

**Crossroads Christian Church**  
**Sunday, August 19, 2012**  
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**“THE STORY”**

**Ch. 23: JESUS’ MINISTRY BEGINS**

Text: Matthew 3-4, 11; Mark 1-3; Luke 8; John 1-4

**Introduction**

Last Sunday marked the end of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. It was quite the spectacle as we saw the best athletes on the planet compete on the world’s biggest stage. USA earned 104 medals, 46 gold, more than any other country. We witnessed numerous world records shattered, and names like Usain Bolt, Michael Phelps, and Gabby Douglas grabbed the biggest headlines.

One thing that is perhaps missed in the Olympics is the preparation that takes place. Not only the strenuous preparation of the athletes, but also the preparations the city of London had to make for these games. Consider the following:

- 26 different sports including 305 unique events
- 10,500 athletes participating
- 20,000 journalists covering the event
- 500,000 spectators
- 8 million tickets sold
- 63,000 people involved in staging the games

London had spent 7 years preparing for these Olympics...ever since they were awarded the games in 2005.

The focal point of the Olympics, London’s Olympic Stadium, took over 3 years to build. At one point over 650 workers were actively building the stadium. Over 5,000 workers were involved overall. 30 buildings were destroyed to build the stadium.

The total cost for the 2012 Olympics will end up being somewhere between \$15-20 billion. The cost for the Opening Ceremonies, watched by an estimated almost 4 billion people was \$42 million dollars.

And all of this preparation was for an event that lasted 2 weeks. 2 WEEKS. Now don’t get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoyed watching the Olympics. I thought the preparations London made were quite impressive. But what if I told you about one man’s preparation that was infinitely more important? What if I told you about one man who’s mission in life was preparing the way for One who would change the world – not for two weeks – but for all eternity?

We meet such a man in chapter 23 of *The Story*.

➤ **TURN TO *MATTHEW 3*, AND PLEASE STAND FOR THE READING OF GOD’S WORD.**

- **READ MATTHEW 3:1-12**

We are continuing our journey through *The Story*. Last week we saw how Jesus came as one of us, as a baby; a baby who would change everything, and He came to show us who the Father is.

You may have heard that Tara and I had a baby recently, too. And I can tell you from personal experience A BABY CHANGES EVERYTHING . . . Our little guy has changed our home, our lives, our schedule, and our sleeping patterns. When JESUS was born He didn't just change the world for Mary and Joseph, He changed the WHOLE WORLD."

- God's UPPER STORY plan of redeeming the world back to Himself started with the LOWER STORY birth of a baby boy in the most humble of circumstances: in a manger, in a stable, in Bethlehem.

Where we pick up today, Jesus is no longer a child, He is now 30 years old and His public ministry is just about to get underway.

At the end of the Old Testament, we came to it a couple of weeks ago, the prophets Isaiah and Malachi tell us that the next prophet that's going to speak is going to introduce us to the One who will provide the way back to God. 400 years of silence. And then that prophet emerges. He emerges out of the wilderness, right on cue, according to God's Upper Story plan. Not a minute too early. Not a minute too late. And his name, we read of him a moment ago, is **John the Baptist**.

There are a few elements that are critical to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and John the Baptist plays a significant role in the first. To begin, notice that...

1. **The WAY Is PREPARED.**

- Who is JOHN THE BAPTIST?
  - Cousin of Jesus
  - Eccentric man, lives in the wilderness, has no credentials
  - Wore camel's skin; ate locusts and honey.
  - MODERN DAY BEAR GRYLLS: *Prophet Man vs. Wild*
  - Another unlikely pick from God
- But John is committed to giving us the solution to our collective eternal problem. He's finally, and I say finally, because as we've journeyed together through *The Story*, it's been 2000 years since He first called Abraham. Finally, he's going to introduce us to God's plan to provide a solution for all of us to come back, if we want.
- **Matthew 3:3** says that John is, "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" Through this, John is fulfilling the words of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.
- John is preparing the way of Jesus, who will be God's solution for bringing us back to Him.

Through John, Jesus' **PREPARATION IS ANNOUNCED.**

- John's ministry is one of PREPARATION. He is alerting the people, "The Kingdom is near. The One whom the people have been waiting for is at hand. And it's time to get ready. The time is now. Repent."

