

*Sermon: Prepare the Way*  
*Text: Mark 1:1 – 8*  
*Date: December 7, 2008 AM*  
*Place: Jesup First UMC*

In the days of the old west, a man came riding into town screaming, “*Big Jake is coming! Big Jake is coming!*” And the people were terrified. They ran to their homes and boarded up the doors and the windows. The bartender was closing up the saloon, when he looked up and saw the biggest, ugliest, meanest man coming in his direction. The man was dressed in black from head to toe. He had bullets strapped across his chest and two big guns strapped on his hips. And he walked up to the bar and said: “*Give me a drink. Now!*” Well, the bartender complied with shaking hands. And the man downed the drink in one gulp. The bartender said: “*Care for another?*” And the man said: “*No! I don’t have time. Haven’t you heard? Big Jake is coming.*”

In the wilderness of Judea, there appeared a wild man named John, preaching a message of repentance and baptizing those who responded in the muddy waters of the Jordan River. And the Bible says many people from the towns and villages of Judea went out to see him and to be baptized by him. And they said to him: “*Who are you?*” He said: “*I am not the Christ?*” They said: “*Well, are you Elijah?*” He said, “*No, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord.’*”

Ready or not, Jesus is coming! Now, when He came the first time, as Bethlehem’s Babe, God sent the prophets to foretell His coming, to prepare His way. And when He came from obscurity into public

ministry, God sent John the Baptist to prepare His way. And friends, since Jesus is coming again, God is sending us to prepare the way for His coming, to prepare the hearts and minds of those around us for the coming of the Lord. But ... how do we do that? How do we prepare the way for the Lord? Well, let's look more closely at John's ministry and see what he did.

**First, John prepared the way for His coming by living a separated life.** In the first century, there was a group called the Essenes. Now, the Essenes were totally turned off by the immorality of the people and totally disgusted with the corruption of the religious establishment. So, they moved out into the wilderness. They separated themselves. Now, we don't know if John was an Essene, but many scholars believe he was.

But regardless, John was different. His diet was different; he ate locust and wild honey. His clothing was different; he wore garments of camel's hair. His actions were different; he dared to confront the status quo. And people were drawn to him. They had never seen anything like John.

You know, the world has no answer for a separated life. Someone once asked Voltaire if he had completely ruled out the existence of God. He shook his head and said: "*I cannot, because I have met Fletcher.*" Fletcher? John Fletcher was a friend of John Wesley. In fact, John Wesley chose John Fletcher to be the leader of the Methodists after his death. He was known as a godly man. And when

John Wesley preached his funeral, he called Fletcher "*the perfect man.*" Voltaire said: "*I can't rule out the existence of God because I've met John Fletcher.*" You see, there is no answer for a separated life.

What's so different about you that it prepares the way for Jesus to enter into the lives of others? What's so different about the way you celebrate Christmas, about the types of gatherings you have during the holidays?

John challenges us to prepare the way for Jesus by living a separated life.

***Second, John prepared the way for Jesus by challenging the people's sin.*** When King Herod came out to hear John, John took the opportunity to confront Herod about his adultery with his brother's wife and all the other sins in his life. And Herod became so angry that he had John arrested and eventually beheaded, but even in prison, John continued to call the people to repentance.

You know, something that is really missing in our culture is the idea of guilt and repentance. Nobody is guilty anymore. If I do wrong, it's because my parents abused or neglected me. We've gone from calling sin "sin" to accepting it as an alternative lifestyle. It's okay to cheat on your taxes, because nobody's getting hurt. It's okay to live together before marriage, because you need to make sure you're compatible. It's okay to ignore the poor and needy because you've got to look after number one. Friends, when is the church going to rise up and call sin "sin" and challenge the sins of our day.

John called sin “sin” and he called people to turn from their sins and turn to God and the coming Messiah. And he challenges us to prepare the way for Jesus by challenging the world’s sin.

***Third, John prepared the way for Jesus by pointing beyond himself.*** One day, John was baptizing in the Jordan River when Jesus came walking by. And John pointed at Jesus and said: ***“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”*** When he could have accepted the accolades and the attention of the people who were crowding around him, John pointed beyond himself, to the One whose sandals he felt unworthy to untie.

Christmas is an interesting time, isn’t it? We can become so self-centered at Christmas. With everything we’ve got to get done, the push and shove, the hustle and the hassle, our lives can be consumed with me. We crowd our schedules so tight that we only have an hour or two a week for God. And we’re disappointed when the service runs over.

But what if ... what if our celebrations weren’t centered on self or family, but on Christ? What if our lives – our words, our thoughts, our actions – pointed beyond ourselves to the One who came to take away the sins of the world?

John took the attention off himself and pointed people to Jesus and he challenges us to prepare the way for Jesus by pointing to the Lamb of God.

Big Jake is coming! Are you ready? Are you helping those around you to be ready? You can ... by living a separated life, by challenging the sin of our

culture, and by pointing to Christ as the center of your Christmas celebration.