



READ: Matthew 3:1-6 (NIV)

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' " John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and 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 and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

ENTER THE STORY:

Throughout the Old Testament, we have seen God's prophets do things that other people might think are "crazy." Ezekiel laid on his right side for 390 days while eating bread made out of wheat and beans. Isaiah walked around naked for three years. Hosea married a woman with a bad reputation, and Jeremiah walked into the king's court wearing wooden bars made for big farm animals, just to name a few. All of these stunts were actually expected because God wanted his prophets to communicate their messages in a way that would get the attention of the people.

Maybe John's crazy wasn't actually that out of the ordinary? Camel hair clothes and a weird diet? That was pretty mild compared to the prophets that came before him. Regardless, God had not sent a prophet to his people for hundreds of years, so naturally, everyone was interested to hear what he had to say.

John's message was simple, and it played on repeat over and over again: Repent for God's kingdom is close!

John had ONE JOB. 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 repentance.

It was the same message as Jonah, who warned the people of Nineveh that destruction was coming, and it was the same message as the prophets of old, who urged the people to turn away from their sin and turn their hearts back to God.

Many years earlier, after the people of Israel had broken their covenant with 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 repentance 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, begging for mercy just like the Ninevites did, and when God sees our repentant heart yearning for more of him, he grants us the gift of his presence. This Christmas, let's do the work of getting rid of sin and cleaning our hearts so that we, too, are ready for his arrival!

PRAY: *God, you are everything we need and more, so we humble our hearts and beg for your mercy. Help us incorporate repentance as a regular part of daily life, so our hearts are always clean and ready for more of you. Amen.*