

Financial Announcement - We made it! With some to spare for the Great Commission Fund!

Have you ever noticed that the people that Jesus chose to work with were highly unlikely? Start with his inexperienced teenage parents. Not pros. Newbies – here, raise a Messiah. Peter, who talked to much and Bartholomew, who to our knowledge, never said a darn thing. Simon the Zealot just wanted to kill Romans and Matthew wanted to work for the Romans. Two brothers who were so obnoxious they were nicknamed “Sons of Thunder”. And a bunch of women – all named Mary. Then, there is the locust eating, camel skin wearing, desert dwelling repentance monster.... Friends, John the Baptist was just plain weird. He is a Wildman. And he is our study for the day. Here is the story in Luke 3.

Luke 3

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

In preparing for this message, one of my colleagues called this ‘the boring stuff’, but I want to jump off for a minute here, because there are golden nuggets in the boring stuff. Luke is setting up the time and place. He is creating context. And he does this at the beginning of chapter one, chapter two and chapter three... then this one lasts for the rest of the story. I love the boring stuff because it gives me the excuse to put up a **MAP! – Including the territories of Herod A, Herod, and Phillip**... Lysanias, mentioned above, is North of all this and never comes into the story again.

Now, this word “tetrarch” is very technical. It means quarter-king. Or ruler of a fourth. In time, it just became a term used for “partial king” when somebody’s territory got divided in the roman empire. In this case, Herod the Great’s territory got divided three ways. Between Herod Antipas, his brother Phillip and Herod Archelaus. (My name is Phillip, and this is my brother Herod and my other brother Herod) Lysanias is another local partial king that was a contemporary. Now, I say this because Luke is very particular about what names and phrases he uses. His technical expertise into exact terms is profound. As is his use of medical terminology, dates and timelines. He is a first class historian. In fact, the nobel prize winning archaologist, Sir William Ramsay – after a tour of the middle East – said.

“Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense ... in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians.” – Sir William Ramsay – Nobel Prize Winner

So, here we are in 29 AD. JB – the Wildman springs on the scene.

³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

**“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.**

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
⁶ And all people will see God's salvation.'"^[a]

So, who is this John, son of Zechariah? Well, if you read chapter 1, his birth is the subject of the chapter. His dad, Zechariah was a priest – so John too would be of the priestly class. He was raised in a highly religious home – a PK of sorts. He was also a miracle baby. His mom, Liz, was well advanced in years, and had no kids. John was a late-in-life gift from God. Everyone in town would know the story of how Zechariah could not talk for 9 months when he was conceived because he saw an angel. And John was the resulting miracle baby. The expectations could not be higher for this kid! The angel told his Dad that this would be his job...

for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Man, you talk about growing up with pressure!

His message was “A Baptism of Repentance.” Whoa... that is a spiritual mouthful. Lets unpack it a bit.

- Baptism – means to be immersed in the water. It means a new identity. It means a new direction. The old is gone, the new has come. Interestingly, it was not being baptized into Christ... yet. At this point it is a public pledge to turn over a new leaf in your public life.
- Repentance – Means to Turn around. To change course. It is misused today to mean “you ought to feel terrible about yourself.” No, back then it was far more practical. Live different. Reconsider your priorities. Wrap your life around God and his priorities!

And that is not all we know about John...

- Beyond that, we know he showed up wearing camel hair outfits and eating honey. He spent extended time in the wilderness. It made me wonder, if Jed Logue or Steve Yost was John the Baptist, what would they look like? **Jed/steve as John the Baptist**
- Now, as for where he went, his ministry zone was the country around the Jordan. Opportunity for another MAP! Yes! **Country around the Jordan – MAP! –**
 - Now if you ask any PR agent, John the Baptist, or JB was doing it wrong. He needed a PR agent. Like duh, if you want to reach people, you have to Go where people are! You need a Demographic analysis, youtube channel, money, clothing that impresses. But John just has a message of repentance. And a job to prepare the way for the Messiah. Straighten his paths... point to Jesus...
- A signpost – Make a path for the LORD. Flatten mountains, lift valleys, straighten curves. Because he is HERE! After 1000 years, people got lulled into the idea that ‘someday’ the messiah would come, but not today! So John had to wake them up and prepare the way. Can you imagine the rumors? “HEY, this bug eater in the wilderness says the Messiah is coming.

Want to go see? I know it is a whole day... lets make a weekend out of it!. And they get ther and John is JUST pointing to Jesus! Just a signpost. really, isn't that what we are all supposed to be? John is not trying to build an empire. He does not want to be the big dog. He just wants to be the intro guy. The warm up act. The hype man. And really, that is all of our job.

