

## Look to the One who is more powerful.

Text: Mark 1:4-11 for January 7, 2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

*<sup>4</sup> And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The 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. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." <sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

When it comes to sports, who do people want leading their team on the field? They want the best! People want the biggest, strongest, fastest, most powerful and talented person to lead their team. Teams want a person with the power and ability to lead them to victory. Teams want a leader who has what it takes to give them the best opportunity to win.

Today John the Baptist has a similar message for us. John tells us that if we want the best opportunity to be in a right relationship with God then we need someone who has the power to clean up our lives and get us on God's good side. We need someone with the skill and ability to make us winners in God's eyes. That is why John the Baptist tells us ...

Theme: Look to the One who is more powerful.

1. He cleanses with the Holy Spirit.
2. He makes you pleasing to God.

As we meet John the Baptist in this portion of Mark's Gospel we hear that he is attracting quite a crowd. Mark tells us "**The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him**" (v. 5a). That is pretty good considering Jerusalem almost ten miles away from where John is preaching. And the only way to get there for most people was walking. And that twenty-mile round trip was not on flat ground. It is downhill all the way from Jerusalem to the Jordan River, and then uphill all the way back.

So why would people make that long and tiresome trip to see John? Because it had been over 400 years since Israel had a prophet proclaim a message from God. John certainly looked like a prophet: He had clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. This is what Elijah the prophet was said to have worn. But John not only looked like a prophet, he sounded like a prophet.

John proclaimed God's message to the people. He was "**Preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**" (v. 4). Now there were always some in Israel who had a problem with that word "repent." To repent means you have to admit you have done something to offend God. Sadly, there were some who heard John's message who refused to repent. They thought God was happy with them because they were descendants of Abraham. They worshipped God in his temple bringing in their sacrifices and offerings. They did all the right things to "make God happy." They felt like they did not have any reason to repent. They rejected John's message. In rejecting John's message, they were really rejecting God's message.

Yet not everyone rejected John's message. Many who heard John believed that his message was from God, and they did repent. Mark tells us "**Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River**" (v. 5b). God's message changed the hearts of these

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people. They recognized their sins. They recognized they needed God's forgiveness. So, they confessed their sin before God, admitting they had done things to offend God. These people trusted in the forgiveness God was proclaiming through John. Because they trusted God's message they received God's forgiveness.

So, what exactly was John's message? What was this baptism of repentance was proclaiming? Mark tells us, **And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit"** (vs. 7,8). John was letting the people know that God would soon reveal to them the Messiah, the one whom God would anoint to take away the sins of the world. John told the people to look to the One who is more powerful. This was someone who was far more powerful than John. This "more powerful One" would not just baptize with water, but he was going to cleanse the people of their sins by the power of his Holy Spirit! John told the people, "Trust in the One who is more powerful for the forgiveness of your sins." That was the message John proclaimed to the people of Israel.

We need John's message just as much as people of his day did. Let's face it, we do not always like to repent of our sins. We do not repent because sometimes we don't take our sin seriously. We think, "So I said a 'bad' word. What's the big deal? It's just a word, and God will forgive me anyway." And sometimes pride can get in the way of our repentance. We feel, "I had every right to be angry and say what I did because of what that person did to me!" Or we take pride in some family connection to a church. We think we are on good terms with God because our parents, or grandparents, or great-grandparents were members of a church so that puts us in a good standing with God. When we do not repent of our sins – all our sins, big or little – we are really telling God he's wrong. When we refuse to turn away from our sins we are saying to God, "I do not care if you find this offensive God, because I think it's okay and that's all that matters." We are really saying that what we want is more important than God.

When our hearts start to harden from unrepentant sin we need to look to the One who is more powerful to crush our stony hearts. We need the baptism of his Holy Spirit to wash away our indifference toward sin, and to wash away our foolish pride. We need God's law to show us how much we need Jesus. We need God's word to move us to repent. And we especially need his gospel to show us how Christ has washed us clean in his blood. Look to the One who is more powerful. He is the one who cleanses you with the Holy Spirit.

