

Mark 1:4-11

Listen To The Voices. Under most circumstances, I would **not** offer that to you as **good** advice. Down through the ages hundreds of people have heard **voices** - voices which seemed to have **no** origin, or at least an **uncertain** origin. Listening to those voices usually meant **trouble**, as it did for **Joan of Arc**, whose listening got her **burned** at the stake. Also, the false prophet, **Mohammed**, the founder of the Islamic religion, thought he was going **insane** (which he probably was) when he heard **voices** speaking to him in the middle of the desert - voices which told him to start a new religion. And more recently, mass **murderers** and **assassins** have testified that they heard **voices** which were telling them to **kill** members of their family, or some public official. It was certainly **not wise** to listen to those voices. However, the voices in our **text** are quite **different**. They have an easily **recognizable** origin, and they are well **worth** listening to.

The **first** of the voices in our text is the voice of a **preacher**. Our text begins, "*John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and **preaching** a baptism of **repentance** for the **forgiveness** of sins.*" This preacher of **repentance** and **forgiveness** was **John the Baptist** - a messenger sent to prepare the way for the Lord - and we heard all about him back in the middle of **December** during the season of **Advent**. John's purpose was to make a clear, straight path for the Lord - a path which had no obstacles to go around. He would **clear away** the obstacles of **sin** in people's lives by preaching a message of **repentance**. John brought his message to thousands of people in a **simple**, but **effective** way. John the Baptist wasn't worried about where he **lived**, or what he **wore**, or what he **ate**. He considered **God's Word** to be much more **important**, and by his own appearance and lifestyle, he attempted to turn the thoughts of the people **away** from **selfishness** and self-**indulgence**, toward **higher** things.

That message of **repentance** and **forgiveness** is still important for us **today**. Many times we get ourselves thinking that we don't **need** to repent. The devil, the world around us, and our own sinful nature try to convince us that our sins aren't really all that **bad**. Just **ignore** them. They won't **bother** anybody - at least, not that **much**. And in **time**, they may even **go away** all by themselves. But of course, we realize that those suggestions are just **lies** from the devil, and in **fact**, we need to be **constantly** living lives of **repentance**. We **sin** every day - more times and in more ways than we **realize**, or can even possibly **imagine** - so, we need to **repent** of those sins **every day**. If we **don't**, then we are choosing to continue to **carry** those sins **ourselves**. And we don't have the **power** to effectively **carry** those sins, or to get **rid** of those sins. They will just continue to **rot us away** from the inside

out, until our lives are nothing but **hollow, empty** shells. We need to **repent** - to turn those sins over to **Jesus**, for the **forgiveness** that He alone can offer.

Jesus Himself held John the Baptist in the **highest** regard. He said, *“Amen I tell you: Among those born of women there has not appeared anyone **greater** than John the Baptist.”* Yet, John understood that in **every way**, Jesus is **superior** to him. John didn't even consider himself worthy of being the very **least** of the **servants** of Christ - the one who would stoop down and untie His **sandals**, and who would then wash the **grime** and **dirt** off from His **feet** after miles and miles of walking from town to town. There can be no doubt about the superiority of **Jesus**. **John** knew it, and he also made sure the people **knew** it. The voice of the **messenger** always directed the people to the **message** - to **Jesus**.

The **other** voice in our text did the same thing. We read, *“And a **voice** came from **heaven**: ‘You are my **Son**, whom I love. I am **well pleased** with you.’”* This voice was the voice of **God** - the eternal **Father**. Actually, the voice was an **echo** of a message which God had already declared long ago. In Psalm 2 the Lord said, *“I have installed my **King** on Zion, my holy mountain.’ I will proclaim the decree of the Lord. He said to me: ‘You are my **Son**. Today I have begotten you.’”* As Jesus was being **baptized** in the Jordan River, God openly declared Him to be His **Son**, and that He would be the **King** over all. Jesus wouldn't only be the Ruler over the **heavenly realms**, but He would also rule over the **hearts** of men. If only all people would **listen** to the voice of **God**, and not **rebel** against the **rule** of Jesus in their lives!

Later in his Gospel, Mark tells us that this same voice of God the Father was **reechoed again** on the Mount of Transfiguration, as Jesus appeared in all His **glory** to His disciples; Peter, James, and John. In Chapter 9 we read, *“A cloud appeared and overshadowed them, and a **voice** came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my **Son**, whom I love. **Listen** to him.’”* Listening to **Jesus** is the **key** to staying on the right **path** - on **God's** path.

And that brings us to the **third** voice in our text - an **unspoken** voice - the voice to which both John the Baptist and God the Father **point** us - the voice of **Jesus**. His voice cries out, *“Come to Me, and I will give you **rest**, and **light**, and **life**, and **love**.”* His voice cries out, *“**Love God** most of all. **Serve Him** with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind**.”* Can we possibly **hear** that voice of Jesus **continually** calling out to us in His Word, and **not listen** to it? That's what happens if we **ignore** the Word of God. That's what happens if we choose to follow a path **other** than the one which **Jesus** has chosen for us. That's

what happens if we think of **ourselves** first, placing God and others farther down in our list of **priorities**.

And finally, the baptism of **Jesus** should remind us of our **own** baptism and its **blessings**. We carry that baptism **with** us every day of our lives, so it serves as a **constant reminder** of who we are. We are **God's** children - **precious** and dearly **loved** members of His **family** - sons and daughters of the King of kings. We have been **forgiven** of all our sins, and because we have been united to Jesus through our baptism, we have been **removed** from the homelessness of this **earthly** existence, to live with Him **forever** in the eternal glories of heaven.

Dear friends, we have now **left** the Christmas Season, and we have entered into the season of **Epiphany**. This is a time when God plainly **shows Himself** to us and to **all** people. Therefore, it is a fitting time for us to **Listen To The Voices**. We know their **source** - it's easily **recognizable**. And we know their **purpose** - it's **clear**. So, **Listen To The Voice** of John the Baptist - the voice which encourages us to **repent** of our sins, to **turn away** from them and to **turn back** to God. **Listen To The Voice** of God the Father - the voice which was well-pleased with the work of His Son, whom He sent into the world to be our **Savior**. And **Listen To The Voice** of Jesus - the voice which invites us to **come** to Him, and to share in **all** the blessings which He has earned for us - who also invites us to **thank Him** for those blessings by **serving Him** with our lives. **Listen To The Voices**. **This** time it's **good** advice. Amen.