

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 3

God Prepares the Way for Jesus' Ministry

Introduction

- Whenever we study the Life of Jesus, we are in the realm of the “supernatural” – the miraculous – that which is beyond the reach of even the greatest minds of men. It is impossible for us to understand rationally the amazing miracle of God becoming man. These truths about Jesus, though rooted in history and therefore are “fact”, nevertheless we must study these truths as we exercise FAITH in what God has revealed to us.

- Applying this to the life of Jesus in His growing up years, we must humbly acknowledge the element of divine “mystery” – here is the Son of God, Jesus, as a boy, growing and developing. The only record that we are given from these early years after Jesus’ circumcision is in Luke 2:40-52. Here is the God-Man – fully divine yet fully human – like no other human being before or after Him – God in human form among a human family, as a developing child – developing physically, mentally and emotionally, discovering more and more about Who He was – studying and understanding the depths of the riches of God’s truth in His Jewish Scriptures – yet all without any blemish or sinful action, word or behaviour – with God the Father watching over His beloved Child continuously.

- Indeed these are facts that are beyond the human, this-worldly realm – these are supernatural realities, miraculous, God-at-work realities, God’s wisdom and power in full view. We are not asked to fathom such truths with our sin-infected minds but to meditate upon them and receive them by faith as God’s truth, as FACT.

- Here we need to guard against two extremes in our thinking, both of which lead into heresies: 1) the extreme that focuses only on the humanity of Jesus – Jesus as MAN; and 2) the extreme that focuses almost exclusively on the divinity of

Jesus – Jesus as GOD. We must hold both of these truths together – in the Person of Jesus, they are NOT in conflict with each other. For example, in our thinking, it is almost impossible for us to understand how Jesus as a teenager grew in His self-awareness of Who He was and His divine mission – here is awesome and wonderful “mystery,” but this is nevertheless absolute truth. God was at work preparing His Son for the Mission that He had sent Him to fulfil.

- As Jesus came towards the moment when He would step out on to the public stage to begin His different ministries of healing, teaching and setting captives free, as well as equipping a core group of disciples for their involvement in His Father’s work, God would prepare the way for this moment in two significant ways: 1) through the work of John the Baptist, and then 2) through His baptism.

1) The way prepared through the ministry of John (the Baptist)

- Jesus’ ministry was prepared by the ministry of John the Baptist (in some way related to Jesus – Luke 1:36).¹
- John’s appearance in the wilderness was an event of great moment and significance in the life and history of God’s holy nation. After about 300-400 years of silence, an OT prophet appears, John appears on the scene among the people of God as a “prophet” (a herald proclaiming God’s message to God’s people)
- God’s holy people had wandered far from God – like sheep without a shepherd, wandering on the hillsides and at the mercy of robbers (cf. “den of thieves”) and wild animals – many of their spiritual leaders (the priests, Pharisees, Levites, scribes) had led them away from the true ways of God – they were oppressed and burdened down by their teachings concerning the Law and the Traditions (cf. living under a heavy yoke – Matt.11:28ff). They needed deliverance from these

¹ **JOHN THE BAPTIST** — forerunner of Jesus; a moral reformer and preacher of messianic hope. According to Luke 1:36, Elizabeth and Mary, the mothers of John and Jesus, were either blood relatives or close kinswomen. Luke adds that both John and Jesus were announced, set apart, and named by the angel Gabriel even before their birth.

false leaders, to be shown the path of freedom and righteousness, to understand God's way of righteousness.

- John's appearance at the Jordan River was received and understood as the coming of another great prophet in keeping with the prophets of old – in that sense, John really stands within the OT era or dispensation, like a “bridge” between the Old and the New.
- John's entry upon the stage of the Jewish nation at the time is to announce to God's people that God's time had come, i.e. the long-awaited visitation from God for the salvation of His people – God's kingdom reign was about to break in upon the stage of human history – John had been sent to announce this and prepare the way for the coming of the King, the Messiah Who would deliver and also set up the kingdom of God: “Repent for the Kingdom of God is *near*” (Matt.3:2 “near” = imminent, just about to happen).

