

Sunday 11th October 2009
Divine Encounters Pt5
Preparing the way for the Face of the Lord

Reading Mark 1:1-3, Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist is described by Jesus as one of the least born of women in

Luke 7:28

I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

Yet in the passage's we have read we see multitudes coming out to be baptized by him for the repentance of sins. We know of his parents encounters with angels, and His mothers encounter with Mary. Jesus told us that the Old Testament predicted John's arrival on the scene of history as the voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord.

John the Baptist was certainly in a different league to those that worked miracles in front of Pharoah, called down fire on Carmel, raised the dead, and healed the sick in the Old Testament. He had a special assignment.

If John the Baptist is described - by Jesus - as the greatest born of women and if we are least in the kingdom of God how can we be greater than John the Baptist? What do we receive because of our inheritance in the kingdom of God, which John had not? What should we do with what we receive that John was not able to?

In our first passage we read that John was sent out as messenger before the Face of the Lord. In effect John's message was to prepare people to see the FACE of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

AND to receive Jesus' baptism which would bring the very FACE of God into the lives of individual Spirit filled believers.

John the Baptist had a special grace that allowed him to recognise the Face of God even from within the womb.

This was John's mission, God's plan, and set John up to be one of the greatest born of women.

The least in the kingdom of God are greater than John because they actually get the privilege of being all that John was, a person sent to Prepare the Way for the Face of the Lord, To preach repentance – bearing the fruits of true repentance (not religious repentance) – and to declare the kingdom of heaven is at hand AS WELL as being the FACE of God i.e. revealing the very character of God and being HIS divine encounters with people we engage with because of the OUTFLOWING of Holy Spirit fruits and gifts.

John had a number of Divine Encounters that CHANGED his life from the moment of conception until he died. Luke's gospel provides the fullest account of Johns life and also teaches us how that grace for recognising the Face of God must be protected in the way Elizabeth and Zacharias protected John. In Luke 1:5-25 we read how Zacharias was performing his priestly duties, burning incense when an angel of the Lord appeared to him, and the fear of the Lord came upon Zacharias.

A divine encounter, often brings an awe at the presence of God and His ministers (whether they be angels, apostles, or believers on mission for God look at the book of Acts)

Notice also that this Divine Encounter occurs as a result of Zacharias' prayer that was about to be answered. Zacharias was pursuing God for a natural desire, to have a child, to be blessed by the Lord with offspring, even in his old age, and probably for joy for his wife Elizabeth. How many of our prayers for the most day to day things do we expect to result in a visitation of angels or Gods presence (that we can actually see)? Sadly not enough, but be sure of this all our prayers are answered probably by the result of an unseen ministering angel being at work. We need to stand in as much awe at the face of God

revealed in the unseen manifestations which result in the answers to our prayers.

In Luke 1:16 the angel proclaims that John will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. What a wonderful prophetic word. Even greater words are spoken over each one of us in Acts 1:8 and you shall be witnesses TO ME, to the ends of the earth. We shall produce the evidence of the kingdom of God in power to the ends of the earth. We shall manifest the FACE of God by the power of Holy Spirit flowing through us in producing both fruit and gifts showing the ARRIVAL of the kingdom of God throughout the earth.

John had the spirit of Elijah to bring reconciliation (1:17) of generations and families, we have the Spirit of Christ, to prepare people for the Lord. Part of YOUR/OUR ministry is to be reconciled in love and forgiveness to all those we meet in order to prepare the way for a revelation of the FACE of the Lord.

Zacharias is just like us, after standing in awe at the manifestation of an angel, says HOW. Have you ever done that, had a Divine Encounter, been told what is going to happen, what you are going to do, and then said HOW. We read last week Moses said the same thing about his ability to speak to Pharaoh. Given Zacharias' and Elizabeths old age, Moses stutter, etc perhaps not unreasonable questions. We know from Rom 10:17 faith comes by hearing the Word of God, but from the rest of Romans 10 we also know God revealed His word for centuries and was rejected. We not only need to hear the Word but also accept it and from whom it came, from God – not the preacher, not the angel, not the stranger, but GOD. If He said it and we take it on board, meditate on it, treasure it, walk in accordance with it, then when it happens we will recognise it.

I believe we mess up the outworking of Gods desires for our lives by not accepting His word. For some people their rejection the gospel is the ultimate catastrophe to a God who desires that none should perish. To most of us there are many things we could and should have received from the Lord which we have delayed or lost because we have not accepted His word.

Even when we accept Gods word, we can endanger the timing and outworking. So when you have a divine encounter this week be careful how you respond, be ready to repent, to change.

Zacharias had some doubts, but speaking those out to anybody, could be dangerous. Proverbs 18:21 Tells us that there is power in the tongue to bring life or death to Gods purposes as well as to the lives and situations of others. Just think of how many people have been hampered by being told as a child you will never achieve that. There is a difference between you will never do that, and given the right time, training and development, you may or can achieve that. I wonder if the Lord knew that Zacharias questions, whether doubt or just questions, would destroy the hope in Elizabeth. I wonder if the Lord knew that had he allowed Zacharias to walk out of the sanctuary and tell those people in prayer outside what had just happened that their scorn, jokes, questions would kill the hope he had just planted in Zacharias' heart. For whatever reason, He sealed Zacharias' mouth, and the prayers outside assumed he had received a visitation, he was dumbstruck.

