

Middle School Sunday School Lessons by



Year 3: Session 3 – John the Baptist and Jesus

Class 9: Mark 1:1-11 – John the Baptist & Jesus team-up

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- How John prepares the people for Jesus' ministry
 - Explain what the original word for "repent" means
 - Explain what the original word for "sin" means
 - Explain how baptism fits with "repent" and "sin"
- How Jesus starts his ministry: By being baptized with water and then God's Holy Spirit.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Movie clip
- TV and equipment needed to play movie clip
- Something soft to throw: Recommend 5 of these soft things per team (a team will consist of 2 students). Balled-up newspaper works well in this case.
- Two ropes/string to delineate where teammates will stand

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- Here's the opening question for today's class. One of the teachers will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, the teacher will answer first.
- Once the teacher answers the question, we'll go around the circle.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- Here's this week's question: *Have you ever had to start something over again? If yes, what was it?*

TRANSITION to Video Clip

- One of the things we'll be discussing in today's class is the word of "repentance"
- The Greek word for "repent" is "metanoia" and it means simply to "turn around."
- We're going to watch a video clip, now, where the word "repentance" is not used, but the idea of turning around is quite present in the clip.
- The movie clip is from the movie, "Planes, Trains and Automobiles" which is a comedy, but to be honest, the scene is a little bit scary.

- To make it a little bit less scary, I'm going to ruin the ending and let you know that the two men in the car survive.
- With that said, let's see what happens.
- [Note: The clip on rfour.org is edited for sound and imagery in one section of the clip.]

Watch Video Clip

ASK

- How would you describe the emotions of the couple who are warning the two men? (Intense. Worried. Almost angry).
- Why do you think their emotions were so intense? (because the danger was immediate; they wanted to get the men's attention and make them listen/respond quickly)
- What were the responses of Steve Martin and John Candy (the two men in the car going the wrong way) to the people who were warning them? (Confusion: They want to race! Name-calling: Morons! Disbelief: "How can they know where we're going?" Then, they dismissed the couple's warning by ridiculing the messengers – by making signs of drunkenness and stupidity.)
- Because the men did not listen/did not turn around, what happened to them? (their car and the semi-trucks got scrapped-up. They almost died.)

TRANSITION to scripture story

- In the past two lessons/scripture stories that we've read, we've learned about the circumstances surrounding the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- We learned that John was going to help "prepare the way" for the Messiah.
- In today's scripture story, both John the Baptist and Jesus have grown up.
- Let's see how John helps "prepare the way" for the Messiah/Jesus.

READ Mark 1:1-11 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2** As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; **3** the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," **4** John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. **8** I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." **9** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

ASK (*answers are in parenthesis*)

- Verse 2 and 3 are the quotes from another prophet, a prophet who lived 500 years previous to the moment that is happening in the story that we just read. What is the name of that prophet? (Isaiah)
- In verse 4, who appears to be living out the words of Isaiah? (John the Baptist/Baptizer)

- In verse 5, does it seem like John the Baptist has much influence? (appears so! The story says ALL the people of Jerusalem came out to him...considered to have about 25,000 people when there were no special gatherings happening. At times of celebration, like the Passover for instance, it was believed that the city population would quadruple [http://www.bible-history.com/jerusalem/firstcenturyjerusalem_overview.html])
- In verse 6, does John strike you as a well-balanced, calm sort of guy? (no – he seems slightly crazy, to put it mildly)
- Thinking about the movie clip and the couple yelling at the people going the wrong way, what might be the “advantage” for John in appearing slightly crazy? (gets the attention of the people better – and does so in a faster way – no time to slowly win/convince/argue them over)
- In verse 9, who shows up? (Jesus does)
- And what happens? (John baptizes him and then Jesus is baptized by the Holy Spirit.)

TELL

- So today, we will look at how John prepares the people for the “way of the Lord.”
- First, let’s look at what John means by “make his [God’s] paths straight”?
- In verse 4, the Greek word that we translate to “sin” is *Hamartia*. It’s an archery term. It means to miss the mark.
- And in Hebrew, the word for sin is *khatta’ah* (root: chata) means to miss the way/path or go the wrong way.
- The original understanding of “sin” for the Israelites was not about “bad actions.” Instead, sin meant you were focusing on things that were not God that would then lead you away from God.
- So when John says, “make your path straight,” he’s telling the Israelites that it is time to stop wandering all over the place -- which is what happens when they follow things other than God.
- One reason why they might not wander all over the place is because they are much more likely to end up in places where they don’t belong, like the wrong side of a freeway.
- John then says, “repent.” And what does repent mean, again? That’s right, to TURN AROUND. In the context of the original usage of “sin,” John is telling the people to turn away from their current habits of wandering after things that are not God.
- As a way to remind the people that they had turned back toward God, John offered this baptism thing. Baptism was a new thing – John was the first one to do it. The Greek word for baptism is “baptismo” and it means to “submerge” and “clean.” For instance, people would regularly *baptismo* their clothing (i.e. when doing laundry). John took that idea and made it into a symbolic act for people to show their repentance (turning around) and to signify being washed cleaned / being ready for a new start.