Not only is it announced, Jesus' **PREPARATION IS SEALED** through His baptism.

**Read MATTHEW 3:13-14:** ***13**Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. **14**But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"*

Jesus comes to be baptized by John, but John realizes that he is nothing but the servant of the Messiah and says, "No way." He says, "I'm not even fit to tie your shoes. You say you want me to baptize you? No, no. I need to be baptized by you."

But Jesus says in Matthew 3:15: ***"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.***

John baptizes Jesus. But why? ***Why did Jesus need to be baptized?*** Jesus had no sin in His life, nothing that He needed to repent of.

- He does it to IDENTIFY HIMSELF WITH US.

Jesus says it should be done to "fulfill all righteousness." Now, Jesus is not using the word righteousness to mean moral purity or goodness. The phrase "fulfill all righteousness" has more to do with accomplishing God's will or God's mission for Jesus' earthly ministry.

- In **Luke 19:10** Jesus stated His mission was ***"to seek and to save what was lost."*** God's mission for Jesus is to bring salvation to the world.

Remember, John's message was both a message of repentance, and a call – to look forward to a coming Messiah who would restore us to a loving relationship with God.

If Jesus is going to save sinners, He must be identified with sinners. He is fully God and fully man. He was a man, like one of us, yet He Himself was without sin.

In fact, Jesus' favorite self-designation was **"THE SON OF MAN."** Jesus used it 84 times to describe Himself. It was a title that emphasized His humanity and ability to be identified with us.

And today, baptism is still all about being identified. When we are baptized we are publically declaring our identity with Jesus – in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is a powerful picture of Who we belong to. It was important to Jesus...so much so that before He ascended in to Heaven, he commanded us to baptize. In His Great Commission He says, ***Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and***

*of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

The last statement of Jesus we have in the gospel of Matthew is a command that includes baptism. And when someone is talking, they save what's most important, the best, for last. So how dare we attempt to minimize something Christ has maximized?

Jesus' baptism also provides a clear picture of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son is being baptized, the Holy Spirit descends on Him like a dove, and the voice of the Father says, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). And John the Baptist finds himself in the middle of a historic event. He finds himself in the middle of the Trinity on a day and an event signifying the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

**Illustration:** After I graduated from Bible College, having been trained to be a minister, I needed to be ordained – consecrated, set apart, by our elders for service to God. It's not only a spiritual requirement for ministry but a legal one as well. For me, and for any minister, this solemn event marks the official beginning of a life devoted solely to serving others on behalf of God. John's baptism of Jesus has this effect, as it marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

So, we see Jesus' preparation was sealed, or marked, by his baptism. But his **PREPARATION WAS ALSO PROVEN** through His temptation. His temptation proved He was prepared.

MATTHEW 4. Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, and as you can imagine, he was hungry.

Why was Jesus tempted? **Hebrews 4:15** tells us, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin."* He was tempted so that He would know and understand what it was like...again, so that He could identify with us.

Notice that Jesus is vulnerable. He's in a moment of weakness. He has a legitimate need: he's hungry. And Satan is there waiting to capitalize. Satan presents Him the opportunity to get food – to turn stones into bread.

Satan will do the same thing to you and me. He will attack us in moments when we're vulnerable and weak. When you have a legitimate need in your life, Satan will offer something appealing. But know, what Satan offers is never, and I mean, NEVER better than what God has in store for you.

Perhaps you have a need in your life for companionship. You feel lonely. Satan will present you with opportunities to fill that...but they are empty and unfulfilling. The one-night stands, sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or cohabitating that you think will be fulfilling is only going to hurt you more in the end.

Perhaps you're in a crunch financially. You have a need to provide for yourself and your family. And Satan presents you with some opportunities. You could fudge some numbers at work in order to get a promotion. A few white lies here and there, no harm, right? Satan tells you if you stop giving to the church, just think what you could do with that money. You could pay bills and get out of the mess. Perhaps you've tried these before, and you're misery is living proof that Satan's promises are completely empty.

Why? Because God's way is always best. He knows you, He knows your heart, He knows what you need, and what He has to offer you will never leave you lacking. Jesus said in **John 10:10**: "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*"

And so Jesus resists the devil's temptation 3 times. And notice what Jesus uses to defend Himself when tempted. 3 times, each time He is tempted, He quotes Scripture.

