

The Story of Hope #13

The Unmatched Power of the Lamb

Luke 3:1-23, Matthew 4:1-11, John 1:19-34

Story of Hope Section 22-23

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Job interviews can be pretty stressful. They are this short time period where you want to know all the right answers and impress the people who are interviewing you. Sometimes they go really well, and it is revealed that you are perfectly qualified, and sometimes they don't go so well, and reveal that you have some learning and growing to do. Through our story, we have seen that God has His own ways of revealing the character of His people. He uses the wilderness, temptations, and trials to reveal just how much His children actually trust Him and have faith in Him. We will see that Jesus is no exception to this pattern.

The promised rescuer has arrived! The son of Eve, the son of Abraham, the son of David, and most incredibly, and unbelievably, the Son of God. The silence of the last 400 years has been shattered with the proclamation that not only is God speaking again, but He has actually come in the flesh to be with His most precious creation again, and to rescue them once and for all. But how was this going to happen? Jews are under the brutal control of the Roman empire. How will this rescuer overthrow this major world power? How will he set his people free? In this section we will see the themes of **God, Man, Sin, Christ, and Faith**.

Two boys are born. Jesus and John. Their mothers were related, and these two will each play an integral part in God's rescue plan. Fast forward about 30 years to our sections today. God selects John, the son of a priest, to be the final prophet to prepare the people for the Rescuer (Luke 3:1-23) He was living in the wilderness when God called him and gave him a message. He came down to the Jordan river and he began to preach about the kingdom of heaven, calling men to repent of their sins and be baptized. People questioned who he was, and if he himself was the messiah, to which John clearly stated that "he who is coming after me, is greater than I, and I am not worthy to untie his sandals". Then one day, Jesus comes to the edge of the Jordan river, and is baptized by John, the heavens open and the Spirit of God descends as a dove, and the Father speaks out of heaven "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Just imagine that scene. The prophet has prepared the way, Jesus has been baptized symbolizing the beginning of his rescue plan, and God, in all His fulness is there. Father, Son and Spirit. It took 30 years, but now Jesus is on the scene and is poised for his dramatic rescue. What will be the first move? As we have seen over and over in God's Story of Hope, this is not going to be the expected rescue. In fact, it begins in a very unexpected way. Jesus is led by the Spirit of God, out into the wilderness, to be tempted by Satan.

This is where the first conflict begins. It isn't with the local authorities or the religious leaders, those will come later. The first order of business is to face off with Satan. We haven't seen Satan directly interact with any human since the garden in Eden. There he left victorious, having brought sin and death into God's pure and perfect children. Now, for the first time since Eve, there is another pure and perfect child, but this time the outcome is much different. Jesus deals decisively with each temptation, quoting God's word to defeat the lies and manipulation set before him. Satan is outmatched and leaves in defeat. We will see that he isn't done trying to derail this rescue mission, but for now he sees he cannot bring Jesus to follow in Eve's footsteps.

Having perfectly passed this time of testing in the wilderness, Jesus comes back to John to begin to recruit his rescue team. It is during this second interaction that John makes a startling declaration and prophecy, he cries out "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" This is startling because it lacks any hint of what the people expected the rescuer to do. No mention of conquering, establishing a new government or overthrowing Rome. It points the hearers back to Isaiah chapters 52-53, to the sacrificial lamb and suffering servant. This was certainly not the path the rescuer would take was it? There are two pictures in conflict now, the rescuer as king and conqueror, and the rescuer as a sacrificial lamb. There is little question as to which picture was focused on by the Jewish people under control of Rome. But as we continue in the story, we will see that God's plans of rescue, don't always align with man's.

Let's look at some key truths that come out of these sections of our story.

God uses the "wilderness" to prepare His servants. This is a theme we have seen a number of times. Moses before he rescued the Israelites, the Israelites before they entered the promised land, and now Jesus. God leads His people into places where their faith is revealed through trials and temptations. The wilderness generation had their lack of faith revealed and were disqualified from entering the promised land. Here Jesus' faith is revealed through the temptations. One of the ways God prepares us is through difficult times, trials and temptations. Times that will reveal our faith or lack thereof. This is one of the ways God seeks to grow us in maturity. This idea is repeated through the new testament as well. (Romans 5:3-4, James 1:2-4) Let us be people who are looking for God to grow us, especially in difficult "wilderness" times.

God's Word is the Way to Win. Remember when Satan tempted Eve in the Garden? He twisted God's word, and Eve even misquoted what God had said. (Gen. 3:3 She added "or touch it") The end result was the beginning of death. Satan tries the same approach with Jesus, seeking to twist God's word to deceive Jesus. But Jesus knew God's word and used it to defeat each temptation Satan used. There is no secret here and no substitutions, the way to defeat sin in our lives is by the power of God's Spirit in us using the Word of God. When we study and seek to follow God's word in our lives, we will see increasing victories over temptation.

Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. I am sure we have heard this line hundreds of times. But let's take a second to dwell on the depth of its meaning. The lamb refers to the sacrifice system, and that in Jesus, the entire system of Law and Sacrifice is bound up in who he is. He will live perfectly, and give his life for the world. In giving his life for all the world, Jesus also fulfills the covenant God made with Abraham. God promised that through Abraham all the world would be blessed, and here is Jesus, descendant of Abraham, preparing to give his life for all the world.

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