- I just point to Jesus. I just point to Jesus. I hope that my life is so attractive that people see Jesus when I show up. I hope that my words reflect the encouragement, joy, purity and life of Jesus. I hope that when people see me, I say "Oh, I am nothing... you should see Jesus!" He is the bombdotcom! He is GOAT. He is LIFE and MEANING... he is just IT. This is the crazy thing about being a Christian... we are consumed with pointing people away from us! John did.

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

- What a sermon start! I told our baptism team to start every baptism orientation session this way – you brood of vipers! Who warned you? And imagine, these are people who likely WALKED from inhabited cities – maybe miles or a half day – just to see the spectacle of the locust eating miracle baby.
- And for his Jewish friends – which would be most... he says "And don't just say I'm Abraham's descendant, so I am good." Just because you have the right genetics doesn't mean you DO the right thing.
- So his play is this: Turn around. Turn to God before you get destroyed! It is not good enough to be a Jew. It is not good enough to be a strict Jew – known as a pharisee! By the way, do you want to see what Jed and Steve look like as Pharisees?
- Jed/Steve as Pharisee

OK, so John is rocking now. He is the main act in Wilderness year 29. And they ask...

¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

¹¹ John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

¹³ "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

- Super practical – don't rip people off. Share with those in need. Tax collectors – don't over collect. Soldiers – don't extort or falsely accuse. It is not an advanced repentance... he is just saying have integrity in your Job. Which makes me wonder:

- Jed/Steve as Roman Solider
- Jed/Steve as tax collector

- Now, I want you to note that He never says ‘leave your profession’, but influence where you are. Be righteous. Do what is honorable. Care for people
- Sometimes, people feel like they are wasting their time in their chosen profession. But interestingly, John B. does not say “Tax Collectors should quit!” OR that soldiers should quit their jobs. No, we need IRS agents and soldiers for society to run!!! We need Burger flippers and Advertisers and motivational speakers and soldiers... and stay at home Moms and custodians. John’s message is not vocational repentance, it is heart repentance. It is not leaving your job, it is doing your job with the utmost in your job. It is being willing to rise above the fray... never cheating people, always being respectful, wrecking the curve on integrity. So, for goodness sake – whatever you do, do it amazing! Do it for God’s glory! And don’t abuse your power...

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, “I baptize you with ^[w] water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with ^[w] the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

- Here is John’s big message. I am not the messiah. You are shooting way to low. It would be like playing golf with me and asking...are you Rory McIlroy? Which happens regularly. Or shooting hoops with Alex and asking “Are you LeBron James?” Alex is great, but not LeBron. John is saying Jesus totally outclasses me. I got water baptism – he is bringing the Holy Spirit to live in side you and purify you like fire. He will differentiate the wheat and the chaff...This guy... when you see him, when you know him... well, I am just not even worthy to untie his shoes. He is everything we have been waiting for.
- But Jesus is from Galilee and John is from the South of Israel. Jesus has not yet come on the scene. How does he know? Well, Jesus was his Second Cousin. John’s mom was Mary’s aunt Elizabeth. But they had babies at the same time. In fact, the miracle baby John recognized the miracle baby Jesus while they were still both in Utero. You remember the story? Mary knocks on Elizabeth’s door. And As soon as she opens it, baby John leaps in the womb because somehow he recognized the presence of Jesus. That was their supernatural beginning
- Now, the Bible does not say what happened in between then and now. We know Jesus was a refugee in Egypt for a time. We know by 12 years old he was back. We know that it was tradition to travel to Jerusalem for the festival every year – or up to three times a year. The likely scenario is that Mary would love to visit Elizabeth – and have their miracle children play together while the adults do adult things.
- Knew him as a kid? Probably, but not sure. In on the plan? Surely at least partly. Surely not fully. You know what I like to speculate? Maybe they hung out together. Maybe Jesus taught him scripture... dreamed about the kingdom... told him part of the plan... gave him his role in it all. Can you imagine being 16 year old John and knowing that your supernaturally conceived Cousin would be the messiah? So John had this unique picture of Jesus.
- But he was a prophet and prophets say bold things.

¹⁹ But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, ²⁰ Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

- OK, so I could do a whole message on Herod – in fact, I will in March in our “Jesus through the eyes of his enemies” series. But suffice it to say that this is not Herod the Great – who met the wise men and killed the babies in Bethlehem. This is one of his sons Herod Antipas. Now Herod married his brother's wife, Herodias. One of the most vile women in the Bible. In order to do so, he divorced his wife who was the daughter of the Syrian king. And the Syrian king brought his army and almost destroyed herod. Just dumb on top of evil and John called it out.
- John was working in Herod Antipas' territory. With his people listening. Herod did not want the bad press or public accountability. So, he put John in Jail. And John never got out. But Jesus said of John “Of those who have been born of women” (Dramatic Pause... pretty much everyone) “John is the greatest.” Not because his ministry was LONG, not because he gathered followers for himself, but because he pointed people to Jesus with every ounce of passion he could muster. I pray that the same could be said of me... and you.