Even Elizabeth after she received the message went into hiding for 5 months (1:28). Can you imagine the emotional turmoil she would have had to go through of people telling her she was too old to have a child. Too old to fulfil your destiny. Too old to be used by God. In this day and age I wonder what the medics, newspapers, TV would make and suggest to a woman of great age giving birth. Some probably would suggest an abortion, others would scare her silly with all the predictions of what could go wrong medically and psychologically in the life of her child. Elizabeth acted wisely and took the revelation and treasured it till it was fully evident that the word was about to be fulfilled, the point of no return.

However, it is highly probably that Elizabeth was not just protecting herself from what may be spoken and suggested, but also the gift of the child she carried. The unborn baby in the womb, even at foetus stage hears the words spoken to the mother about the child. The fact that John leaped in the womb at the approach of Mary, Jesus' mother tells of the grace upon John from the point of conception to recognize the Saviour. It tells also of the sensitivity of even an unborn baby to the words and emotions around its mother.

Elizabeth protected John in the womb, his undefiled heart enabled him to rejoice in the womb, and Elizabeth was then at that moment filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41) which empowered her to steward the gift of God which she carried until the child was born and he was able to steward the gift.

No prophet ever before bore the responsibility that was given to John the Baptist. His assignment was not only to walk before the face of God, but to prepare the way for the face of God to be revealed.

He would raise the valleys, lower the hills, removed the obstructions for the KING of glory's face of divine favour to common upon the earth. He not only held the responsibility to prepare the way for the clearest REVELATION of the face of God, but also the actual MANIFESTATION of the face of God in Jesus Christ.

We have the same responsibility to prepare the way, for the possible ONLY revelation and manifestation that some people may have of the King. We so need to be in that place of being before the FACE of God having those divine encounters as part of our daily life, in order to fulfil the task. To me this is why soaking as well as our daily devotionals is so important, but to soak effectively and to want to soak we need to be pursuing that walk of holiness. There is nothing more distracting to us taking time to come into the presence of God than sin or selfish agenda's

In John 1:29 we see that John had not only to prepare the way by declaration he had to identify the manifestation of the FACE of God on Jesus. He declares behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world .. then he goes on to say I DID NOT RECOGNIZE Him – until he had seen THE SPIRIT descending on Him and REMAINING with Him. As a result of seeing this manifestation John could bear full witness that here is THE SON OF GOD who baptizes in Holy Spirit.

The wonderful Holy Spirit was positioned to MANIFEST the face of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

He REMAINED upon Jesus, is the key phrase in that passage. How did Jesus do life, He walked through life in such a way that Holy Spirit never left Him. What about me? What about you? There is a cost to maintaining Holy Spirit's presence, it's a cost of passion rather than works.

In Matthew 3 account of Jesus baptism John stated I need to be baptized by you – he was not talking of water baptism he was desirous of Holy Spirit baptism that would draw him closer to the face of God. When Jesus approached and He recognized Him John's assignment was complete. John knew Jesus' assignment was to reveal the face of God through the baptism John would take Him through and as a result of the Father's sending of Holy Spirit visibly manifest.

John was called the greatest born of women. We in the kingdom of God are called greater because we have the opportunity to be filled with Holy Spirit, the manifestation of the characteristics, the very Face of God.

So what does the FACE of God look like. The Characteristics of God which Jesus revealed were wholly good. Salvation, healing, deliverance, relief to the poor, sight to the blind, setting captives free, revealing the predominant characteristic of God – i.e. LOVE.

LOVE wants and delivers perfection to each of us. There is a judgement side to God, which is part of His character of LOVE as He will one day deal with injustice, rebellion and consequences of the curse, but His ultimate aim is that none should perish, and all should experience His LOVE, grace, mercy, forgiveness and healing.

Just as there has to be a Trinity for us to understand the COMMUNITY of love, self giving agape love to each member of the trinity, there has to be love expressed in community within the church. This is why it is our greatest command, all men will know by our love.

Holy Spirit empowers us to show love where we do not have the means or emotion to do so.

God is good all the time. All the time God is good.

We may not understand the mysteries of apparent contradictions in scripture, but Jesus primarily displayed Gods love and mercy. We are commissioned only to show Gods love and mercy by healing the sick

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If we are not doing that, what did Jesus do to model the lifestyle that enabled Him to show Gods goodness

He pursued the Face of the Father in long periods of prayer and fasting, so that He could manifest the FACE of the Father.

Ezekiel 39:29 “I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on them” This is the incredible promise to each of us that has received Holy Spirit we walk in the Face of God we have open access to Divine Encounters and to bring Divine Encounters to others. They will change you and change others.