

A Truly God-Pleasing Advent Preacher.

Text: Mat 11:2-10

1) Points people's hearts to Jesus

Suggested Hymns:

2) Stands for the truth, humbly and sincerely

6, 12, 13, 265, 221

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 11:2-10, ² *And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"*

⁴ *Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶ "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

⁷ *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ "For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'" (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Advent and Christmas season is the time for much preaching. There are the pastors whose work involves the duty of public preaching. Then there are also those who do much preaching in the Christmas season by sending out Christmas cards etc. There are those who are teaching in colleges and schools and who will, therefore, certainly make some reference to the significance of this holy and happy season in their classes.

Some business owners give out Christmas bonuses and gifts to their employees. They will certainly bring them some kind of Christmas message.

Then there are young people and children who by their singing beautiful Christmas carols are truly preaching the message of Christmas.

Since there is so much preaching in this season of the church year, it is quite appropriate that the Early Church set aside this third Sunday in Advent to draw our attention to Christmas preaching and preachers.

However, not all Advent and Christmas preaching is good, because many false prophets and preachers go out into the world also in this holy season. How can you tell what is good Advent and Christmas preaching? Our text today shows us that John the Baptist was a truly God-pleasing Advent preacher. Let us consider the advent preacher. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Advent Preacher Points People's Hearts To Jesus

John the Baptist had been chosen by God to be the forerunner of Jesus. The Old Testament speaks of him as a herald preparing the highway for the king. Thus, when we speak of Advent preachers, we think immediately of John the Baptist.

John had performed his duty faithfully. He had preached repentance and faith without fear or favour. Yes, he had even dared to tell King Herod that he was an adulterer, an open sinner, because he was living with his brother's wife. Such honest preaching had offended and angered King Herod and especially his wife Herodias, who had disowned her previous husband to become a queen; and John was cast into prison, never to be set free again.

But John still kept on preaching. He had a few faithful disciples who served him even while he was in prison. John's one great purpose had been to point people's hearts to Jesus. He wanted people to believe that Jesus was truly the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. But it seems that even some of his disciples were still in doubt. They saw how poor and humble Jesus was. They could hardly believe that such a person could have come from God to be the Ruler and Redeemer of Israel.

No doubt, John had exhausted all the Old Testament prophecies in an attempt to prove to these disciples that they were all fulfilled in the Person of Jesus.

Now he saw another way of convincing them. Our text tells us about it in these words, ² *And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he*

sent two of his disciples³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” In other words, he was asking, “Are You really the true Messiah, for whom Israel has been waiting according to the Old Testament promises, or are You just another prophet who has come to tell us that we must wait for another?” With that question, John sent these disciples directly to Jesus.

That is good Advent preaching: To direct everyone to go with all his questions and doubts directly to Jesus. But Jesus is no longer visibly among us. How, then, can people’s hearts be directed to Him?

He has left us His living Word. Of that He says in John 8:31-32, ³¹ *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed.* ³² *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

If John the Baptist was living today, he would say to all of us in this Advent season, “*Read your Bible if you really want to celebrate Christmas properly. In the Bible you will see Jesus as He truly is.*” If people would only read this holy Book of God, then they would learn that Jesus, the Christ Child, whom we adore and worship in this Christmas season, is really the Messiah who was to come. If they did this, how much greater and deeper their Christmas joy would be!

What answer did these disciples of John get as they came to Jesus with this question? We read, *Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:* ⁵ *“The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

Luke tells us that when these disciples of John came to Jesus, He was in the act of healing the maimed and the blind and the deaf. Jesus did not give these disciples a mere theoretical answer in word, but pointed to His deeds. Actions always speak louder than words.

Isaiah had prophesied of the Messiah who was to come,¹ *Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.”* ⁵ *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.* ⁶ *Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.*

By whom has this prophecy been fulfilled other than by Jesus? Not in all the history of mankind could they find another person who by his own authority and in his own name did the wonderful deeds that Jesus did.

Isaiah also had said another thing concerning the Messiah, as we read in Isaiah 61:1, ¹ *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound. Jesus points to those things as He says, **the poor have the gospel preached to them.**”*

All the glorious things which the Messiah was to do, things which seemed so impossible for man, were now being done by Jesus. Accordingly, the answer was plain. Was Jesus the One that should come? Certainly He was; only the most stubborn fool would deny that, because all of Jesus’ works and all His preaching proved it.

Therein lies the test of a truly God-pleasing Advent preacher today: Does he turn people’s hearts to Jesus? Do you talk and preach after this manner in this Advent and Christmas season? Do you know people who are approaching this festival of Christmas this year without that firm conviction that that little Baby born in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago is truly the One that should come?