As we look at these words from Mark's Gospel that speak of Jesus' baptism, people sometimes have trouble with the idea of Jesus being baptized. They start questioning what is happening: If John's baptism was one of repentance for the forgiveness of sins then why was Jesus baptized? Does this mean Jesus had sins he needed to repent of? Did Jesus need to be forgiven? If so, how could he be our Savior? Why was Jesus there being baptized?

Jesus was not there to be forgiven of any sins; he had no sins. And we know Jesus had no sin because he was pleasing to Father. God said of Jesus, "**You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased**" (v. 11). The only way anyone can be pleasing to God is if they have no sin. A person must be Holy and perfect as God is perfect to be pleasing to God. And Jesus is perfect. He pleased God with everything he did.

Jesus was not baptized by John so he could be forgiven. Jesus was baptized by John so he could be anointed. In the Old Testament, when a person was appointed by God to be a prophet, priest, or king, God would have that person anointed with oil to show that they had

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been officially placed into that position by God. At Jesus' baptism God anointed his Son not with oil, but with the Holy Spirit. God was officially appointing his Son into the position of Savior. From this point on Jesus would carry out a *public* ministry, showing publicly by what he said and did that he was the Savior. At Jesus' baptism God revealed to the people of Israel that Jesus is the Messiah, the one anointed to be the world's Savior. Jesus is the more powerful One who pleases God.

And that is good news for us because by nature we are not pleasing to God. By nature, we cannot please God because of the sin we are born with; the sin that works to control our lives. When we look to ourselves to please God we find out that all we end up doing is offending God. This is because so often our attempts to please God are nothing more than attempts to justify ourselves: "Look at all of the 'good things' I have done for you God. You should be really pleased with me!" We try to balance out sin by doing "good deeds", yet those good deeds can never take away sin. And as long as the sin remains we cannot be pleasing to God.

Jesus is always pleasing to God. Because Jesus pleased God he could take our place; he could be our substitute. Jesus pleased God with his entire life. Then Jesus pleased God by making the payment God required for sin: The sacrifice of his perfect sinless life. By his death Christ took our sins away, and in return gives us everything about himself that is right with God. Along with his forgiveness Jesus gives his perfect life as a gift to you and me. As the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "**This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**" (Romans 3:22). Through faith in Jesus people are made pleasing to God.

Look to the One who is more powerful; look to Jesus. He makes you pleasing to God. It is only by faith in the promised Savior that a person can please God. The writer to the Hebrews tells us "**without faith it is impossible to please God**" (Hebrews 11:6). When you have faith in Jesus you are covered with his perfect life. So, when you do something by faith, doing it out love for your Savior, what you do is pleasing in God's sight.

And it doesn't matter what you do. It could be some great deed, or a simple act of kindness. Whatever you do by faith pleases God. Giving thousands of dollars to help one of our missionaries is certainly pleasing to God. But it's also pleasing to God when you show love to your elderly neighbor by shoveling snow off their sidewalk. Sure, it is pleasing to God when we use our skills to help build, maintain, or run a church. It is pleasing to God when we give of our time and energy to help with church outreach events, or to help plan and carry out a fellowship event. But it is just as pleasing to God to help a child with their homework, or show compassion to a neighbor or friend who has lost a loved one, or even to spend time with someone who needs an ear to listen and a heart to show care. Some of the most pleasing things to God are often the simplest things. The author of the letter to the Hebrews says, "**Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased**" (Hebrews 13:15,16). Look to the One who is more powerful. It is only by faith in him that we are pleasing to God.

Sports teams want the best when it comes to those who will lead the team on the field. Teams and fans want the people with the power to lead their team to victory. The same is true for our spiritual life. We want our spiritual leader to be the one who has the power to lead us to victory. Look to the One who is more powerful. He cleanses you from your sins by his Holy Spirit. He gives you the victory over sin, Satan and death. With his perfect life covering you he

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makes you pleasing to God. Amen.