

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Luke 3:1-6

*<sup>1</sup> It was the fifteenth year in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Herod ruled Galilee, and his brother Philip ruled Iturea and Trachonitis. Lysanias was the ruler of Abilene. <sup>2</sup> It was at the time when Annas and Caiaphas were chief priests that God spoke to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert. <sup>3</sup> John traveled throughout the region around the Jordan River. He told people about a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As the prophet Isaiah wrote in his book, “A voice cries out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord! Make his paths straight!’ <sup>5</sup> Every valley will be filled. Every mountain and hill will be leveled. The crooked ways will be made straight. The rough roads will be made smooth. <sup>6</sup> All people will see the salvation that God gives.’”*

Jeremy Myers, graduate of Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary, author of books and blog posts and leader of an online discipleship website called Redeeming God wrote this description about preparation that is helpful for our understanding about the role of John the Baptist: “In ancient times, when a king was going to visit a city, he would send before him someone to herald his coming, someone to announce that he would be arriving soon. The herald would go around the city, and go before the leaders of the city, telling them all, “The king is coming. He will be here any day. So, clean up your lives. Make sure you are all in obedience to the king’s commands so that you will not be punished when he arrives.”

This herald also served as a city inspector. He would go around the city and make a list of things that needed to be fixed. He would tell them, “Clean up your city. Sweep your streets. Get rid of all the garbage lying around. Round up any criminals to make the city safe. Fix the roads; make them smooth and straight. Make sure the town is gleaming. Make sure the city is fit for a king to ride through.” It was an embarrassment for that city, and the people of the city, if they were not prepared when the king arrived. It was also an insult to the king if they had not prepared properly for his arrival. If he came, and they were not prepared, he might mete out some judgment and punishment upon the city and its rulers.

As we look at Luke 3, this is what we see going on. The King is coming, and He has sent a herald to announce His imminent arrival. The king, of course, is Jesus Christ.” The herald is John the Baptist.

In the season of Advent, we are reminded that God sends to us the greatest gift of all, His love for us, in the flesh, our Savior Jesus Christ. Each year we hear the Christmas story and celebrate the Good News, and we try to grasp the deeper meaning of this for our lives. Through worldly mechanisms we receive secular hype geared towards materialism and selfish desires, drawing our attention sometimes other interests.

But John the Baptist, the herald for Jesus, directs our focus questions like: Are we excited about the coming of God’s precious gift for us? Do we truly understand what this gift is? How badly do we really want God’s gift? What are we willing to do to make room for Jesus in our lives? Do we prepare each day, and do we stay excited about our walk with Christ?

Through today’s scripture reading we find that John the Baptist gives us some guidance on how we can prepare ourselves and make room for Jesus in our lives. The first task of preparation he tells us in verse three is we need to confess our sins to God to make room for Jesus in our lives.

There's a story about four preachers who met for a friendly gathering. During the conversation one preacher said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confess certain sins and needs. Let's do the same. Confession is good for the soul." In due time all agreed. One confessed he liked to gamble and would sneak off when away from his church. The second confessed his struggle with lust and the third one confessed to materialism. When it came to the fourth one, he wouldn't confess. The others pressed him saying, "Come now, we confessed ours. What is your secret or vice?" Finally, he answered, "It is gossiping, and I can hardly wait to get out of here."

We all need to offer our confessions for our sins. No one is exempt from the need to do this. No one is perfect. We not only need to confess what we do and say wrong, but we also need to confess the sins of our thoughts and hearts. Jesus taught us that these sins are just as bad as what we do or say to hurt others and cause sin.

Without confession of our sins, we allow a wall to be built between us and God and God's will for us. We keep at a distance the revelation of the truth that Christ serves as a guide for living together in peace. Sadly, sinfulness is so much a part of our human nature, but even though this is the case, we should not allow ourselves to fall into *the trap of using our human nature* as an excuse for our sin. Confession keeps our awareness heightened of the possibility of sinful thoughts, words, and actions that we could give in to, and it gives us a better chance of making a choice to turn away from any temptation to sin.

How else should we prepare for the arrival of Christ child in our lives? Also in verse three, John tells us that along with confession, we need to repent of our sin.

Some of us may have the idea that confession and repentance are the same thing, but they are not. Repentance takes confession a step further. Repentance includes our confession, but it also means making changes in our lives so that sin does not rule our daily living otherwise sin will continue to get in the way of our relationship with God.

John accused the Pharisees, who came to see him, of being hypocrites. They taught the Law of Moses, and they said and did the right things, but they also had a lot of pride, counting themselves as better than anyone else. They not only needed to make confession for their sin, but they also needed to repent, they needed to make some changes in their walk with God and with others.

Sin can move into our lives subtly. Maybe this illustration will help make my point. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. "Stevenson's man found a trick by which he could change himself into the person of another man, he could make an actual transformation of himself. He could change not only his internal thoughts and feelings, but also his external looks and actions.

Whenever he wanted to turn himself into Mr. Hyde, he took a drug, and the miracle was accomplished. He changed his handwriting. He had a separate bank account for Mr. Hyde-- everything in life was separate. When Mr. Hyde, (who went down into sin and constantly wallowed in those depths of inquiry) wanted to get away from being Mr. Hyde, he took the drug and went back to being Dr. Jekyll. When the officers were after him, he had simply to go into the laboratory and swallow a pill, and when they arrived the man, they were looking for was not there.

That process went on through the years, but this was the peculiar fact about it: Not only by his will could he change himself into another man, and so on back and forth, but he discovered at last, when it was too late that, every time he transformed himself from the good Dr.

Jekyll into the evil Mr. Hyde, then Mr. Hyde became increasingly the stronger, until at last the climax was reached.

It became harder and harder to make the transfer, and then, it could not be made at all. Dr. Jekyll was dead, and Mr. Hyde still lived, but he was damned to eternal darkness and death, helpless and hopeless."

If we do not confess and repent of our sinful nature every day, we will find ourselves drifting our way away from God, God's love, and the influence of God's love in our lives. We'll wake up one day and ask, "How did I ever get here?"

Once we have confessed and repented of our sin, we have opened ourselves to the forgiveness of our sin that we so desperately want and need. Forgiveness clears the way for us to walk with Christ. It makes room for him to rule in our lives so that the path that he lays before us is made straight. Forgiveness makes us more aware of God's presence and availability to us, to help us get through the difficult times, and to celebrate with us during the good times of our lives.

When we prepare ourselves and make room for Jesus in our lives, we confess our sin, we make changes from our sinful ways, we are forgiven, and finally, we live holy lives. We live as examples of Christ. We live as ambassadors of God's love and healing to those around us. This happens because we no longer live selfishly, focused more on what we need and want than on the needs of others. It happens because we know God's love. We know how precious and loved we are by God, and this fills us with joy and peace that comes with being forgiven and walking with Jesus, and we want everyone else to know Jesus and have the same kind of experience that we have.

It was in December of 1903, that after many attempts, the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground and into the air at Kitty Hawk. Thrilled over the accomplishment, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas." Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the big news-for the first time in human history, man had flown! (SOURCE: Daily Bread, December 23, 1991.)

Do we hear, do we understand the message shared with us by the herald, John the Baptist? Listen brothers and sisters to his message. God is sending to us an incredible gift if we want it. There is no better gift, God's love that is deeper than anything we could possibly imagine. It's a love so great that we are forgiven our sin, and we are changed by it, changed in a way that pleases God. Receive it. Make room for it, through your confession and repentance, take it, open it, it's for you. Amen.