

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: John the Baptist Prepared the Way, Mark 1

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INTRODUCTION: Today, we will be looking at John the Baptist and how he prepared the way for Jesus. Here are the seven points to today's message:

1. God used John the Baptist to prepare the way.
2. John made it clear for whom he was preparing the way.
3. John's preparation was fulfilled in Jesus.
4. Jesus continued what John the Baptist started.
5. Jesus called the disciples.
6. Now that Jesus had disciples, he went to the synagogue and taught.
7. When Jesus entered the synagogue, evil was exposed.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:1-3 *The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,*² *as 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.'"*

First, GOD USED JOHN THE BAPTIST TO PREPARE THE WAY.

EXPLANATION: God had great plans for Jesus, and he used John the Baptist to prepare the way. It was prophesied by Isaiah, so the way had also been prepared for John the Baptist.

APPLICATION: When God leads us to do something, he's already been involved in the preparation of it. The question is whether God is leading us. Careful discernment is needed as to whether the Lord is leading us. I heard one Bible teacher say the answer is found in differentiating between inspiration and revelation.

Every cause needs a champion. There have been many times in my ministry when people have come to me with ideas about what the church should be doing. People see what another church down the road is doing or they visit a church while traveling or there is some trend passing through church life.

The imperative question is whether God *has prepared* the way or *is preparing* the way. If God is leading us in a new direction, let's not stand in the way. If God is not leading us in a particular direction, then we should press on with what we are doing.

Second, JOHN MADE IT CLEAR FOR WHOM HE WAS PREPARING THE WAY.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:7-8 ⁷ *And 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. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

John knew well the order of things. He knew he was second, and Jesus was first. Think about it; John had conversions before Jesus came on the scene. Throngs of people listened to John and repented of their sins. This is indeed amazing when you think about it—this wild character wearing rugged clothing, eating locusts and wild honey...and we have an audience to listen to him.

ILLUSTRATION: In today's world, a person with the success of John the Baptist would have started teaching seminars; he would have built a Christian empire with a large cathedral; he would have offered books and teaching guides and who knows what else. He would have hired a marketing company to make him more popular.

But self-promotion wasn't John the Baptist's purpose or intention. He knew his role; he knew his purpose. It's a strong statement to say, *"I'm not worthy to even stoop down and untie the sandals of the person who will follow me."*

APPLICATION: Let us remember what it's all about. It's about Jesus. Anything else is a diversion. I've gotten caught up in plenty of diversions. I remember a meeting where I said, "What does any of this have to do with reaching people for Jesus?"

On a personal level, let us think about our own lives— our own plans. Do we make decisions based on whether something will further our opportunities to share Christ?

Third, JOHN’S PREPARATION WAS FULFILLED IN JESUS.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:9-11 ⁹ *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.”*

Now this odd character, John, did what God had told him to do, and then Jesus comes on the scene to be baptized. But this baptism was different than the other ones. Heaven opened, and the Spirit of God descended. What a sight it must have been!

The baptism of Jesus has been and will always be a topic of serious discussion among believers. Why was Jesus baptized? He never sinned. He didn’t need to be saved. Can you image looking at Jesus and quoting John 3:16?

Jesus was baptized to set an example for the rest of us. If Jesus submitted himself to baptism, then all believers should be baptized. I can’t figure out why people would be followers of Christ and refuse to be baptized.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:12-13 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.*

Fourth, JESUS CONTINUED WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIST STARTED.

John made it clear: the one following him would do greater things than he, and indeed he was right. John was put in prison, and Jesus continued one thing John did. He continued the message. He also did three things John did not do: he called his first disciples, he cast out a demon, and he healed people.

You see, it was true – John was only preparing the way for someone else.

Here is the continuation of John’s message.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:15 ¹⁵ *“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

Fifth, JESUS CALLED THE DISCIPLES.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:16-20 ¹⁶ *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.* ¹⁷ *“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”* ¹⁸ *At once they left their nets and followed him.*

¹⁹ *When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.* ²⁰ *Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

EXPLANATION: A long time ago, I told you about rabbis and their disciples. Rabbis were teachers of the Law, and they were highly respected. Rabbis had followers— young men who aspired to be like them. Rabbis could pick and choose who they wanted as followers. All parents wanted their kids to follow a rabbi.