Be like John the Baptist, be a real Advent preacher, and tell those that have doubts and cares and fears the same thing that John told his disciples: *“Go to Jesus, and see if you will not be convinced that He is a sure Help in all trouble and a certain Saviour from sin.”*

Tell such a person to read their Bible and see the marvellous works which Jesus did, how He healed the sick and the lame and the blind and how He can do the same today. Let them go to Jesus in the Bible and hear His precious promises of forgiveness and grace and mercy, and they will see how the poor also today have the Gospel preached to them. That will make this a real Christmas for them.

Having given the evidence of His identity, Jesus added the words, *“**And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.**”* No doubt, these disciples had been somewhat offended in Jesus. He was too plain and simple. They had expected a Messiah who would make a grand and striking appearance.

That danger will also be there for all of us in the Christmas season this year. We may think that people will call us plain or simple if we talk about Jesus and His love to them. Away with such thoughts and fears! Jesus is our greatest and grandest Treasure; the one really great and worth-while Christmas Gift that we have.

Our faith in Him is worth more than gold and silver. As truly God-pleasing Advent preachers, whether among the clergy or the laity, we must direct people's hearts to Jesus.

2. The Advent Preacher Stands for the Truth, Humbly and Sincerely

As these disciples of John returned to him, we may assume that they were convinced that Jesus was truly the Messiah. Then Jesus took the opportunity to show those who had heard the discussion that John the Baptist had always been a truly God-pleasing Advent preacher.

We read, *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"* Many preachers, clergymen and laymen, are such reeds shaken with the wind. They speak what pleases the people. If they know a person is guilty of a certain sin, they will be careful not to condemn that sin in his presence in order not to lose his favour. Not so John.

John spoke alike to the poorest Jewish beggar, to the rich Pharisee, and even to proud King Herod. His message was: *"Repent, humble yourselves before your God."* Contrary and opposite winds could not shake John like a reed. He remained firm as a rock, even if it meant being cast into prison. Certainly those who went out to see in John a reed shaken in the wind were disappointed.

If only all Advent preachers this year might fearlessly and honestly condemn people's sin without fear or favour, stand firm as Jesus and the Bible, preach the Law in all its severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness!

Then Jesus continues, *"But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses."* John the Baptist did not seek riches or selfish gain for himself. He did not come in soft clothing and rich raiment. He came clad in camel's hair and a leather girdle tied around him. He served and preached not for profits sake, but because he was sent by God to lead people to Jesus.

If we want to please earthly kings and live in their houses, we may have to wear soft clothing and say only such things that will flatter those around us. But if we work for the King of Kings, our outward appearance means nothing, because He searches the heart. The world has had to invent all kinds of flimsy outward things to make Christmas appealing. With Jesus the standards that appeal are still the same today as they were in the days of John the Baptist: Repentance and faith in the heart.

Jesus asks once more, ***“But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.”*** John the Baptist was not a reed shaken in the wind, he was not a man in soft, fine clothing, but he was a prophet, even more than a prophet. In what way?

Jesus answers, ***“For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’”*** None of the prophets had ever been foretold by God, only John the Baptist. Isaiah and Malachi both had prophesied about his coming as the forerunner of Jesus. That made him more than a prophet.

Furthermore, all of the prophets could only say, *“Jesus is coming, believe, and wait.”* But John could say, *“Jesus is here. Believe and come to Him. Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* Thus John was the messenger going ahead of Jesus. In every sense he was a truly God-pleasing Advent preacher, preparing the way of the Lord.

Yet you and I, who are living in the Advent season of 2010, have the opportunity to be even greater than John the Baptist because when John preached, Jesus’ great work of redemption was just beginning. Christ had not yet suffered under Pontius Pilate, He had not died or been buried, He had not risen from the dead. Now He has.

We see the completed work. We know it is finished, the Father’s anger is appeased, our sins are forgiven, we are free, completely and eternally free. Accordingly, how much better Advent preachers we ought to be! How zealously we, both the pastors and the people of today, should direct people’s hearts to Jesus!

In a world where there is so much fear and doubt and unbelief and worry and care we ought to tell everyone what John told his disciples, *“Go to Jesus, and see*

for yourself whether or not He is the true Messiah, the only Saviour of your soul.”

And we, as Christian believers, ought to stand firm in our faith and life, not as reeds shaken with the wind, trying to gain the favour and applause of people that we might wear fine clothing and sit in high places. Rather may we always, as prophets of God, sincerely be preparing the way for Jesus in the hearts of people.

The world is our field, the time is now. Let us go to work now in this Advent season, directing people’s hearts to Jesus, that they may believe what John believed and what we believe: Jesus, the Christ Child, is the promised Messiah, our Saviour and our King, our only sure Help in all trouble and all sin.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,²

On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every heart from sin;
Make straight the way for God within;
Prepare we in our hearts a home,
Where such a mighty guest may come. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isaiah 35:4-6

² Hymn 13