Leaving it All Behind
Mark 1:1-8

The Beginning of the Gospel: A Messenger
The good news begins when someone is willing to become a messenger. They leave behind the comfort and respectability of “normal” life, and carry the news wherever they are sent (usually into barren, broken places).

Although God can speak directly to people, He usually uses a messenger (Is. 6:8, Matt. 9:38, 10:1, John 20:21, Acts 22:21, Rom. 10:14-15, 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Crying Out in the Wilderness
John was calling people out of their “normal” life.

The lives we build (with our smarts and effort) can distract us from the life God wants to give (by His power and grace).

Prepare the Way of the Lord
We “prepare the way” by rejecting the pattern of life we’ve previously known—taking care of ourselves rather than relying on God as our Father.

When Jesus comes along, if we’re busy satisfying ourselves, we won’t be able to see or receive the satisfaction that He offers.

A Baptism of Repentance
Contrary to popular thinking, repentance is not an angry or judgmental word (picture the angry dude on the street corner yelling at people to "REPENT!"). To "repent" simply means to have a change of mind, to turn around, to go another direction from where we were headed.

Repentance is saying to God, "My way hasn't worked; I'm going to stop what I'm doing and ask for Your help." Even our noblest efforts fall far short of how God thinks and acts (HYPERLINK "http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Isaiah%2064.6" \t "_blank" Isaiah 64:6, HYPERLINK "http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Isaiah%2055.9" \t "_blank" 55:9), so there is room for repentance all the time. Repentance isn't a sporadic guilt-driven routine, but an ongoing process of being instructed by God in how to live, think, and feel.

Religion twists repentance into a shameful ritual—it's the "price" we pay to earn favor with God. That’s why it’s often portrayed as a cowering, squirming, shameful disclosure of how bad we are. But God doesn’t need anything from us; it's for our benefit (not His) that He kindly invites us into repentance (HYPERLINK "http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Psalm%2050.9-15" \t
Not because He’s angry, but because He wants to rescue us and teach us a better way.

Confessing Their Sins

This wasn’t shameful or awkward; instead people were declaring to the world their rejection of an old pattern and their embrace of a new life-manifesto.

They were “coming clean” about their previous lifestyle and attitude, announcing publically, “I am not the good person I pretended to be! I am setting the record straight: I am a bad person! Because God forgives me, I don’t have to lie about it anymore! Now instead of trying to be good on my own, I trust God to change me!”

Once we understand the power of His grace, we become hungry to confess and repent all the time! No longer are we driven by guilt and shame to defend and prove ourselves, but we get to let our guard down with God and other people. We confess freely because we no longer fear punishment (1 John 4:18, Rom. 8:15). Instead of the judgment and rejection we had feared, we discover an intimacy with God and others we hadn’t dreamed of! In His love and grace, we find the freedom to become the people God made us to be.

Clothed with Camel’s Hair and Eating Locusts and Wild Honey

This guy was radical! People were drawn to John because of the purity of his message. He really practiced what he preached (Rom. 12:9, 1 John 3:18).

He was radical, but he wasn’t crazy. He was intelligent, passionate, and persuasive. He preached that the life God gives is better than the life we can secure for ourselves. And people agreed with him! His God-given-camel-hair-and-locusts was better than their self-earned-comfort-and-respectability!

Neither we nor the people around us will comprehend the message of the gospel until we begin to live it as radically (Isaiah 43:10, Acts 1:8). God asks us to tell others about who He is. In the process, we learn more of who He is!

One is Coming Who is Mightier than I

John was mighty! People are weakened when they focus on empty morality and boring rituals (Heb. 7:18-19, 10:1-25). But God strengthens us to take on things we aren’t qualified for and to battle enemies that are bigger than us.

Despite John’s strength and his ability to attract people’s interest, he was quick to divert that attention to Jesus and to give Him the glory.