John, his nature and character:

- God's calling upon John as a prophet was radical/unique – he was a radical person, with a radical appearance, and a radical life-style in keeping with his special calling as an OT prophet (see Mark 1:6) – he had been filled with the Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15) in preparation for his unique calling to prepare the way for the coming of God's Messiah – Mal.4:5-6; Luke 7:24-27
- He was characterised by boldness, courage and humility – Luke 3:15-17; cf. Mark 1:7-8; John 3:23-30
- A great and godly man – note Jesus' own testimony to John – Luke 7:28
- A fallible man – who when locked away in prison could fall back into doubt concerning Jesus as the Messiah – Luke 7:18-23
- An uncompromising man – without compromise even before kings – see Luke 3:19-20 – in the end, he paid the ultimate price for his faithfulness to God

John's role:

- A prophet – God's “mouthpiece” – speaking the words of God with divine power
 - “The word of the LORD came to John” – Luke 3:2 (cf. Jeremiah 1:2,4,11,13 etc.)

- A herald – sent by God (John 1:6-8) to announce God’s message to His people (cf. Mal.3:1) – calling God’s people anyone who would listen ...
 - Those who came to be baptised included “soldiers” as well as ordinary people (Luke 3:14); also “tax-collectors” (Luke 3:12), i.e. people whose sins were very obvious (often categorised together with “sinners” – Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1 – but they were more open to listen to John and later to Jesus than many of the religious elite and hierarchy) – they also included “Pharisees & Sadducees” – Matt.3:7
- A voice crying in the wilderness = God’s voice to His holy nation – God once again speaking to His people through a chosen mouthpiece in order that His people might be saved – linked with prophecy in the OT – see Luke 3:3-5, cf. Is.40:3-5 (N.B. “Wilderness” or “desert” is a totally barren wasteland but it also signifies in the NT a place where God’s people retreat to in order to meet and speak with God, eg Jesus’ retreats to the wilderness for prayer – there He also confronts the enemy)
- A forerunner – common in his day day, a person who would run ahead announcing the coming of the emperor or some other very important person, so that the people would prepare themselves to welcome and receive him – cf. levelling the road so that God’s people might be spiritually ready to recognise God’s Messiah (Isaiah 40:3-5)
- A witness – telling the people about the One who would baptise them with the Holy Spirit and fire – Mark 1:7-8 – cf. John 1:29 – bearing witness to Jesus as “the Lamb of God” – see also John 1:7,15,19-37

John’s message:

- A call to radical repentance – full of warnings of the coming day of God’s wrath (see Mal.4:5-6)
- John was widely known for his baptism of (unto) REPENTANCE² for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3) – the people went out into the wilderness to hear John and to be baptised by him in the Jordan River – “Repent” (see Matt.3:1-

² John’s baptism was “of repentance” (*metanoias*), that is, its chief characteristic was that it indicated sorrow for sin and a moral change on the part of those he baptized (vv. 8-14). The noun *metanoia* (“repentance”) appears also in 3:8; 5:32, 15:7; and 24:47. The verb *metanoeo* (“repent”) occurs in Luke 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; and 17:3-4. The basic idea comes from the Hebrew *sub* (“turn,” i.e., from sin to God; cf. TDNT, 4:975-1008). Repentance is an ancient prophetic theme (e.g., Ezek 18:21, 30). “For [*eis*, or ‘with a view to’] forgiveness of sins” expresses the result of the repentance shown in baptism. (Evangelical Bible Commentary of the New Testament).

2; cf. Mark 1:15) = “Change your mind/thinking” – throw off your old ways of thinking, eg about God, your ways, your selves; and put on God’s way of thinking as revealed in His Word.

John’s influence:

- John’s preaching prepared the way for the coming ministry of Jesus by arousing the people’s awareness of their true spiritual plight – and calling them to return to their God.
- It also created a fresh or renewed longing in their hearts for God to usher in His kingdom

2) Jesus Himself prepared through the Spirit’s anointing

- In the Gospel of Luke more than in any other Gospel, we find a strong teaching and emphasis upon the activity and ministry of the HOLY SPIRIT. In this section, we will highlight in particular the dynamic of the Spirit at work in the early hours and days of Jesus’ public ministry, especially at His baptism and the moments that immediately followed.
- At this moment (*kairos*) – “The time has come” (Mark 1:15) – Jesus makes His first appearance on the scene. One day in Jesus’ life (when He had reached about 30 years of age, see Luke 3:23), by the stirring of the Spirit, He left His family home with its the secure environment and His daily work. This was the *kairos* moment when He would launch the ministry for which His Father had sent Him into the world.
- In God’s plan, Jesus goes first to the Jordan River, to John, to be baptised as an act of identification with sinful humanity, not as a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of His sins as John readily acknowledges – see Matt.3:13-15 – in obedience and submission to His Father’s will to fulfil all righteousness through identifying with sinful man.
- This was also a most holy moment when Jesus as Servant of the LORD would be anointed by the Spirit in preparation for launching of His public ministries (cf. Luke 4:18a) – i.e. when He would receive the divine empowering from on High so that

with great power and authority He would fulfil all His messianic ministries. – see Luke 3:21-22.

