



## ADVENT IS A TIME OF PREPARATION

Advent is about our anticipation and expectation of the arrival of Jesus—a time to refocus on why we celebrate and have this hope. It's about preparing our hearts, minds, and souls. When Pastor Andrew was in grad school, he had a class taught by a professor who presented tons of information! The lectures, notes, and reading, all anticipated a final exam. Pastor realized his degree of preparation was going to determine the outcome of his grade. And as we look at Luke Ch. 3, we see a proclamation of preparation from John the Baptist in anticipation of the arrival of the Messiah. John's entire ministry was a ministry of preparation. Luke 1:17 says his job was to make ready for the Lord a prepared people. John asks questions of the crowd that still apply to our preparation as a people for the Lord today.

1. What kind of things have you done that required focused preparation for success?

## JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY WAS TO PREPARE FOR JESUS

[Luke 3:3-14] There are questions we need to be regularly asking ourselves relating to preparing for what Jesus wants to do in our lives. This Advent season, we're going to slip into the place of the crowds because we ask the same question that is the foundation for our preparation: What should we do? John quotes from Isaiah a Messianic prophecy written hundreds of years earlier. John is a herald for the coming king. (By way of example, he talks about making the roads smooth just like the herald would go in advance of the king to ensure the roads had been repaired and directions were good.) But, John is telling us that it isn't about getting the infrastructure right, but about getting our hearts ready, receptive, and open to the King of Kings in regard to three things: (1) faith, (2) things, and (3) power.

2. Making the way ready is a type of preparation. How can we make the way ready for what Jesus wants to do in us?

## What should we do? PREPARING OUR FAITH AND THINGS

[Luke 3:8] Luke says to produce fruit consistent with repentance. He first wants the crowd to understand that what they believe should be consistent with what they do. He uses this word—metanoia—that means to make a 180-degree change of affections and passions in light of Jesus. A more proper definition is a transformation of the individual that changes perspective, thinking, and approach to life. Everything that we do should be overlaid with Jesus and the opportunity to glorify Him in all we do. In English, our similar word is metamorphosis. Like a caterpillar changing into a butterfly, it means something that comes out completely different and capable of doing something it couldn't do before.

3. Being transformed means you have to allow the Holy Spirit to change you. What have been the challenges and/or victories in letting Jesus into spaces that need transformation?

## ARE MY ACTIONS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT I SAY I BELIEVE?

But it's easy for us to revert back to how we used to do things, so the first question we need to regularly ask ourselves is if our actions are consistent with what I say I believe. Is my faith evidenced by my words, decisions, and actions? Or, is my faith something I declare, but not something I do? The hope that as we follow Jesus, over time we are able to look back and see transformation. Perhaps you were once extremely judgmental but now you're more compassionate. Perhaps you were easily angered and now have more patience.

4. How has your life been transformed since you gave your life to Christ?

## HAVE I MADE A PERSONAL DECISION FOR JESUS OR AM I JUST DOING FAITH IN PROXIMITY TO OTHERS WHO BELIEVE?

John says the Jews can't rely being in the lineage of Abraham who received a covenant from God. John challenges them that association with a faith doesn't make that faith your own. Pastor Andrew learned that when a tree is sick and isn't producing good fruit, they don't check the leaves and bark but instead take a core sample of the soil because they realize it's probably deficient of a needed nutrient. Further, in order to identify a tree, a botanist doesn't look at the roots but instead looks at the fruit, leaves, and flowers. That's what John is saying here. He's saying you can believe you planted the seed for an orange tree, but if it's never produced an orange for years, it's suspect whether it's actually an orange tree. It's the same with us when we associate with faith by going to Bible study, church, etc., we can be fooled that we have faith by proxy, but that's not truthful. So, John asks if we've made the personal decision to follow Jesus or followed the faith of others. There's a big difference between being "spiritual" and being born again by repentance and a confession to follow Jesus as savior and Lord. (If that's you and you need to make a personal decision for Christ, talk to your Small Group Leader.)

5. What kind of nutrients need to be added to the soil of your faith?
6. If someone looked at your leaves, flowers, and fruit, what kind of faith tree would you be? Describe it.

## WHAT IS MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY THINGS?

Our things have an association with our faith. John wants us to understand we shouldn't hold too tightly to things that were never really ours to begin with. We have to regularly ask ourselves about our relationships with our stuff because many times we determine our faith and trust by the things we have instead of by the One who has us.

7. Imagine how your faith might be affected if you returned home and your home had been completely destroyed by a devastating fire. Does what you imagined reveal any areas where you need to trust Jesus more than possessions?

## HOW AM I WIELDING MY POWER AND INFLUENCE?

[Luke 3:12-14] The tax collectors and soldiers were two of the most feared and corrupt people groups of that time and place. They abused the power they had been given. John is addressing how we wield our power. Even if we don't have great power, we all have some scope of power. So, the question about our power is whether we're using the influence God's given me for others or just myself? Do you consider how the gifts God has given you can benefit others, or just selfishly?

8. Where do you have a scope of influence, and how can you use that influence in a way that benefits others?