

## NT LESSON #4

# "PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD"

MATTHEW 3,4; LUKE 3; JOHN 1:35-51; JOHN 2

By Ted L. Gibbons

**INTRODUCTION:** What preparations would you make if the Savior were coming to your home. What would you try to do before he arrived? Would you shovel the walks if it had snowed recently? Would you mow the lawn or weed the roses or prune the fruit trees? Would you clean up the yard? In ancient times, before a king paid a visit to a far country, the roads were often improved in order to facilitate his travel. Isaiah prophesied:

Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. (Isaiah 40:3)

This refers to John the Baptist, whose mission was to "prepare the Way of the Lord." The fact that Jesus had a forerunner, a herald, to proclaim His advent and command that the Way be prepared for Him, proves that He was more than a common mortal, more than a teacher and reformer . . . When kings and potentates in those days were about to travel, they notified their subjects that they were coming, and that the roads were to be repaired and straightened so that there should be no unnecessary delay.

A notable illustration of this oriental custom was furnished by the Sultan of Turkey, Abdul-Hamid II, when he, having received word that the German Emperor desired to visit Jerusalem, issued an order that the road between Jaffa and Jerusalem be prepared for the Imperial Visitor. This was done. Hundreds of men and women were drafted for work on the road (Reynolds and Sjordahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Vol. 3, p.117).

Luke quotes Isaiah's prophecy. He applies to John. What does John suggest that the people should do to "prepare . . . the way of the Lord" in Luke 3:4,5?

As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying,

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways [shall be] made smooth . . . (Luke 3:4,5).

As you study the following scripture accounts, ponder how these scriptures apply to your daily life. Ponder and record in your journal experiences that relate to the scriptural principles.

## **I. JOHN THE BAPTIST TEACHES US TO PREPARE FOR THE SAVIOR THROUGH OUR REPENTANCE**

What is the message John preached as he came into the country around the Jordan River and began to encourage people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah?

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 3:2; see also Luke 3:3)

John preached repentance. Note that the first message of the Savior was the same as the message of John.

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 4:17).

The first message of the apostles following the ascension was the same--(See Acts 2:37-38)

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:37,38).

In Mosiah 18:20, Alma commanded his followers to “preach nothing save it were repentance.” How will repentance assist the people in being prepared for the coming of the Savior?

John urged the people to bring forth *fruits worthy of repentance* (see John 3:8).

I like the image suggested here by John. Repentance is not simply a matter of clearing the unwanted weeds from the gardens of our lives. We must plant something in their place. We must cultivate the fruits of repentant living. Those who came to listen to John asked him what was expected of them and he gave powerful answers about the kind of fruit they ought to produce:

(1) And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise (Luke 3:10,11).

This is the kind of fruit of which Matthew 25 speaks.

(2) Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you (Luke 3:12,13).

When we are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, we are told in the Doctrine and Covenants that some of the fruits of the Spirit are to

do good--yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit (D&C 11:12).

The publicans seeking baptism were taught some of these principles.

(3) And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages (Luke 3:14).

This is the fruit of peace: no violence, no false accusations, no discontentment.

When we repent, we remove the mountains, valleys, and rough places, from the pathway to our hearts and souls and the Savior can more easily come into our lives. Can you identify some of the obstacles you have placed in your lives that prevent the Savior's healing and forgiving power from changing you? How does repentance

remove these barriers?

The following quote from Elder Bruce R. McConkie may be helpful to you as you consider John's efforts to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord:

*No one is ever prepared for the Lord while remains in his sins. The Lord does not save people in their sins, but from their sins. The plan of salvation is designed to enable men to free themselves from sin so they can, as clean and spotless beings, enter the presence of him who is without sin. No one is ever prepared for the Lord until he confesses and forsakes his sins. (The Mortal Messiah, Book 1, pp. 386, 387)*

## **II. IF WE REPENT AND PREPARE FOR THE SAVIOR, HE WILL THEN SHOW US THE WAY BACK TO THE FATHER.**

Early events in the ministry of the Savior begin to show us the straight and narrow path back to the Father.

### **A. MAKE A COVENANT OF OBEDIENCE WITH THE FATHER THROUGH BAPTISM**

**Matt. 3:13-17; Luke 3:21, 22**

Study the account of the Savior's baptism in Matthew 3:13-17. Why was it necessary for him to be baptized? What insights do the teachings in 2 Nephi 31 add to your understanding of the Savior's baptism? According to 2 Nephi 31:7, what did the Savior *witness* to the Father with his baptism?

Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments.

How significant was the Savior's covenant of obedience "according to the flesh" when the Savior knelt and prayed to the father in the Garden of Gethsemane and asked for the cup he was about to drink to be removed? Somehow, because of our covenants in the waters of baptism, the word "nevertheless" must become a part of our vocabulary

of obedience as it was a part of his. (See Luke 22:42)

By sharing as best we can in the sufferings and sicknesses of others, we too can develop our empathy—that everlasting and vital virtue. We can also further develop our submissiveness to God’s will, so that amid our lesser but genuinely vexing moments we too can say, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). When heartfelt, this expression of obedience constitutes real petition followed by real submission. It is much more than polite deference. Rather, it is a deep yielding in which one’s momentary uncertainty gives way to the certainty of Father’s rescuing love and mercy, attributes which drench His plan of salvation (Neal A. Maxwell, “Apply the Atoning Blood of Christ,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 23).

Thus it is also necessary for us to be baptized. And in our baptisms we too make that covenant of obedience. We witness that we will serve as missionaries and remain worthy to enter the temple and be the WEBLO advisor *whether we want to or not*.

