

## The Word Came To John

One of the difficulties that we encounter when we read through these scriptures too quickly, perhaps getting in our obligatory bible reading for the day, is that that manner of reading can cause us to miss out on some of the more important insights that God intends us to gain from within these truths.

That is why we often see where God encourages us to not only stop and meditate on His truths, but also to actually “chew” on them, slowly and intentionally.

And such is true regarding some of the truths we will encounter within these words today. Listen, beginning in verse 1 of Luke chapter 3.

<sup>1</sup> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

<sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” (Luke 3:1-6)

Sometimes, when we encounter words such as these in verse one, that simply give us historical references, men’s names and their titles, we tend not to assign much importance to them. But these historical references do have importance. They are here to say to us that all of these things recorded here involving John the Baptist and later with the Lord Jesus really were actual occurrences that took place in actual history and that these events are verifiable within our recognized secular history books.

For all those sceptics who do not want to accept the validity of the bible and who would try to deny the actual existence of men like John the Baptist and especially, Jesus Christ, they need only to go to the secular history books they

trust and read what is written about this time in the history of Israel and of Rome and they will find that, yes, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ really did exist.

Why does God do these things in this way? At least two reasons come to my mind. For those of us who are seeking to know the Lord and His ways, such knowledge will help us in our understanding. But also, for those who do not want to know our Lord, these proofs cause them to be as Romans 1 tells us, "without excuse".

And so, for us, as we seek to learn and to know more about what our God intends for us in His scriptures, we find here in verse 2, a very special "word phrase" that has a very important meaning for our souls. Here, we are told that John the Baptist received a "Word" from the Lord, a "compelling unction", that would define all of his next steps as he began to minister to the people. Listen in verse 2.

<sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:2-3)

Here in verse 2, is the simple phrase "the Word of the Lord came to John". Unfortunately, for our simple minds, we don't easily know what God intends when He uses such expressions as these, "the Word of God came to John". Because this word, "word" is used in different ways depending upon its context.

When we read the Book of John, chapter 1, the giving there of the expression "Word", it refers to the "Logos", speaking specifically about the actual Person of Jesus Christ. Listen!

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And then in verse 14 of John chapter 1

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)

Again, as we're told here in this verse 14 of John chapter 1, the "Word", "Logos" being spoken about here is Jesus Himself. And one of the blessed attributes of the Lord Jesus is that He is the "speaking voice of God". The same "speaking voice" of God who spoke words that brought all of creation into existence. In Hebrews 11, we read,

<sup>3</sup>By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word (the command) of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

Jesus simply spoke "commanding words" and all of creation came into existence! He simply said, "let there be light, let there be the earth, the moon and the stars, and plants and trees, and on and on, and all things came into being."

Here in our scripture text for today, however, the "word" that came to John the Baptist, was somewhat different. Here, the "word" is not "Logos", but is "Rhema", "Rhema". And it has a different meaning. "Rhema" is a unique commanding "word" which the Holy Spirit speaks into a person to quicken their hearts and minds at a specific time and for a specific purpose.

It is as God said to Jeremiah as He sent him out to prophesy to the nation of Israel. We are told there in Jeremiah chapter 1,

<sup>9</sup>Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. (Jeremiah 1:9)

And that is also what God had done with John the Baptist. God had put His words into John's mouth for John to speak.

And even today, as we who preach are faithful to God in our preaching, a "Rhema word" is given to us to proclaim His truths each Sunday.

And may I encourage us to know also that such is the same with each of us, you and me, as we witness to others, and as we counsel with them. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to remind us of a particular Bible verse or promise. And He places that "word" into our heart and onto our tongue for us to share with them.

Here, with John the Baptist, the "Rhema Word" was God's command, His "marching orders" to go out and to begin the ministry that John was born for, the purpose that God had ordained for John, even before he was born, the

ministry to proclaim a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”. And John obeyed God’s call.

There had been a long silence that God chose to put into these scriptures spanning from the time that Jesus was twelve years old until the time of this account given to us about John the Baptist. The bible scholars believe that both John and Jesus were about 30 years of age at this time, because there was a requirement within Jewish tradition that a man be at least thirty years of age to serve as a priest. And both John the Baptist and Jesus were taking on the special roles of both prophet and of priest.

A question . . . “Why would God not give us an account of all those intervening years?” We really don’t know that answer for sure, but we do know that God has chosen to confine His words to those truths that are most “profitable” for our growth in righteousness. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that. Listen!

*<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

Understanding that then, we know that the words we have been given here in these scriptures are the only ones that God, in His infinite wisdom has chosen to use to accomplish His instruction in our righteousness.

Another question though . . . because of the inquisitiveness of our minds, we often want to know more about matters like those intervening years. And so, we seek out historians and especially some of those books that are purported to be written by even some of the disciples like Thomas and others. Is it permissible to read those texts?

Perhaps, but with great caution! It is always good to remember that historical accounts are ever and always, only the words of men, written from a man or woman’s own personal perspective and bias. Their accounts are not the inerrant, infallible words of God, and are subject to error. And we should accept their words only in that vein.

But these words in front of us today are not the words of men. Yes, these words were given through the minds and the hands of men, but these words were, in every way, from the very first moment given, through every moment they are

read, ever and always the intimate and precious breath of God, His wisdom, His knowledge, His holiness, His righteousness. And these words are ever and always profitable to you and to me for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man (or woman) of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Let me read these words from Luke chapter 3 again, and then let's examine them carefully! Beginning with verse 2.

<sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" (Luke 3:2-6)

Our text begins simply by telling us that the words that flowed out of the heart and mind of John the Baptist, the words that we would read here, the words that he would say to the people in front of him during his day, to the common people, to the scribes and the Pharisees, all of his words would be words "put into his mouth" directly from God.

God had, some years earlier, led John into the wilderness for the express purpose of isolating Him from the rest of the world, in order that He might instruct and equip John in all the things that John would say and do during all of the next steps of his life. In Luke chapter 2, we are told about that. Listen, verse 80,

<sup>80</sup> . . . the child (John) grew and became strong in spirit and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel. (Luke 2:80)

From those words, we don't know at what age John was first led there and how long He might have spent there in the desert, but we do know that God raised John the Baptist up and equipped him for this very purpose.

Why would such isolation in the wilderness be necessary? It's because, John the Baptist was truly just a common man, much like you and me. He was not born with any super abilities or knowledge.

And the reasons that God chose to do it this way, to work through the normal and simple human abilities of a common man's heart is also a mystery to us, but He did.

But to make that work out right, God knew that He needed to isolate John for a season of time and to instruct him in the ways of true righteousness.

Yes, God could have accomplished His purposes in an easier way. He could have sent one, or a whole host of His angels who were already fully instructed in all the laws and precepts of God. God had done that very thing through all the many preceding generations as the angels ministered the old covenant of law to the people in the Old Testament.

But for some reason, unknown to us, God chose to use a weak and lowly man of flesh, John the Baptist. And He isolated John in the wilderness for a season in order that He might have John's full attention as He taught him.

And God did much the same with the Apostle Paul. From the accounts we read in the Book of Acts, though Paul was already very learned in the scriptures, we see that shortly after God called Paul into salvation and into a ministry to the Gentiles, He then isolated Paul for several years, possibly as long as 14 years, in order to properly instruct Paul in the truths of the Gospel.

Sometimes, God will do the same with you and me. He will isolate us, not necessarily in a desert, but isolation all the same . . . somehow separated from our "creature comforts" and from our friends and family members. It might come as a result of our own wrong behavior, or it might be forced upon us by our circumstances or through health problems.

But whatever the cause, when God chooses to isolate us in our wilderness, we must not complain or murmur. God is simply wanting to set us apart and to instruct us in ways of righteousness.

Note again here, that God raised up this man, John the Baptist, for a very special purpose, to carry out a very special task. These words are simple and basic proof that God can and does make decisions for our lives that are beyond our control, that are beyond our "free will". Listen to these words again. This was a prophecy given by Zechariah, his father, while John was still a baby.

<sup>76</sup>“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, <sup>77</sup>To give knowledge of salvation to His people, by the remission of their sins. (Luke 1:76-77)

John's involvement had been planned out long before he was born. These words of today's text from Luke chapter 3 were clearly given by the Prophet Isaiah over 700 years before John was born. Listen to the words of Isaiah 40, the same words that are repeated here in this gospel of Luke.

Isaiah 40,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord;

Make His paths straight.

<sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled

And every mountain and hill brought low;

The crooked places shall be made straight

And the rough ways smooth;

<sup>6</sup>And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” (Isaiah 40:4-6)

This was John's one special mission in life. And He would successfully accomplish this one thing and then he would very violently be taken away.

His mission was to “prepare the way of the Lord”, to “smooth the way” so that “all flesh would see the salvation of God”. Everything that John would do during his short lifetime would work only towards this one purpose.

How was John to “prepare ye the way of the Lord?” It is a very simple, but at the same time a very profound concept. A seed sown on the top of the ground cannot find the nutrients and provision that it needs, and it will soon perish, either from natural elements or from the birds of the air coming and eating it up.

Jesus described the problem in the Parable of the Sower. Listen!

<sup>5</sup>“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup>Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. <sup>7</sup>And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup>But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Luke 8:5-8)

And then Jesus went on to explain the parable by saying,

<sup>11</sup>“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup>But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. <sup>14</sup>Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. <sup>15</sup>But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:11-15)

Jesus would soon follow onto a path that John the Baptist was walking. Jesus would be sowing seeds of righteousness, seeds that would bring men and women to salvation. But in order for that seed to be able to settle into the soil and begin to take root, the ground would need to be properly prepared and cultivated. And that was John's job.

John the Baptist was sent out ahead of the Lord Jesus to prepare His way, to soften and cultivate the ground within the souls of the men and women who would receive the seed that Jesus would plant there.

And how was that ground to be prepared, softened and cultivated? It would be prepared through a special message from John declaring the need for “repentance for the remission of their sins”.

A heart can only be prepared to receive the salvation of the Lord Jesus through one means and one means only, that is through “repentance”. And that was the message that John preached, “repentance for the remission of sins”.

Repentance was in some ways John's only message, and for that reason, you and I need to understand and accept that in God's plan of redemption, there can be no true saving relationship with Christ without repentance.

I want us to spend a good amount of time on this matter of “repentance”, and today's service doesn't allow for that time, so I will, if God allows, spend time in the weeks ahead on the matter of and the necessity of “repentance”.

In the meantime, I would like for you and me to be considering what “repentance” means to each of us personally. Have we, do we, open our hearts up to the Lord on a regular basis and do we fully acknowledge and repent of the sins that live and lurk deeply within us?

Repentance was John’s message to the people of his day, and it is John’s message for you and me of our day, “repent for the day of the Lord is upon us”

<sup>3</sup>And (John) he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”