

In the history of the church, the season of Advent has historically focused on our deep longing and need for a Savior. This 4 week season of Advent focused on preparing for Christmas time which began on Christmas Day though repentance, confession, and facing our desperate need for God to enter into our world as he'd promised. The "color" of this liturgical season was the color purple – the most expensive of colors. Purple symbolizes our repentance. Things have changed! The Advent season of longing, confession, and preparation has been skipped over and drowned out by business, parties, and consumerism. It's not too much of a stretch to say that the god of materialism has dethroned Jesus in this season and our longing and hope has more to do with our purchasing power than the Incarnation. This week, we'll enter into the Ancient and Biblical practice of preparing for Christmas.

Day #1

- 1) Read Matthew 3:1-12
- 2) Read Matthew 3:1-6 again and notice just how many people were coming. Consider the massive impact of John's words.
- 3) Consider the various things the people who were coming were doing here, i.e.,
 - Where were they going out to and what is the symbolism?
 - What in John's message were they responding to?
 - What were the various things they were doing?
- 4) In what ways can you personally identify with their response to John's message?
- 5) Take some time to consider how responding to John's invitation to prepare for Jesus might make Christmas Day all the more special.
- 6) As we prepare for the arrival of Jesus this week, how can you take time to enter into the call and invitation of John, i.e., *what does God tell us in John it means to prepare for Christmas?* Are you desperate for your savior to show up for you?
- 7) Take some time now to respond to God's Word through John in a personal way as an act of deep and personal worship.

Day #2

- 1) Read Matthew 3:1-12
- 2) Read Matthew 3:5-8 and notice the abrupt & jarring transition.
- 3) It's possible to translate the words of v7 to say that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming "*to*" the baptism as opposed to coming "*for*" baptism. Consider your own attendance in your personal devotions, showing up at church, small-group, etc. Can you identify the difference between coming "*for*" and coming "*to*"?
- 4) John uses strong words in v7-8. Read them again. Let them sink in.

- 5) Read v8-12 and consider: ***Who is this God? What kind of God is he? What does John say is coming with Jesus?*** Highlight or underline the analogies/metaphors/descriptions of what Jesus is bringing with him/doing.
- 6) In v12, “***his threshing floor***” is a synonym for “***the church/people of God.***” Let that sink in for a moment.
- 7) Consider the past week of your life: Would the wrath of God be justified towards you due to what you have done and what you have not done? Or, to approach this question from the images John uses, “***If God put his winnowing fork into your last week and tossed it into the air, what is the ‘chaff’ that would be blown away and what is the ‘fruit’ that would remain?***”
- 8) What would it look like for you to respond now to the God and Jesus that is revealed in these verses? (Remember that “***confession***” means “***agreeing with God***” and “***repentance***” means “***a turning away.***”)

Day #3

- 1) Read Matthew 3:1-12 again. Try to not rush through it today as it is possibly becoming familiar. Slow down and especially focus on v7-12.
- 2) We know from Scripture and history that the Pharisees were very zealous in their actions and activities to “be holy.” They achieved righteousness by what they did and what they didn’t do (especially in comparison to how much better they were than others). The Sadducees were the aristocratic/politicians. Their righteousness was in who they were and the power/privilege they had. Can you identify? Where does your own personal self-righteousness originate?
- 3) The following is taken from “Revival” magazine.
“Calmly, but with a grieving heart, a pastor from Uganda spoke directly and boldly to the panel of leading revivalists:

In Uganda we experience a nationwide revival as a result of sever persecution. The suffering of the people was beyond description, and no one came our rescue. But God used the opportunity to wake a nation from its spiritual coma. What we learned is that revival will come either through devastation or desperation. So my question is simply this: What are you doing in American to makes sure revival comes through desperation and not devastation?”

- 4) Can you identify between the desperation/devastation options?
- 5) Take some time to consider the question the author asks. ***What are you yourself doing (for yourself, in your relationships, your household, or in your church community) to ensure that revival comes through desperation and not devastation?***

Day #4

- 1) Read through Matthew 3:1-12 again just to remind yourself of what it says, this passage won't be our main focus today.
- 2) Take some time to read through chapter 1 & 2 of the book of Revelation
- 3) Reflect on the article we read yesterday on desperation/devastation and how it is connected to John's warning in Matthew 3 and the warning of God to the churches in Revelation.
- 4) Take some time to ask God to give you a desperate heart and to reveal to you the places in your life, your church's community, and the culture that you live in that might be in danger of his devastating love.
- 5) Write down where you are desperate for God to show up and change you, your church, and your culture. Offer that as a prayer to God.
- 6) Consider sending or communicating your desperate prayer above to one of the people who you are closest to. I know this is a big step.
- 7) Rest in the promise of Revelation 3:20. Enter into it with desperation, longing, and hope.

Day #5

- 1) Read Matthew 3:1-12 one last time.
- 2) Read Acts 9:1-6.
- 3) Consider the Acts passage.
 - a. Why was the baptism of John not enough?
 - b. As important as it is, why is the repentance and confession that John called for not enough or sufficient?
 - c. What was John preparing folks for? (Read Matthew 3 again).
- 4) What changed when the folks in Ephesus received Jesus?
- 5) Take some time to reflect on
 - a. How believing in Jesus has changed you
 - b. The role of confession/repentance and believing/receiving/trusting in Jesus has played or is playing in your life right now?
- 6) Read Revelation 2:1-8 again. This is the letter to the Ephesian Church that was birthed in Acts 9.
- 7) We have focused a lot this week on preparing for Christmas Day: repentance, confession, desperation, and the warning of devastation for the self-reliant. Take some time today to enter into the rest, hope, and grace of believing in Jesus. Consider the magnitude of the gift that God has given to you – a sinner.
- 8) Enter into worship.