But the climax of John's ministry... and the launch of Jesus' ministry are these two sentences.

²¹ When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Now this is the first time in the Bible we see the triple appearance of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit – mentioned specifically as members of the trinity. Note the role of each. The Spirit empowers “descending upon him.” The son launches the ministry that was anticipated for centuries, prophesied, hoped for, prayed for and dreamed about by Abraham, Moses, David, Elisha, Isaiah, Malachi and so many more... And the voice of the Father, expressing his approval. Now Jesus earthly dad Joseph was likely dead for a while. I wonder how this voice of affirmation played with Jesus soul. Did he hear the Father's audible voice all the time? Was this the first time? Was this for Jesus or was it for the crowd? Was it mostly for us, the Billions through history that would read this moment and say “Wow.... That's so cool!” ?

And what about John? I think he was surprised. I don't think he expected the Holy Spirit or the Father's voice, affirming what we know because of our theological paradigm, but John is understanding for the first time. Jesus is not just a prophet. Not just another miracle baby. He is the very son of God.

Some have asked “Why did Jesus need to get baptized?” Because he didn't need to repent. He didn't need the symbolism of washing away sins.

- I think it was because he was beginning a worldwide movement – a movement where every new believer would symbolize their belief by being publicly baptized. Billions of followers from Indiana to Iraq will do the same thing – go under the water and come out. You see, when you and I are baptized, we are “Identifying with Jesus.” Well, Jesus was setting the pace here. If “everyone in the family is baptized.” And Jesus is the leader of the family, he is doing it give us something to identify with. We are all baptized LIKE Jesus and IN Jesus name with the idea that

the same Holy Spirit will indwell us and make us LIKE Jesus. Another way of saying that is that we are baptized INTO Jesus.

- And he got baptized to give us this scene... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – all present, all communing in the initiation scene of the New Kingdom, the New Community, the New Reality that is the climax of the story they have written together for millennia.
- If you want to join our community, believe in Jesus or go public in baptism, just hit that same ccomaha.info and click the baptism tab. A minister or elder will walk you through step by step. And if you are lucky, they'll call you a brood of vipers...

Alright, I have one more mindblower for you if you can hang with me... you got a minute? And to make it better, it has to do with Geography so we get one more **MAP!**

- The book of John tells us that John the Baptist was baptizing at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan. A po-dunk hundred person location that is insignificant except for what happened there historically. Did you know that the Red Sea and Moses was not the only miraculous parting of the waters in the Bible? It actually happened three more times. And do you know where it happened? Yup... at this exact location. Joshua – crossing into the promised land, promising a new era for people who had wandered for 40 years in the desert. His crossing was the initiation of the Kingdom of Israel and all of God's promises from Abraham to Egypt to the Desert coming true. Then, in the era of the prophets, Elijah crossed over by slapping the river with his cloak and the waters parted. He crossed in order to be taken into heaven and Elisha got a 'double portion' of the Holy Spirit... where? Right across the Jordan. He took Elijah's cloak or mantle – (which is where the phrase passing on the mantle comes from.) He went back to the Jordan, slapped it with the cloak, it miraculously parted and he crossed – creating a brand new era of prophethood. Elisha did more double the miracles of Elijah and ushered in a NEW ERA of God's power being poured out by the Holy Spirit.
- Now Jesus started in Bethany, got baptized and went to the Judean wilderness this way... So follow the pattern with me. If Joshua ushered in a new KINGDOM. And Elisha brought a new chapter of SPIRITUAL POWER. How does this set up Jesus? Just by his location and trajectory, John would know that Jesus is ushering in a new kingdom of spiritual power. In this spot, where three miracles already happened, Jesus has a whole new event – with God's voice and the Holy Spirit. It tells us "Something NEW, something BIG, something earthshattering is here!" Get ready people... the messiah is about to change everything!

Friends, this is Jesus through the eyes of the Wildman. He was his co-conspirator on Kingdom subversion from the beginning... maybe from childhood. He was the first to see the trinitarian connection. He was the first to know Jesus was God's Son. And he was the first to see kingdom being begun. A kingdom with LIFE and Supernatural power that would outlive every kingdom on earth. The very kingdom of God. And this is good news, Amen?