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SERMON TITLE: "The Preparation: Accepting Grace and Truth"

SCRIPTURE: John 1:6-9, 14-18

DATE: January 14, 2018

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ ALSO ISAIAH 40:1-8 and PSALM 24:1-5

Throughout the Bible prophets are spoken of and their job is "to prepare the way of the Lord." Habakkuk, during Old Testament times, stood at his watchtower to watch for God's answer. It would come through a "runner" who would run to each village shouting out God's proclamation. A prophet is a runner, a herald, a messenger. A courier of God's words.

John the Baptist was a herald. His father, Zechariah said, *he would be called the prophet of the Most High because he would go before the Lord to prepare his ways* (Lk 1:76).

READ JOHN 1:6-9 (below)

Heralds draw people to themselves. I don't know why. Is it because they dress weird, or wear curly toed shoes? Or yell on the street corner? Or wave a scroll or newspaper?

Think about it. When you are down spiritually and you hear a preacher proclaim a good sermon does that not lift you up for a while?

Do you call a Christian friend who can inspire your faith with a good word? Do you go to a Christian conference or retreat to spur yourself on?

A big change was coming for Israel. They knew "in theory" that a savior would come, but how would they know who it was? God sent John to be the prophet who would prepare them. God provided a "revivalist" for the people so they would be open to Jesus. And that's exactly what happened.

The Bible tells us as a result of John's message, *the people were filled with expectation* (Lk 3:15).

Sending a herald was not an unusual step for God. There are many little things that God does every day to help you and me; to guide us when we need guidance. God often sends messengers as an expression of God's GRACE.

Heralds are very important. You are a herald when you open your mouth and proclaim the Savior sent by God.

- When you go to a foreign country and formally help people learn about God because you are a missionary, you are a herald.
- When you go to a foreign country for any other reason, perhaps employment, and you share your faith in Jesus informally, you are a herald.
- When you tell someone you meet on the street or at your job or at your college about Jesus Christ, you are a herald.
- If you tell your neighbor about your hope in God, you are a herald.

A herald prepares hearts for Jesus to come to that person.

You might think "I don't want to do that!" But if you think of it as being the person who helps someone to be open to God, that takes the burden off of you. You can speak your particular testimony freely. You are simply opening the door. God will take it from there, for God is the one who saves.¹

So let's hear John the Baptist's message: READ JOHN 1:14-18 (below)

After assuring them he was not the savior, John said, *the one I'm talking about has already given us our greatest gift*. God always gives to us, for this is God's world.

Now that's intriguing. You might try that method on your neighbors.

The Jewish people had already received the law from God. That was the gift from God. It was precious because it was the True Light that set them apart from all nations.

But it was hard to keep!

It was hard for everyone, all the way back to Abraham, who was the father of their faith. God promised Abraham a child. But Abraham struggled with the wait. When the child

¹ God very well may speak through you or God may speak through someone else. The important thing is that you are willing to speak your own story of your hope in God as the Holy Spirit helps you. (see 1 Cor. 3:6-7)

did not come, Abraham took matters in his own hands and he had Ishmael through his wife's servant.

But God said salvation is not going to come through Ishmael. God's salvation is going to come through the Promise; through Sarah, who would have Isaac.

Through Isaac the truth would come and God's nation would be born: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, *Israel*. Moses led Israel out of bondage, and Moses received the truth. That's what John told them: the law was given through Moses.

But, the people could not keep the Law. It was impossible. The truth by itself cannot save. That's why Paul called the law a "tutor."

We all know the truth by itself cannot save.

Take a thirty-second inventory of your life. Think of a period when you went more than a year without breaking God's law.

When I had my first child, I thought he was perfect. I told my uncle. He called me each week and the first thing he said was, "Is he still perfect?" "Yes," I replied. That lasted for about eight months. One day my uncle called, "Is he still perfect?" to which I replied a resounding "NO!"

From then on my uncle's first inquiry was, "What did he do this time?"

So the Law is a great gift but hard to keep. What is our help then? How can we ever be saved? John said God gave us a second gift: **grace and truth**.

Grace and truth is a package deal. If you have grace and not truth, you don't have Jesus. If you have truth without grace, you don't have Jesus.

John the Baptist proclaimed the truth alone: "You brood of vipers, straighten up your act!" This hit the people he was preaching to because they knew it was true.

We know it's true too. It took us less than thirty seconds to realize we can't straighten up our act on our own.

So what does that mean, exactly, that Jesus was full of grace and truth?

It does not mean the Christian life is easy or that the Christian's goal is happiness. C. S. Lewis said, "I didn't go

to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

Grace and truth does not mean that the truth is disregarded or modified or diminished or subject to interpretation.

Rather, truth is steadfast and trustworthy. It is an eternal reality. Truth is not determined by your particular persuasion or political party or culture or family background, but it has to do with the eternal reality of God.

Jesus came full of grace and truth. Jesus came full of mercy while keeping the truth. Jesus has "gracious consistency." Isn't that beautiful? Jesus in grace embraces you, forgives you, gives you an eternal future, and helps you walk in the truth.

Would you like to offer "gracious consistency?" Would you like to be treated with gracious consistency? You have it from God. That's the way God operates.

For the last few years our culture and even some churches have compromised God's law, which is hard to keep. They have superimposed their own truth. What is the Christian to do when the culture around them barely tolerates Christian truth?

When facing that fact, which you will, do not go with the culture but accept Christ's model of grace and truth. C. S. Lewis explains it like this:

There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to [Jesus], it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you. ~ *Mere Christianity*

That's grace and truth. The world is desperate for that package. Do you desire it for yourself? Embrace it today. And then wherever you are, whoever you come into contact with, you be the herald with the same message: *grace and truth*. That gracious consistency will change you and our world.

AMEN

SCRIPTURES

John 1: 6-9

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world."²

John 1: 14-18

The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John witnesses to him. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.' Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received -- one gift replacing another, for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.³

² Translation from the *Greek-English New Testament* by Nestle-Aland.

³ Translation from *The New Jerusalem Bible: Standard Ed.* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).