- God “pours out” His Spirit upon His beloved Son, Jesus – as it were, this is the moment when God anoints His Son with the precious anointing oil ordaining Him apart for His priestly and kingly service.
 - See Acts 10:38, the coming of the Spirit “on” Jesus at His baptism is also referred to as an “anointing”. Cf. 1 John 2:26-27. This picture is rooted in the “anointing oil” poured upon the high priest. Again it is clear that this is an essential part of Jesus’ preparation for His earthly ministry.
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- This event makes clear that Jesus of Nazareth as God’s Messiah is perfectly HUMAN as well as perfectly DIVINE – as MAN He was anointed by the Father with His Spirit in preparation for His earthly ministry – the coming of the Spirit on Jesus has nothing to do with bringing Him into relationship with God but rather as POWER FOR SERVICE. (This truth has profound significance to God’s servants who through rebirth have become indwelt with God’s Spirit but in their going out in service have need for God’s anointing and empowering for service.)
 - Luke also highlights the visible descending of the Spirit on Jesus “in bodily form” (recorded only in Luke’s Gospel)³ – giving visible and undeniable proof to Jesus Himself of the coming and Presence of the Spirit “overshadowing” His life and ministry in every part – a releasing of God’s Spirit upon the Person of Jesus of Nazareth as He begins His ministry.
 - From this moment on, the Spirit of God is at work in and through Jesus, the Man, in every detail and aspect of His life and ministry. Jesus is never alone. The Father through the Spirit is continually with Him, helping, strengthening, guiding,

³ What is the significance of the dove descending upon Jesus when He was baptised? Wm. Hendriksen (NT Commentary, The Gospel of Luke, p.218): “It is not clear just why God chose the form of a dove to represent the Holy Spirit. Some commentators point to the *purity* and gentleness or *graciousness* of the dove, properties which, in an infinite degree, characterize the Spirit, and therefore also Christ (cf. Ps.68:13; Song of Sol.2:14;5:2; Matt.10:16). Thus equipped and qualified, he was able to carry out the very difficult task which the Father had given him to do. To save us from sin he himself needed to be *pure*. To endure torment, to pardon our iniquities, and to exercise patience with our weaknesses, he needed *gentleness, meekness, graciousness*. This, too, he possessed in an abundant measure, and he told his followers, that, by the grace and power of God, they should acquire and exercise these same gifts (Matt.11:29,30; 12:19; 21:4,5; Luke 23:34).”

empowering Him so that He knows and does the Father's will in all things at all times.

- Jesus then returns from the wilderness "full of the Holy Spirit": Luke 4:1a – the meaning of "full of the Spirit" as opposed to "filled with the Spirit" seems to refer to the state of full mastery of the whole person by the Spirit.
- The Spirit is present as *power* (Greek: *dunamis*) in Jesus' life and ministry – Luke 4:14 – cf. Hebrew word "*ruach*" means breath, wind or spirit – when it is used for "wind," it refers to a very powerful and mighty wind, not just a gentle breeze – hence applied to the "power" of the Spirit, it is of a hidden yet a mighty, irresistible force.⁴
- In His first proclamation, Jesus declares that the Spirit of the LORD was "on" Him – see Luke 4:18 – to preach the Good News, to proclaim freedom, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Conclusion

- God has prepared His Son for ministry and now sends Him out, not firstly into ministry, but rather into the wilderness where He would be brought face to face with the adversary, the one who had been deceiving, tempting and corrupting the hearts and minds of people ever since he succeeded in robbing Adam and Eve of their innocence and holy estate as God's special creation in the Garden of Eden.
- But now with the coming of God's Son, the holy Servant and mighty Warrior of God, the moment when Satan would be overcome and cast out was fast drawing near. See John 12:31.

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⁴ Luke and Paul frequently link the Spirit with "power". We should look more carefully at this power and understand what it is and what we should expect. Cf. John 3:7-8 – the Spirit blows where He will – His power cannot be controlled or manipulated by man, nor can His works or movements be fully known or understood.