In **Matthew 4:11**, it says, "*Then the devil left him.*" You want Satan to leave your life? You want to experience victory over temptation, then follow the example of Jesus. Know Scripture. Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Quote it.

- David said in the **Psalms 119:11**, "*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*"

And so I ask, what do you turn to when you're weak, when you're vulnerable? Your friends? Your feelings? The culture – Hollywood or the media? Or do you turn to the holy, inerrant, inspired Word of God...the sword of the Spirit? It has yet to lead me astray. And it never will.

The preaching of John, the baptism of Jesus, and His temptation in the wilderness all prepared Jesus for ministry. The 2<sup>nd</sup> element we can't miss is...

## 2. **His POWER Is DISPLAYED.**

If Jesus' baptism and temptation demonstrated His HUMANITY, His power displayed His DIVINITY.

### POWER OVER NATURAL WORLD

It begins at a wedding in the town of Cana. It's found in John 2 and it is the 1<sup>st</sup> recorded miracle of Jesus. They have run out of wine and Mary, Jesus' mother, who knows who Jesus was better than any person on earth, calls Jesus to do something.

So Jesus has the wedding attendants fill six large jars full of water. Then He told them to draw from the jars and take it to the master's table, and the water had been turned into really good wine.

### POWER OVER THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

In MARK 1:21-28, we see Jesus teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. And the crowd was amazed at the authority of His teaching. As He was teaching a man with an evil spirit

cried out, *"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!"*<sup>25</sup> *"Be quiet!"* said Jesus sternly. *"Come out of him!"*

And the Bible tells us that at the word of Jesus, the evil spirit left the man, and once more the crowd was amazed His authority.

#### POWER OVER THE PHYSICAL BODY

MARK'S gospel, chapters 1 & 2 continue to tell of the divine power of Jesus, not only over natural and spiritual world, but also over the PHYSICAL BODY.

In Mark 1, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, who lay ill with a fever. In the same chapter, He heals a man plagued with leprosy, a gruesome and painful flesh disease.

In Mark 2, Jesus is preaching at a house in Capernaum. The place is packed. There are four friends carrying a paralytic man. They want to get this man to Jesus, but they can't. There's no room. So, they get the genius idea to cut a hole in the roof and lower the paralytic through the opening. They're resourceful to say the least.

It says, *"<sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."<sup>6</sup>Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, <sup>7</sup>"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

This right here shows why Jesus performed miracles – to prove that He was God. And the religious leaders jumped on this quick when Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven. He hasn't even healed the man yet. The religious leaders know that only God has the authority to forgive sins. So Jesus says in verse 10, *<sup>10</sup>But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . "* He said to the paralytic, *<sup>11</sup>"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."<sup>12</sup>He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"*

His miracles validated His message. In fact, the miracles cannot be separated from His message. Jesus' power ministry was inextricably wedded to His teaching ministry.

Miracles were never done for selfish reasons...never done to simply give people a good show. But what they did do was demonstrate that He was God. And as God, He was able to not just heal the physical body. He was able to heal the soul as well. He had the authority to forgive sins.

### 3. **The TRUTH Is PROCLAIMED.**

Jesus' ministry began by proclaiming the Truth. Throughout His ministry Jesus would preach to large crowds filled with seekers, followers, and skeptics alike. But He also focused on the needs of individuals. And in John 3 we see Jesus' first one-on-one conversation with a man who is searching for the Truth, which is exactly what Jesus has to offer.

## **NICK AT NIGHT**

The man's name is Nicodemus. He is a Pharisee, a Jewish religious leader, who comes to Jesus at night. He's the original Nick at Night. He recognizes that Jesus speaks with authority and that there's something different about Him; that no one could perform these signs and miracles unless God was with him.

Jesus responds to Nicodemus by saying, "*I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again*" (John 3:3). This is news to Nicodemus. He thinks this is preposterous. "You can't enter your mother's womb a second time," Nicodemus replies.

You see, Nicodemus is stuck in LOWER STORY thinking.

In His response, Jesus pulls back the curtain and allows us to see God's UPPER STORY plan.