The *Bible Dictionary* lists three purposes for baptism: 1) Remission of sins, 2) Membership in the church, and 3) Entrance into the Celestial Kingdom. What covenants did Alma teach that we make when we are baptized? (See Mosiah 18:8,9)

## **B. OVERCOME TEMPTATIONS**

### **Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-14**

Examine the account of the Savior's temptation in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. What can you learn from the Savior in this account about overcoming temptation? You may wish to reflect upon the following points.

1. Luke 4:1--We must be "full of the Holy Ghost" and "led by the Spirit" *before* the temptations come. Why was Jesus led . . . into the wilderness"? The JST replaces the statement “to be tempted of the devil” with the phrase “to be with God” (Matt. 4:1, JST). The JST further explains that “when he had fasted forty days and forty nights *and had communed with God . . .*” he was hungry and was “*left to be tempted of the devil*” *Matt. 4:2, JST*).

It might be worth your time to consider the experiences of missionaries at the Missionary Training Centers of the Church as a “wilderness” experience in which elders and sisters, at the beginning of their ministries, learn to commune with God. The MTC is also an experience in which they fast from friends and movies and television and Big Macs and music and all the things that might distract them as they prepare spiritually for their missions.

2. The Savior responds to each temptation by quoting from the scriptures. (See Matt. 4:4,7,10) Similar preparation in our own lives will give us similar strength to resist temptations. How can the study of the scriptures give us additional strength to overcome or resist?

3. Satan begins his temptations with the phrase, "If thou be the Son of God . . ." (Matt. 4:3,6) What value is there in knowing we are children of God when we face temptations? (See also Moses 1:13)

## **C. HONOR YOUR PARENTS**

### **John 2:1-11**

You remember the account of the marriage in Cana in John 2:1-11. In John 2:3--What is the problem? Who is concerned about it?

Note Jesus' response to his mother: “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:4) That response seems rather cold. In John 2:4, JST, we read a different version of his response: “*Woman, what wilt thou have me to do for thee? That will I do; for mine hour is not yet come.*”

Each time the Savior refers to his “hour” or his “time,” in the Gospel of John, he is referring to the hour of his atonement (see John 7:6,8,30; John 8:20; John 12:23,27; John 13:1; 16:32; 17:1) What Jesus is saying is, *Mother, what do you want me to do. Tell me and I will do it for as long as I am alive.*

What kind of responsibilities do youth and adults have for their parents? Why did the Lord not place time limits on the command given in Exodus 20:12 to honor our fathers and our mothers? Many of us think that this is a duty we escape with the onset of age. The example of the Savior at Cana seems to teach us something else.

## **D. REVERENCE THE TEMPLE**

### **JOHN 2:13-25**

Take some time to ponder the Savior's first cleansing of the temple. What motivated the Savior to do what he did? Instead of a place to commune with the Father, what had the temple become? What does the word "zeal" mean in John 2:17? What are the things in your life for which you have zeal? Notice in the footnotes that the phrase "hath eaten me up" can also mean "hath consumed me."

How can we show the a greater reverence for the house of the Lord today? How would a person act who is "consumed" with the Lord's house? My grandmother bought a lot behind the Mesa Temple after her husband died. She lived on that lot in a tent for four years (until she was able to purchase a house), working in the temple by day and doing genealogy by lamplight at night. *The zeal of thine house hath consumed me.* I have a friend who has been to the temple every week it has been open for eight years. *The zeal of thine house hath consumed me.* President Hinckley has determined to get temples were every member can have the blessings: *The zeal of thine house hath consumed me.* Would you use the word *zeal* to describe your feelings for the temple?

## **III. THE CHARACTER, LIFE, TEACHINGS, AND EXAMPLE OF THE MASTER WILL GUIDE US BACK TO THE FATHER**

After John recognized the Savior, notice what he encouraged his disciples to do.

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus (John 1:35-37).

We have a solemn and inescapable obligation to point out the Savior to others. If we have an opportunity and pass it by, we will be accountable.

God will hold you responsible for those whom you might have saved had you done your duty. How many of you can say, My garments are clean from the blood of this generation? I speak in behalf of the nations and the people thereof, and the honest in heart who are ignorant of God and his

laws. He has called upon us to enlighten them, and to spread forth the truth, and send forth the principles of the Gospel, and point out the way of life. And it is for us to attend to these things, that we may secure the smiles and approbation of God (Journal of Discourses, Vol.20, p.23, John Taylor, July 7, 1878).

When Jesus saw Andrew and John following him, what invitation did he give them?

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour (John 1:38,39).

The Savior's question, "What seek ye?" is one we all must answer. What do we want from life? What are the desires of our hearts that impel us to action?

When Andrew heard and recognized the Savior, what did he do? (John 1:40-42)

One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus

brought *him to Jesus*. Have you brought your brothers and sisters to him? Your children? Your neighbors?

Jesus found Philip and invited him to follow. Philip then did what Andrew had done. He went and found a friend (John 1:43-46) and bore his testimony—"We have found him. . ."

**CONCLUSION:** As we draw close to the Savior by overcoming temptation, by making and keeping covenants of obedience, by honoring our parents and by honoring the temple, we become better prepared to understand and follow the teachings of the Savior as they direct us back to the Father. We must then make that blessing available to others. Remember that as John and Andrew and Philip and the Samaritan woman brought their friends to Christ, we also must bring our families, our friends, and



associates to experience the majesty of the Savior and the lessons of his life.

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