Here’s how it worked: Parents worked with their sons. Their sons would go to a rabbi, basically for an audition, and then the rabbi would say, “Follow me,” or “Return to your father’s trade.” If they were told to return to their father’s trade, it didn’t mean they were bad. It just meant they weren’t cut out to be a follower of a rabbi.

As I understand it, nearly every boy wanted to be the follower of a rabbi so he could become a rabbi someday. Simon, Andrew, James and John were fishing; they were doing what their father had taught them. They had probably failed in their aspiration of being a disciple of a rabbi. And now, here came the rabbi named Jesus, who said the words all young men wanted to hear from a rabbi: “Follow me.” Why did they go immediately? Because it was the last and only opportunity they would have.

Sixth, NOW THAT JESUS HAD DISCIPLES, HE WENT TO THE SYNAGOGUE AND TAUGHT.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:22 ²² *The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.*

Wow! Right here Mark gives us insight as to the condition of the synagogue of the day: the teachers taught without authority. What does this mean? It means they just repeated memorized lines. As we know from other parts of the New Testament, the teaching of the day was basically the recitation of the laws, and it was following rules for the sake of following rules.

But there was something else going on as well. About 400 years had passed since the book of Malachi had been written. That's a long period of silence. They we have the birth of Christ, and we know nothing until Jesus was about twelve, when he taught in the temple. Then, we have no news until John the Baptist

But when John came, he didn't come through the synagogue; he came out of the woods. I believe this was symbolic of God revealing himself in a new way from a new perspective.

Now, pay attention; I want everyone to hear this next point:

Seventh, WHEN JESUS ENTERED THE SYNAGOGUE, EVIL WAS EXPOSED.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 1:23-28 ²³ *Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”*

²⁵ *“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!”* ²⁶ *The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.*

²⁷ *The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”* ²⁸ *News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.*

EXPLANATION: Now let's look at this situation. No one went into the synagogue except Jewish believers. There wasn't a sense of reaching out to people to bring them into the family of faith like we have today.

This means that those who came to the synagogue were the same people who came week after week, every Sabbath. This means, the demon possessed man had been there before.

Why did the evil spirit not recognize the other teachers of the Law? Because the teachers did not teach with authority. Jesus made all the difference. He spoke with authority because he was the authority.

So let's review –

- John the Baptist prepared the way.
- John made it clear for whom he was preparing the way.
- John's preparation was fulfilled in Jesus.
- Jesus continued what John had started but with greater power.

SUMMARY: We just went through the Christmas season, and I'm sure you are tired of me saying that Jesus did not stay a baby. I've said it repeatedly because many people only see Jesus as the babe in a manger. But he grew up and became a man. Mark's gospel gives us interesting insight as to how Jesus' ministry began.

Three of the Gospels are similar...

Matthew wrote mainly to the Jews, and he started with genealogy. The Jews had to be convinced that Jesus was in David's bloodline. Luke wrote mainly to the Greeks, so he emphasized the humanity of Jesus. They needed explanations in order to gain understanding. The Greeks with their philosophy and mythology would relate to the idea of a sinless man who was deity. But we believe Mark wrote to the Romans because they like action. And Mark wasted no time getting straight to the action. He doesn't start out with genealogy. He doesn't start out with anything but action. We have Mark using the words "straightway and amazing." We have Mark teaching about this character, this man, John the Baptist, and his action. Then Jesus shows up, and we see more action...action.

CALL TO ACTION: Now I wonder what it is that Jesus is calling us to do in 2016. In this New Year, I know what he is not calling us to do; he is not calling us to inaction. He is not calling on us to just sit down and reflect on 2015, or the previous years, and just do nothing. He's calling us to action. God may be preparing you for action—for a new ministry. Or maybe someone else has prepared a new ministry, and God's calling you to walk into it. The first action you can take is to repent of your sin, as John called you to do and Jesus called you to do. We must all repent of our sin and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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