He's not speaking about a physical birth. He's talking about a spiritual birth. And as Jesus elaborates what this means He states what's become the most popular verse in the whole Bible. It is on necklaces and wristbands, bumper stickers and billboards. It has brought hope to single moms, widowed grandparents, white collar CEO's, homeless beggars, middle class families, struggling college students, and convicts in prison. Its promise is true and its scope is unlimited. Its message is offered to every person on this planet.

**JOHN 3:16.** Say it with me... "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

John 3:16...it's the greatest verse in the Bible. Here's why. Look a little closer at this with me:

"FOR GOD" – the Greatest Being  
"SO LOVED" – the Greatest Reason  
"THE WORLD" – the Greatest Need  
"THAT HE GAVE" – the Greatest Act  
"HIS ONE AND ONLY SON" – the Greatest Sacrifice  
"THAT WHOEVER" – the Greatest Opportunity  
"BELIEVES" – the Greatest Response  
"IN HIM" – the Greatest Savior  
"SHALL NOT PERISH" – the Greatest Promise  
"BUT" – the Greatest Difference  
"HAVE" – the Greatest Certainty  
"ETERNAL LIFE" – the Greatest Possession

If you're not a believer then I implore you today to consider the words of John 3:16. Embracing the GREATEST verse of the Bible will make today the GREATEST day of your life.

## **Conclusion**

I want to close by revisiting John the Baptist. In John 1, John has a crowd of people around him as Jesus approaches. And John says these words: "*Look, the Lamb of God.*" And no

Jewish person could have missed this. They understood what John was saying. The young, unblemished, innocent lamb of the Old Testament. The one who gave up their life for the forgiveness of another, is Jesus.

We saw this on the Day of Passover in Egypt. Remember back in chapter 4 where the blood of the lamb, the innocent, unblemished lamb was applied to the doorframe of the Hebrews, or the Israelites, so that when the angel of death whooshed through Egypt that night anybody that had the blood of the lamb was passed over. Whoever did not, the child's life was taken. I close with this story because the prominent theme of the Lamb of God has reemerged here for our clarification. All of the lambs who gave their life, millions of them in the OT, were pointing to the one Lamb of God so that when He shows up on the scene everybody should know what He is all about.

Then, after Israel escapes slavery, they move into the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. And it is here in the wilderness that the sacrificial system is officially established. It is here that hundreds upon hundreds, thousands upon thousands, if not millions of innocent, unblemished lambs' lives are taken. You may or may not know the exact protocol for this, but a man would bring a young, unblemished lamb or bull before the priest, and he would place his hand on top of the lamb signifying that he was purposefully transferring all of his sin, all of his guilt to this young, innocent lamb who did NOTHING wrong. While his hand was on the head of that lamb the priest would take a knife, slice the throat of the lamb, causing the blood to fall into a basin. And that basin would be poured on the altar of God for the forgiveness of sins of that man and his family.

All of you, not just animal lovers, have to say to yourself with indignation, "That is not fair!" Anybody with me on that? "That is not fair!" That's not fair that a young, innocent, and unblemished, big future ahead of them lamb or bull has to lose their life because a man can't control his anger. Because the mom's a gossip. Because Grandpa's a drunk. Because my friend's a liar Because they can't help but do wrong. Why does the innocent lamb have to pay the price?

What you need to understand is there is no other way, take it or leave it. John is telling us, "Jesus is the ultimate Lamb of God." You want to overturn Adam's decision on your life that has brought you utter condemnation? You want to overturn it? Then you better place the blood of the lamb over the doorframe of your house, before the angel of death arrives. You want to escape the condemnation that Adam sentenced you to; that became your decision, then you better place your hand on the head of Christ and transfer all of your sin, all of your shame, all of your guilt to Jesus. Because that's why He went there. And the blood that poured from His crown, the blood that poured from His hands and His feet, the blood that poured from His side when the Roman soldier pierced it, was captured if you will, in a basin that was poured upon the altar of God for the forgiveness of your sins. And that same indignation should rise up within you to say, "That's not fair! That's not fair that a guy that has done absolutely nothing wrong ever should have to die for my sins." But listen folks; there is no other way. Take it or leave it. That is the decision that has to be made.

Let's pray.