews.com reported on October 18, "Authorities in Lexington County are looking for the mother of an abandoned baby.

"Someone left a two-day old baby in a bathroom stall at a medical office building.

"A janitor found the baby girl wrapped in a towel in the handicap stall.

"Doctors say she's healthy but dehydrated.

“She had a note attached to her that read, ‘She was born Tuesday morning at 9:30 and was last fed that afternoon at 2:30.’

“State law allows people to leave babies in safe havens, just not alone.”

When mothers do that, they are acknowledging that birth is the easy part; raising a newborn to maturity, that’s much more difficult. Growing a child to maturity requires an ongoing relationship, not a single act of birth. Or, said another way, to leave someone after baptism is to get them “all dressed up, but nowhere to go”.

Paul, writing to the new believers at Ephesus, gets the whole picture. Find Ephesians 2, a bit further into the New Testament, verses 4-10. Let’s read this together, off the screen. *[text]*

Dead in our life without God, yet God loving us and not wanting to lose us, God makes us alive in and with Christ. God didn’t have to do that; we certainly did not deserve it. That is what “grace” means. We have a place with the Risen Christ, that is eternal, and we will be on display forever to show how grace-full God has been to sinful people. “For we are God’s workmanship, [re-born] in Christ Jesus to do good works, which [is what] God has prepared in advance for us to do [with him].” Christian faith--redeemed life--life with God--begins with responding to God’s call to think again about our life without God, turn around, and be baptized. Then, in this new with-God life, we are to discover how God at work around us, and join in. That’s what real Christians do.

Is that you?

This is how to get ready for Christmas, when our Redeemer comes. Nothing less will do. And as we grow in Christ, with Christ in us, Paul’s words to the Thessalonians become much more natural. *[text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24]*

What a difference for people who know Jesus! **People who know Jesus know what to pray for—for themselves, and others: the with-God life!**

[Today, we offer our healing ministry as this worship service concludes. With this Word of God ringing in our ears, perhaps some of you feel a need for a healing of your faith with God, so you are ready to greet our Redeemer. Or, maybe you need physical healing, or financial healing, or you deeply want healing for someone else. Then our healing ministry is for you. After our last song and God’s Words of blessing, you can move to the center section, and join others of you who are staying to pray for God’s power and protection. When the rest have moved out [QUIETLY], the Ministry Teams will be in place, and when you see an opening, you can come for healing. Now, let’s sing our last song, as one of our Elders takes light from the Christ Candle to each of the Healing Stations.]