

Mark 1:4-11

**Listen To The Voices.** Under most circumstances, I would **not** offer that to you as **good** advice. Down through the ages hundreds of people have heard **voices** - voices which seemed to have **no** origin, or at least an **uncertain** origin. Listening to those voices usually means **trouble**, as it did for Joan of Arc, whose listening got her **burned** at the stake. Also, the false prophet, Mohammed, the founder of the Islamic religion, thought he was going **insane** when he heard voices speaking to him in the middle of the desert - voices which told him to start a new religion. And more recently, mass **murderers** and **assassins** have testified that they heard voices which were telling them to **kill** members of their family, or some public official. However, the voices in our **text** are quite **different**. They **do** have an origin, and they are well **worth** listening to.

The first of the voices in our text is the voice of a **messenger**. *“I will send My **messenger** ahead of you, who will prepare Your way - a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.’”* This messenger was John the Baptist - a messenger sent to prepare the way for the Lord - and we heard all about him back in the middle of **December** during the season of **Advent**. John’s purpose was to make a clear, straight path for the Lord - a path which had no obstacles to go around. He would **clear away** the obstacles of **sin** in people’s lives by preaching a message of **repentance**. John brought his message to thousands of people in a **simple**, but **effective** way. John the Baptist wasn’t worried about where he **lived**, or what he **wore**, or what he **ate**. He considered **God’s Word** to be much more **important**, and by his own appearance and lifestyle, he attempted to turn the thoughts of the people **away** from **selfishness** and self-**indulgence**, toward **higher** things.

That message of **repentance** is still important for us **today**. Many times we get ourselves thinking that we don’t **need** to repent. The devil, the world around us, and our own sinful nature try to convince us that our sins aren’t all that **bad**. Just **ignore** them. They won’t bother anybody - at least, not that much. And in **time**, they may even go away all by themselves. But of course, we realize that those suggestions are just **lies**, and in fact, we need to be **constantly** living **lives** of repentance. We **sin** every day - more times and in more ways than we **realize**, or can even possibly **imagine** - so, we need to **repent** of those sins **every day**. If we **don’t**, then we are choosing to continue to **carry** those sins **ourselves**. And we don’t have the **power** to effectively **bear** those sins, or to get **rid** of those sins.

They will just continue to **rot us away** from the inside out, until we are left as nothing but **hollow, empty** shells. We need to **repent** - to turn those sins over to **Jesus**, for the **forgiveness** that He alone can offer.

And that's where John's message **continues**. Mark gives us this added information about John's message when he wrote, "*And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the **forgiveness of sins**.*" So, John's message was also a message of **forgiveness**. The word "forgiveness" literally means "sending away." God **describes** that sending away in a variety of **word pictures** including: removing our sins as far as the **east** is from the **west**; **blotting out** our transgressions; **remembering** our sins **no more**; and casting our mountains of sin into the depths of the **sea** where they will be **drowned** forever. In the Old Testament, God even gave us a **visual** picture of the **sending away** of our sins. On the great Day of **Atonement**, a **goat** was to be brought before the High Priest. Then the priest would place all the **sins** and the **wickedness** of the people on the **head** of that goat. The goat would then be **led out** of the city, and would **carry** the sins of the people into the **wilderness**. Thus the sins of God's people would be **far removed** from them. This **goat** was known as the "**scapegoat**", and of course the term is still used **today** when someone or something **gets the blame** for someone or something **else!** This **scapegoat** was a foreshadowing of **Christ** - who took upon **His** head the sins of **all** people. He carried them all **away**, leaving us with free **forgiveness** and **life** everlasting. There can be no sweeter message for the Christian than knowing that our sins are **forgiven** through the work of our **Savior Jesus Christ**.

Jesus Himself held John the Baptist in the **highest** regard. He said, "*I tell you the truth, among those born of women there has not risen anyone **greater** than John the Baptist.*" Yet, John understood that in **every way**, Jesus is **superior** to him. John didn't even consider himself worthy of being the very **least** of the **servants** of Christ - the one who would stoop down and untie His **sandals**, and who would then wash the **grime** and **dirt** off from His **feet** after miles and miles of walking from town to town. There can be no doubt about the superiority of **Jesus**. **John** knew it, and he also made sure the people **knew** it. The voice of the **messenger** always directed the people to the **message** - to **Jesus**.

The **other** voice in our text did the same thing. We read, "*And a **voice** came from **heaven**: 'You are My **Son**, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.'*" This voice was the voice of **God** - the eternal **Father**. Actually, the voice was an **echo**

of a message which God had already declared long ago. In Psalm 2 the Lord said, *“I have installed My **king** on Zion, My holy hill. I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My **Son**; today I have become Your Father.’”* God openly declared that His **Son**, Jesus, would be the **King** over all. He would not only be the Ruler over the **heavenly realms**, but also over the **hearts** of men. If only all people would **listen** to the voice of **God**, and not **rebel** against the **rule** of Jesus in their lives!

That brings us to the **unspoken** voice in our text, the voice to which both John the Baptist and God the Father **point** us - the voice of **Jesus**. His voice cries out, *“Come unto Me, and I will give you **rest**, and **light**, and **life**, and **love**.”* His voice cries out, *“**Love God** most of all. **Serve Him** with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* Can we possibly **hear** that voice of Jesus **continually** calling out to us, and not **listen** to it? That’s what happens if we **ignore** the Word of God. That’s what happens if we choose to follow a path **other** than the one which **Jesus** has chosen for us. That’s what happens if we think of **ourselves** first, placing God and others farther down in our list of **priorities**.

And finally, the baptism of **Jesus** should remind us of our **own** baptism and its **blessings**. We carry that baptism **with** us every day of our lives, so it serves as a **constant reminder** of who we are. We are **God’s** children - **precious** and dearly **loved** members of His **family** - sons and daughters of the King of kings. We have been **forgiven** of all our sins, and because we have been united to Jesus through our baptism, we have been **removed** from the homelessness of this **earthly** existence, to live with Him **forever** in the eternal glories of heaven.

Dear friends, we have now **left** the Christmas Season, and we have entered into the season of **Epiphany**. This is a time when God plainly **shows Himself** to us and to **all** people. Therefore, it is a fitting time for us to **Listen To The Voices**. We know their **source** - it is **plain**. And we know their **purpose** - it is **clear**. **Listen To The Voice** of John the Baptist, who encourages us to **repent** of our sins, to **turn away** from them and to **turn back** to God. **Listen To The Voice** of God the Father, who was well-pleased with the work of His Son, whom He sent into the world to be our **Savior**. And **Listen To The Voice** of Jesus, who invites us to come to Him, and to share in **all** the blessings which He has earned for us - who also invites us to **thank Him** for those blessings by **serving Him** with our lives. **Listen To The Voices**. This time it’s **good** advice. Amen.