

SM004 – First Encounters with Jesus

Weeks had passed since the prophet John had baptized Jesus. What a glorious moment that had been! The skies opened, God in heaven spoke, and the Spirit of God came upon Jesus. The Messiah had been revealed to John, just as God had promised.

But since then – silence. No more voices from heaven and no sign of Jesus. John had watched Jesus walk away from the Jordan River after his baptism deeply into the dangerous and rocky wilderness of Judea.

Where was Jesus? Why did he just disappear into the wilderness? John had no answer for these questions. He could have no answers. He had no idea that while he continued preaching to the crowds, telling them what he had seen and heard, that Jesus was fighting the great battle in the desert against the great enemy of Israel and mankind.

But John would fight a battle, also.

[Haunted Piano]

Serious and grim looking men gathered in Jerusalem, the capital of the people of God and the place where God's temple was busy with activity – animals were led to the sacrificial altar, men and women prayed, and priests plotted to preserve their power at any price.

“He called us a brood of snakes! He said the wrath of God was going to come against us! He said we needed to repent and that we were not really children of Abraham.”

Annas, who had reigned as high priest many years before and his son-in-law Caiaphas, the current high priest, listened intently as they heard the report about this wild man in the wilderness preaching and saying that the kingdom of God was at hand.

Finally, Annas spoke. “We must be very careful. If half of what you say is correct, we must not arouse the people against us. You say that hundreds, perhaps thousands listen to him preach?”

“Yes, my lord. It is a remarkable thing to see. And he baptizes the people and tells them that it is for their forgiveness, as if the temple doesn't matter anymore. He also says it is to prepare them for the coming of the Promised One.”

“Yes, I see.”

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

Then Caiaphas spoke. “Annas is correct. We must be very careful. Chances are this John is just another would-be prophet and the people will soon tire of his preaching. But he also may think that he is the Messiah and he could stir up trouble. We cannot just sit back and allow him to think that we are not paying attention. I want you to go back. But this time, I want you to question him. Ask him who he claims to be. Ask him on what authority he baptizes the people. Then bring back word to us.”

And so the priests of the temple and their helpers, men from the tribe of Levi, formed a delegation. They consulted with another group of religious people in the land, the Pharisees, to bring them into their plot. They had an uneasy alliance with the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed that the priests, known as the Sadducees were too worldly and caught up in the political intrigue of the time.

The Pharisees believed that the Laws of Moses had to be kept in every detail, and they expended great effort to expand the Laws for the people. Laws were placed upon laws about keeping the Sabbath, how far a person could walk on the Sabbath, what he could and could not do. Laws were placed upon laws about what food could and could not be eaten. How dishes should be washed. How food should be prepared. Who one could and could not eat with. The new traditions piled as high as the hills of the holy land, and only experts could remember and explain them all. The Pharisees believed that the faithful keeping of their traditions was the true mark of the covenant people of God. But they sometimes joined with the Sadducees to advance what they thought was in the interests of the nation.

And so these men, Sadducees and Pharisees made their way to John, again. They remembered their first encounter with him, when he had insulted them. They would not let him do this again.

[Begin Where is the Humanity]

“Baptizer! You! We have come from Jerusalem. We have been sent by the high priest himself. We come in his name and authority, and we demand some answers so that the leader of our nation may know your mission.”

John, looked in their direction. He was standing in the river exhorting the people to prepare for the coming of the kingdom. He took a few steps in their direction but remained silent.

The priest continued, “Who are you claiming to be? What is your mission to Israel? Many are saying that you are the Messiah? Do you claim to be the Messiah of Israel?”

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

And John replied. “I want to make sure you understand this first – I am not the Messiah.” And John walked toward some of the people to whom he had been preaching and he said, “I have been telling everyone, repeatedly, and as loudly as I can that I am here to prepare his way. I have seen him and I have heard ...” but John could not finish because another priest shouted out, “If you are not the Messiah, who are you? Are you the prophet Elijah? Why are you dressed this way, dressed like Elijah was dressed?”

“I serve the same God as Elijah. I come in the same power and spirit as Elijah, but I am not Elijah. I have been called John since birth.”

