

02/20/05 PREPARATION TIME

Matthew 3: 1-12

INTRO: Odd that we are in a portion of scripture not far from the “Christmas story”. As I reflect on a number of things from Jesus birth account, I am moved by the similarities to today, but also the renewed opportunities. *Matthew* chapter two, tells us that the chief priests and scribes knew exactly where Jesus was to be born, but *they were working with Herod* over that information. They were not prepared for the event. They knew all about God, but they had no revelation from God. Scriptures are truth but they can only make a difference in lives by God intimately revealing Himself to the individual as truth. *Jesus said: “I am the way the truth and the life”*. Fact is, He isn’t functioning as that for many. Listening, hearing, seeing, are spiritual matters. I need to “understand” (oida) and to KNOW, (ginosko). What is God preparing in my life? Am I ready for His revelation? How can I be prepared? Not all people are prepared the same way, but as I look, the components of preparation are there for every one.

THE SETTING

Setting means a whole lot *more to me than region*. It means at least, if not much more,...**God’s timing and God’s place**. Those two things are heavy on me, heavy. We hear phrases like “the fullness of time”, “that it might be fulfilled,” “the appointed time,” and many others. I wonder how many things get *destroyed*, because we didn’t understand God’s timing, and how many things *of blessing* come into our life, because it is “His Time”. Be careful. Remember how Abraham was given a promise by God for a son? Not just a son, but a NATION. Do you recall how Sarah tried to push the promise up by devising her own plan? Hagar, Sarah’s handmaid enters the picture and then Ishmael is born. Ishmael and Isaac may sound alike but they are not alike. See Ishmael means “God hears” and Isaac means “laughter”. Interesting isn’t it. Isaac is the true promise and Sarah laughs, and Ishmael is man’s idea and they say God “hears”. How many times have we instituted our own plans, pushed our own thoughts under the guise of “this is God’s idea?” When God devises a plan, all the pieces are in place. All of the preparations for it to be accomplished are set. We had been speaking of the year of jubilee. Jesus saying “this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”. Before that happened, there were events that had to happen. Joseph and Mary had to be prepared by God. Zacharias and Elizabeth had to be prepared. And the way for the Lord had to be prepared. So our story begins.

THE PLACE

Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, .. When we tie this verse to the last verse we see that Jesus is settled in Nazareth, according to the prophets and now “In those days” comes John. And where does He enter to make the big splash announcement for Jesus? In the wilderness. Now someday I may just do a whole study on wilderness since it seems like such familiar territory to us at times. *Wilderness here means: er'-ay-mos; lonesome, that is, (by implication) waste (usually as a noun, - desert, desolate, solitary, wilderness*. Why of all things would the messenger of the Lord make his startling announcement in this area. The wilderness of Judea was west of the Dead Sea and certainly not a populated center. Not a great place to start a church if you want a lot of response. But isn’t it just like God to pick the most unlikely setting to perform His work. What if the greatest announcements of your life are to come not out of your activity, but out of a wilderness you have been in?

And what if that wilderness was God's appointed place to speak Himself into your life? The place that begins the birthing of His plan and dream for you.

THE TIME

Matthew 3:1 says "In those Days". What days? God's days. There is perfect timing in God. John is filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb. He is driven to the wilderness in the days selected by God Himself. The right message in the wrong place can bring disaster. The wrong message in any place will bring disaster. We need God's message, in God's time, and in God's place. No wonder Jesus said I say only what my Father says and I do only what I see my Father doing. I want to live like that. Jesus was living right where He was supposed to be living, because His father Joseph was told by God exactly where to go. I want that in my life also.

THE SPEAKER

John the Baptist. An interesting character to be sure. We know he grew up in the hills of Judah, and that his parents both walked righteous before God. (Luke 1:6). We have this angelic prophecy surrounding him:

Luke 1: 14-16: your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, seven from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.(NKJ) and something similar is said about him as it was Jesus: *Luke 1:80 So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.* Not last minute, in the deserts until his MANIFESTATION!

We know from verse 4 of Matthew 3, that he was clothed in camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist.. Now, this is not the guy that I want to picture as ushering in the Kingdom. I'm not sure about wild honey, but locusts is not on our dinner menu today, I don't think. And he came preaching. This is defined by Strong's as: kay-roos'-so: to herald (as a public crier), especially divine truth (the gospel) - preach (-er), proclaim, publish. Thayer says: *this was almost always done with a gravity, formality and authority that must be listened to.* NOW MORE IMPORTANTLY perhaps, why him? Why this John? Well, verse 3 tells us why. *Matthew 3:3 - For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:* (ref. Isaiah 40:3) You see it had to be this man. God had ordained it hundreds of years before, so it had to happen. Can you see the mess if someone else tried to be Him? I wonder what we look like when we try to be someone or something we are not, especially how do we look to God? We read that Elijah was a hairy man with a leather belt around him. We read this about John: *Luke 1: 17 - He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'* This is not John trying to speak like Elijah. This is a messenger sent forth by God, at God's time, in God's place. This ministry thing is very sacred. Trying to be something your not is just a delay of God's purpose in your life. John the Baptist was NOT Elijah! He was not the messiah! He was a follower of one and a forerunner of the other. As far as I can determine, his ministry lasted about six (6) months. I mean his preaching did. Because he responded to God his ministry is still going. God's purpose, God's person, God's place. It is that simple. Revelation of this in your life will not invade all of your other business. Usually, not

always, you will see, and feel and hear what He sees and feels and hears, only because you have been in His chamber, loving Him.

1. Can you name a place in your life or those close to you that feels like a wilderness?
2. Tell a story of God's timing in accomplishing something in your life that you did not see at the time?
3. How are you different than those who do not know a personal relationship with Christ?
4. Where are you going at this time of you walk with the Lord, or what is driving your relationship with Him?