

MEETING GOD IN THE WILDERNESS



The wilderness can be a lonely place, isolated from human influence and activity. In the Middle East, the desert was one such place. The Jews saw the desert as an ominous and hostile place. There were outlaws, demons, snakes and scorpions. It was a place of hunger, thirst and chaos. They saw it as a place cursed by God. Rain was seen as a blessing from God, but the desert.....it was dusty and dry.

The word wilderness starts with 'wild'. There was a wild looking man out there in the desert of Judea in 27 A.D. He was about 30 years old with clothes of camel hair and a leather belt. He lived simply with locusts and wild honey for food. His message was simple too. **'Repent...the kingdom of heaven is here!'** He could say that, because the king of that kingdom was soon to appear in the desert. Who is this fiery forerunner and messenger? If you asked him, he would say that it was not important. What was crucial was the message and the one coming after him.

John the Baptist was sent to **'prepare the way for the Lord'**. Even while in his mother Elizabeth's womb, John sensed something special about the presence of Jesus. After Mary was carrying unborn Jesus, she went to stay with Elizabeth. As Mary greeted her, John leaped in his mother's womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. - Luke 1:41.

Jesus would one day be recognized as the Lord and would even call himself 'The Way, the Truth and the Life who lead people back to the heavenly Father' - John 14:6. In the meantime, John was like a **bulldozer** and grater that would prepare the road. Have you ever seen the process of building roads, especially in mountainous areas?

Several years ago when I used to drive from upstate New York to Florida instead of fly, I would encounter such a process. West Virginia is a very mountainous state. At that time there was a 20 mile section of road that was still just two lanes instead of a wide interstate road with separate double lanes. That stretch of road was slow and winding. God help you if you got stuck behind a truck! Over a period of years that 20 mile section would be transformed into an expressway. The process was slow, disruptive and costly. Road-building through mountains and valleys requires removing high areas and building up lower ones. Sometimes explosives are used too. John the Baptist knew that his assignment was to build a road in the desert for the coming Messiah. He was aware of the prophecy about himself in Isaiah 40.

A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain'. - Isaiah 40:3-4 NIV

For 30 years John had lived a simple life dedicated fully to God's purpose. He lived a sacrificial life under the Nazarite vow - Numbers 6:1-21. He was truly set apart for God as he spent all of his adult life in the wilderness. He was alone. **He was not influenced by the voices of the world but he would listen to God's voice.** He knew the Old Testament scriptures and got his identity from them. (We also should get our identity from the scriptures and what God says about us, not from the world). When people would later ask him who he was, he replied with words from Isaiah 40.

'I am the voice' / John 1:23

John knew that he was the messenger spoken of in Malachi 3:1, who would prepare the way for Messiah, the messenger of the covenant. He would prepare people to meet Jesus. **God must remove the high places of pride and lift up those who thought they were worthless.** John could not just be another voice that echoed the words of others. He must speak God's Word and that alone, and he must be bold and fearless, for John would wield an **ax**. Old roots must be cut off. God would use him to **prepare the hearts** of the people to receive Jesus.

*He will **turn the hearts** of the fathers to their children
and the hearts of the children to their fathers... - Malachi 4:6*

God was building a road to human hearts. The common people in Israel were hungry for God. It had been 400 years since they had heard from God through his prophets. John was like another Elijah, a clear voice from God. Multitudes left Jerusalem and the surrounding areas to make the trek into the desert to hear this man John, for he had a message of hope. It is likely that John gave them the whole message of Isaiah 40 and parts of Malachi.

God had met his people before in the desert. Moses had spent his first 40 years in the royal palace learning the ways of the Egyptians. God would have him spend the next 40 years in the desert learning His ways in humility and solitude, and Moses would see the glory of the Lord. God prepared him in the desert so that he could later lead his people in the desert for a period of 40 years.

Eventually the road in West Virginia was finished. The road was wider, straighter, quicker and more pleasant. The dirty and tedious job of road building was done. It was worth the wait. The people in Israel had waited for years for the coming of their Messiah. They were made ready because of the sacrificial life and ministry of John the Baptist. His public ministry ended abruptly after only 6 months. He was put to death because his message of repentance was too fiery for one wicked woman. Nonetheless, his mission had been accomplished and the people of Israel were able to see what they were looking for when Jesus arrived on the scene.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. - Isaiah 40:5

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God caused his goodness to pass before him. -Exodus 33:18-19. When Jesus came to earth, mankind began to see the goodness of God on display. Around the world today, John the Baptist is not very well known, but millions have heard about Jesus Christ. That is the way John preferred it. He knew who he was and who Jesus was.

You yourselves can testify what I said, I am not the Christ, I am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater, and I must become less. - John 3:28-30

Just as John announced the coming of the Lord, so should we. Are we willing to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus? It begins in our hearts. Before John the Baptist proclaimed the message, he became the message. He was willing to spend time with God in a lonely place. That was where he heard God's voice and became a voice for God. We too can meet God in the wilderness. It is where He will prepare us for His glory. It will be worth it. - John B.

jesusreigns.net