A Levite shouted out, “Moses said that a prophet would arise among the people. He would be another prophet as he was and would lead the people. Are you claiming to be this prophet?”

And John said, “No.”

The rulers seemed exasperated with John’s answers. They were getting nowhere. They looked at the crowd and sensed anxiety knowing that they did not like the way they were questioning John.

Then, one of them then asked, “Just tell us who you are. What is your mission? We have to give a report to Lord Caiaphas. What do you say about yourself?”

And John said, “I am ... a voice, a voice crying out in the wilderness – ‘prepare the way of the Lord.’ Have you not read the words of the prophet, ‘A voice is calling ... clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness. Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low. Let the rough ground become smooth and the rugged terrain a broad, beautiful valley.’

“That’s who I am, a voice calling out for everyone to prepare their hearts for the return of the Lord to his people. We must all get ready for it is his coming that matters, not mine. It is his presence that we seek. It is his kingdom for which we wait.”

Then, a Pharisee spoke. “John, if you are not the Messiah, if you are not the prophet Moses spoke about, if you are not Elijah, why are you baptizing these people? Who gave you this authority?”

“Have you not been listening? I am not the one that matters. I baptize in water to prepare the people for the one who does matter. He is the one who gives the Spirit. Tell your lord Caiaphas that he is now among us. He is worthy of our lives, our sacrifice, our obedience, our love. I am not worthy to perform the act of a lowly slave. I am not worthy to take the sandals off his feet. And I have seen him. I have seen the Spirit of God coming upon him. He is among us and he will

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

soon be revealed. Tell that to Caiaphas. Tell them they will see him soon. Tell them that I am just a voice in the wilderness.”

And with that, John turned back to the people. The Sadducees and the Pharisees knew they would get no more information and walked back to Jerusalem, deeply troubled at what they had heard.

John watched them leave. Then he said. “Let us pray for God to watch over his anointed. Let us pray that he will soon be revealed.” And John knelt down, the people knelt down with him, and they all prayed for God’s kingdom to come.

Interlude

[Begin 026197320-mystery-life-wp-04-alt3-myster]

The next day, John arose early. Some of his closest followers had remained with him. They had talked late into the night about the day’s events and on this morning two of them said, “Teacher, when will he appear? You said that you have seen him. When will he appear?”

But the prophet seemed not to be listening. He was looking intently toward the great wilderness into which Jesus had walked. And as he watched, a lone figure slowly made his way toward them.

Then he said, “All of you, look. Wait. Watch with me.” John’s heart began to beat faster. He began to feel the joy that had filled his heart when Jesus came for baptism. He sensed Jesus was approaching, but he waited until he could see his face.

“There he is! The one who obediently and faithfully follows the Shepherd of Israel, like a lamb. Behold the Lamb of God! It is he who will take away the sin of the world. It is he who will restore all things.”

John’s followers looked and they saw a man standing some distance away. He had stopped and listened to what John said. He smiled, lifted his hand in greeting, and then he continued walking past John toward a small village not far away.

John said, “Do you see him, men. Do you see him! He is the One I have been talking about. This is the One who is far greater than I. When I came baptizing I was looking for him. God told me the heavens would open, and I would see the Spirit of God coming upon the Messiah. I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and the Spirit remained upon that man. He is the One who will give the Spirit to his people.”

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

By the time John had finished saying all these things Jesus was out of sight, and John turned to his disciples and said. “He is so thin. He looks like he has gone without food and that he has suffered. But he also seems different, filled with greater power. Surely, he will show himself soon.”

Then two of the disciples drew apart from the rest. One of them was named Andrew. He had been listening to the prophet preach and had spent much time with him. He was a fisherman from Galilee. The other was also a fisherman from Galilee, John the son of Zebedee and Andrew said to him, “Tomorrow we must be prepared. If Jesus walks by again, we must go after him.”

And the next day, it happened again.

[026197164-mystery-life-wp-02-alt1-myster]

The prophet was talking again with his followers. The fishermen, Andrew and John the son of Zebedee were close by and they were about to ask a question when John said, “Look, there he is, behold, the Lamb of God!”

