

# SESSION 2: Preparing the Way

TEXT: LUKE 1

## INTRODUCTION

As we embark on this journey of fasting for forty days, let us begin with the story of John the Baptist. The setting of the story is in Palestine, where the Jews are under Roman rule. Faithful Jews are anxiously anticipating the coming of a king who will liberate them and restore Israel to an independent and powerful nation.

A King is indeed coming, but the Kingdom he will establish is radically different from what anyone has envisioned. The people need someone to help them prepare for this coming King, much like we need to prepare to meet our King and his Kingdom in this journey.

As we peek into the story of John the Baptist, here are two questions to consider:

1. What is the story that God has been writing—and is writing even now?
2. What is the role that we get to play in this story?

## 1. WHAT IS THE STORY THAT GOD HAS BEEN WRITING—AND IS WRITING EVEN NOW? (LUKE 1:1–2, 17, 67–75)

Luke begins by saying he is writing to tell of what has been fulfilled, meaning that these are stories that had been promised long ago (verses 1–2).

The angel Gabriel also tells Zechariah that John will go in “the spirit and power of Elijah,” meaning that John will play a role similar to that of Elijah in a way that reminds people of the ancient prophet’s story (verse 17).

When John is born, Zechariah praises God for remembering his covenant with David and Abraham (verses 69, 73).

It is important to remember God’s promise to Abraham and David:

- “Through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 22:19).
- “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious” (Isaiah 11:10).
- God has always been about redeeming and restoring all of creation, and he does this through Jesus.

These verses also remind us that God has always had a heart for stepping into places where people have been oppressed, and he longs to set them free.

Consider this section from Day Two's reading:

*If this journey is to transform us, it will require us to better understand a reality we tend to ignore personally, historically, and as a present crisis: slavery. It is not a word that evokes positive feelings. Whether you live in the North, South, Southwest, or Midwest you feel some sense of anguish, grief, and shame about the history of slavery in the United States of America. Globally, 27 million people live in slavery today. Half of these slaves are children. This is something I know in my head, but it is difficult to translate in my heart. When I look at the shelves of chocolate in my local convenience store, I know that much of the cacao farmed across the globe comes from children who are forced into labor due to unjust debt. But I ignore it.*

*In the same way many facts in my own life point to one irrefutable conclusion: I am a slave. I am a slave to my job, my fears, my cravings, my beloved possessions, my technological gadgets, my dreams for the future, and my sense of well-being that comes from the approval of other people. **I need an Exodus. We all do.***

God longs to set us free, and he is working to prepare our hearts for his freedom. This is why John the Baptist came.

## 2. WHAT IS THE ROLE THAT WE GET TO PLAY IN THIS STORY? (LUKE 1:11-17, 76-80)

God longs to soften the hearts of men and women. This was clearly John's role (verse 16).

There is also an element to speaking/telling the story (verse 76).

A big part of what we get invited into is ushering in God's peace and offering light/hope/restoration to those dwelling in darkness/despair (verse 79).

John had many reasons to believe that he was uniquely gifted for the task ahead of him. For one thing, an angel foretold his birth! John was also peculiar and had plenty of reason to doubt his own abilities/calling.

- The statement that he "lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly" (verse 80) is indicative that at the least, John did not prefer the normal social settings. It may even suggest that John did not function well socially. Either way, John was weird.
- Most of us do not have a story where an angel announced/confirmed our mission.
- Most of us are more aware of our deficiencies than of our unique gifts.

As Chris pointed out beautifully this week, we need to set aside the fear of our inadequacies in order to play our part:

*Nina Simone could set a room ablaze with the sound of her voice and the passion of her words. Moses held up his arms and saw God part the sea before him, and still he was plagued by self-doubt and despair. Why should we be any better than either of them? God also has a plan for us. He used one to lead his [God's] people out of Egypt, and another to lead her people out of oppression and into a better day. God also intends to use each of us. May we pause today to reconnect with that truth and summon the courage to walk into another day by his grace.*

For each of us, it is our responsibility to find the way that we best tell the story of redemption and restoration and to find the way that we can best contribute to restoration/Exodus of our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, cities and world.

In the next sermon, we will take time to consider the message that John the Baptist preached. It is a call to live a life of generosity.