The following are NOT Teaching Points for this particular lesson, but are notes meant to help answer questions the students may have:

- **V6 – John’s a weird dude. Why?** *His antics are similar to Elijah. In the Zechariah story, the angel tells Zechariah that John will have the spirit of Elijah – meaning have a similar type of passion and fire. This was similar to how Elisha who received “double Elijah’s spirit.” Also, Elijah spent much of his time out in the wilderness, living off of the land. This particular type of weirdness by John probably triggered thoughts in the people about Elijah – automatically making the people think of John as a great prophet.*
- **V7 – all the gospels have a story where John mentions that he is not the messiah. There was probably much discussion about this at the time among the folk, and probably some competition between the disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus. Who wants to be with the second best,**

right? But the authors of the Gospels take great pains to show that John himself did not think he was the Messiah, but was preparing the way for the Messiah.

- **Baptism of water vs holy spirit:** baptism by water is the preparation, a symbol of being ready. Baptism of Holy Spirit is when the “ready” becomes “in action.”
- **V9** – no competition between Jesus and John themselves. Jesus submits to John. John baptizes him. Why would Jesus need to be baptized? Simplest answer is in the following note for V11.
- **V10** – “heavens torn apart” – a symbolic note that the realm of human and the realm of God is not divided. Jesus will show those who choose to follow him how to merge the two realities. We see this happen again in the transfiguration story and also when the temple curtain tears in half when Jesus dies.
- **V11** – For Mark, the baptism of the adult Jesus **is the birth story of Jesus**. This is the first story in the gospel of Mark. If a reader **ONLY** had this book about Jesus, there’d be no stories about Mary, Joseph, Bethlehem, Egypt, etc. The theology becomes pretty different (and more straightforward) when using this perspective. For example, when Jesus says “follow me, you can learn and do what I do” – there’s no divine DNA issues to get around (i.e. how can normal people follow and do what a person with divine DNA does?). Jesus can do what he does, not because of his lineage, but because of what he **chooses**. And what he chooses in this story is repent, like John says to do. And then, he receives the God’s way, as symbolized by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which the book of Acts tells us is available to all of us, if we so choose.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- In today’s story, we see how John is preparing the people for Jesus.
- He does this by telling them to turn around.
- And the reason they need to turn around is because if they do so then they will be better positioned to hear and receive what Jesus will be sharing/teaching them.
- To help us think about how this works in a more concrete manner, we’re going to do an activity of playing catch.

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- Each team will have two members.
- One member will stand behind this rope
- The other member will stand in front of this other rope (about 8 big steps away from the other rope – or whatever amount of distance you think will work best).
- Each team will receive 5 balled-up pieces of newspaper.
- The member of the team standing behind their rope will be given these balled-up newspapers.
- The other member of the team must **keep their back towards their teammate** with the balled-up newspapers.
- In other words, both members of the team will face the same direction, and the member of the team with the newspapers will only be able to see the back of their teammate.
- When I say “Go,” the teammate with the balled-up newspapers will throw them at their teammate.
- The other teammate must catch as many of the thrown balled-up newspapers as possible *without turning around their body or head!* [this means that the one teammate will have to throw the newspapers over the shoulder/head of their other teammate. But don’t tell them that! Let them figure it out.]
- The objective of the activity is to see which team can catch the most of the allotted balled-up newspapers.

- Neither teammate can cross their respective rope/line.
- The balled-up newspapers can only be thrown once. So 5 points is the highest possible total you can get as a team.
- There will be two rounds.
- We are about to begin the first round.
- Any questions?
- On your mark, get set, go!

DO ACTIVITY and tally up points from the first round

EXPLAIN ROUND 2

- For Round 2, everything will be the same except this time, the catching teammate from your team is going to repent.
- And to repent means what? (That's right. *Turn around*)
- So the catching teammate is going to turn around and face the throwing teammate.
- All the other rules remain the same.
- We are about to begin the second round.
- Any questions?
- On your mark, get set, go!

DO ACTIVITY Then tally up the points from both rounds and announce a winner.

ASK/TELL

- Looking at the points from round one vs round two, which round was easier? (Round 2)
- And why, do you think, was Round 2 easier? (Because the person catching the newspapers had "repented" and was therefore better positioned to receive what the other teammate was sending/throwing)
- And this is the same thing that John the Baptist was trying to do with the people of Israel as well.
- They were paying attention to things that had nothing to do with God.
- And so they were facing away from where Jesus was coming from.
- Which makes it more difficult for them to receive what he would be sharing. (like round 1 of our activity)
- So John prepares them by getting their attention to shift, by getting them to turn around, and those who listened, were then better able to hear and receive Jesus' message.

CLOSING PRAYER