They looked in the direction to which John pointed and there was Jesus in the distance walking by, but this time he was not stopping to listen. The fishermen looked at each other, then they looked at their teacher with whom they had been for many days, as if they were asking for permission. John nodded his head and away they ran after Jesus.

When they caught up with Him, Jesus turned and said, “What is it you are looking for?”

The two men stammered, “Teacher, uh ... where ... are You staying?”

And Jesus laughed. “Is that what you really want? Do you really want to see where I am staying? Come, and you will see.” So they came and saw where He was staying and remained the whole day, not knowing that they would remain with him for three years and that their lives would be forever changed.

“Jesus, our teacher, John, said amazing things about you.”

“Oh,” Jesus said. “Tell me.”

“He said that he saw the Spirit of God coming upon you, like a dove, or something like that. He said he heard the voice of God talking about you. He said that you are the chosen one for whom we have been waiting. Is this true?”

“Do you believe John to be a teller of truth?”

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

“Yes.”

“Then why do you ask me? Is not his word enough?”

The disciples looked ashamed but then one of them said, “Jesus, if you are the one, then there is so much to be done. What are you going to do?”

[Begin Nostalgia]

Jesus became quiet, and then he spoke, “Yes. There is much to be done. John has done his work well but there is still so much to be done in the hearts of men who do not know me.”

“Jesus, if they do not know you then you must show yourself to the world!”

And Jesus said, “It is always time for those who seek their own will to show themselves to the world. I leave my time in the hands of my Father.”

“Jesus, you know the leaders of our people are corrupt. And then there are Herod’s sons ruling much of the land and the Romans. How will you deal with them?”

“The kingdom of God is at hand. God is going to act. But the people will not recognize the work of God that he will do through me. There will be a time of great trial. There will be a time of great suffering. Like obedient sheep, we must follow the Shepherd of Israel.”

“Jesus, John said you were like an obedient lamb following our God.”

“Yes, I follow my Father. I do what he tells me to do. I say what he wants me to say. I do not come on my own authority. I come on the authority of the God of Israel. I come bringing his kingdom. Yes, I am the Lamb of God obediently following the Shepherd. And there is more about the Lamb that you must come to learn. All I can now say is that there will be a great trial and great sadness.” And with that Jesus’ voice grew silent and his face looked pained and full of sorrow.

“But we will talk of that now. Tell me about yourselves. Tell me about your family.” And that day, the fishermen Andrew and John talked with Jesus and told him their dreams and hopes for their people and as they fell asleep that night, they dreamed of great acts of God, great upheavals shook the earth and the heavens. Armies were marching and people were weeping. Wicked men were laughing and then they saw the kingdom of God coming in glory.

The next day, Andrew said, “Jesus, I want you to meet my brother. He is not far from here. May I bring him to you?” And away he ran to find his brother, Simon, another fisherman from Galilee.

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

[Fire on Far Off Shores – Piano and Strings]

Andrew could hardly contain himself after spending the day with Jesus but when he found Simon, Simon spoke first, “Andrew – where have you been! You have been gone for so long and there is much work to be done on the lake.”

“Simon – John and I went to hear the prophet. Simon, his words were amazing. We stayed with him. He taught us to pray like we never have prayed before. He taught us God’s word. But there is something even greater. The Messiah has come. He has been revealed. And John and I have met him!”

“What do you mean you have found the Messiah? How can you be so sure?”

“Simon ... the prophet said that he baptized him and that he saw God’s Spirit coming upon him. He heard the voice of God. And then we met him. We have spent time with him, and he taught us like no one else has ever taught. He said the kingdom is coming. I asked him if I could bring you to him and he said he was looking forward to meeting you.”

And so Simon went with Andrew his brother to the place where Jesus was staying. They walked in the door, Jesus looked at Simon and said something that would change his life forever, “Shalom, Simon, brother of Andrew and son of your father, Jonah. Simon, I am giving you a new name. From this day forward your name will be Peter, Rock!”

