



READ: Matthew 3:1-6 (NIRV)

In those days John the Baptist came and preached in the Desert of Judea. He said, "Turn away from your sins! The kingdom of heaven has come near." John is the one Isaiah the prophet had spoken about. He had said, "A messenger is calling out in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him.'" (Isaiah 40:3) John's clothes were made out of camel's hair. He had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea. They also came from the whole area around the Jordan River. When they confessed their sins, John baptized them in the Jordan.

ENTER THE STORY:

Throughout the Old Testament, God's prophets, or messengers, did some things that other people thought were "crazy." The prophet Ezekiel laid on his right side for 390 days while eating bread made out of wheat and beans. The prophet Isaiah walked around naked for three years! Can you believe that? They did these things to get the attention of the people, and it usually worked well!

Camel hair clothes and a weird diet? Maybe John wasn't that crazy after all? That was pretty mild compared to the messengers that came before him, and it WORKED! God's people had not seen a prophet for a VERY long time, so everyone was excited to hear what he had to say.

John's message was simple, and he said it over and over again: Turn away from your sins! God's kingdom is HERE!

This was the ONE JOB God gave to John. He was supposed to help God's people get ready for the arrival of the long-awaited promised Messiah. You might think the best way to do that would be to talk about God's love or his grace and mercy, but that was not his message. It was always about turning away from their sin and being sorry for hurting God.

It was the same message as Jonah, who warned the people of Nineveh that bad things were coming, and it was the same message as the prophets in the Old Testament.

Many years earlier, after the people of Israel had broken their promises to Yahweh for the last time, God removed his presence. The people had been waiting for his return, and it was finally time. THE BRIDEGROOM WAS COMING, and John's message of turning away from sin was necessary in order for the bride to be ready.

Do you know who the Bridegroom is? It's Jesus! It would not be much longer before the people actually got to see him and talk to him, but FIRST - they needed to deal with their sin so their hearts would be clean!

This is true for anyone who wants to come to Yahweh and receive the gift of salvation. Everyone must approach the King with a humble heart, on bended knee, asking for mercy just like the Ninevites did, and when God sees how sorry our hearts are, he grants us the gift of his presence. This Christmas, let's all turn away from the bad things we have done and ask God to clean our hearts so that we, too, will be ready for his arrival!

PRAY: *God, you are everything we need and more, so we humble our hearts and ask for your mercy. Help us feel sorry when we hurt you, and turn away from our sins so our hearts are always clean and ready for more of you. Amen.*