In ancient times, a person’s name was a reflection of his character or of a significant event in his life. The Bible has many episodes where God changes the name of a person such as Abram to Abraham or Jacob to Israel. It was always a sign of ownership and a change of life direction. And when Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter – to “Rock” – he was giving him a vision for what kind of person he would become – a man of steadfast, rock-like character who would be a pillar of strength for others.

And Simon said, “OK – if you say so. Yes. I like that. I am rather a steadfast, loyal person. I could be of great help to you in your mission. Perhaps you would like to explain to me, Jesus, what it is you are doing and then I will see how I can help.”

Jesus laughed and he and Andrew, John, and Peter set off for Galilee where Jesus had an appointment with another man. As they journeyed, they talked of many things. They talked of their families, they talked of their nation and its hopes, they talked about the wider world and the problems mankind faced.

Finally they reached Galilee, the northernmost part of Israel, bounded on the east by the Jordan River, the north by Lake Hula, and the west by the region of Cabul close to the Phoenician city of Tyre. During the time of Jesus it was relatively prosperous. It was a place of fertile soil,

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

abundant rain, and a mild climate that made the growing of crops easy. And of course, the famous Sea of Galilee with its fishing industry was there.

Although Greek was spoken in Galilee, the vast majority of the people were Jewish and they were devout. Many synagogues served the thousands of Jews who held fast to the Law of Moses. Galilee was a hotbed for Jewish nationalism and revolutionary zeal against Rome. It was also the place where Jesus was raised in Nazareth.

The men came to a fishing village and in that village Jesus spotted a man and said, “He is the one. I want that one also.”

“You mean Philip? We know him.”

“Yes, go call him and tell him to come.”

And so they went to Philip, much like Andrew went to his brother and told him about Jesus. Philip looked in Jesus’ direction who only smiled and when Philip came to Jesus he heard him say, “Philip, I want you to follow me. I have a great task ahead, and I want you to be part of it.” And that day, Philip followed Jesus and listened and was convinced that Jesus was the promised one. And then he said, “Jesus, I too have someone I want you to meet.”

And away Philip ran to find his friend, Nathanael, sometimes called Bartholomew.

[Fire on Far Off Shores – Piano and Strings and repeat to the end]

“Nathanael, the most wonderful thing has happened. You know that Andrew and John went to hear the prophet in the wilderness. They have returned. Simon is with them, and – someone else – Nathanael, the Messiah has come. We have found the one Moses and the prophets wrote about. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

“Jesus ... of Nazareth? Did you say Nazareth, that little run down village west of here? Can any good thing come from that place?”

Nazareth had never been a prominent town in the history of God’s people. And being in Galilee which was considered culturally backwards by the more sophisticated inhabitants of Jerusalem, Nathanael had reason to doubt. Why would the Messiah associate with such a backward place?

Philip said, “Nathanael, all I can say is, ‘come and see.’” And so Nathanael came with Philip and when he walked in the door, Jesus took one look at him, nodded his head, smiled broadly and said, “Yes, here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

And Nathanael with astonishment said, “Jesus, how do you know me?”

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

Jesus's answer would change Nathanael forever. He said, "Nathanael, before Philip found you, when you were sitting in the grove of fig trees, under one of the trees, I saw you and I heard everything. Good things can come from Nazareth!"

Philip smiled broadly as if he were saying, "I told you Nathanael. I told you Nathanael. He is the Messiah."

But Philip didn't need to do any convincing. Nathanael fell to his knees and said, "Teacher, you are the Son of God. You are the king of Israel!"

Jesus replied, "Nathanael do you believe in Me because I said I saw you when you were sitting under that fig tree even before Philip came to you? Is that why you believe? You will see greater things than this! A day is coming when you will see heaven open and you will see Me enthroned, surrounded by angels who come up to the throne of God and who leave the throne of God to carry out their assignments. You will see who I really am, the heavenly one who is Lord of all."

The five men – Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael said, "Jesus, we must go to Jerusalem and tell them this great news!"

And Jesus replied, "we will, in time, but first, I must go to Cana. A family member is getting married. I am invited and all of you can come as well, and there you will see the glory of God."