

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE STRAIGHT WAY

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, 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 and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Isaiah 40:3-5

Before there was ever anything called sin, or any of the world as we know it was created; the purpose of GOD to redeem a people which HE chose in CHRIST was determined and sure to come to pass. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."* (Eph 1:3-6)

Without a clear declaration of this truth, it is impossible to rightly preach the Gospel of the glory of the blessed GOD. Apart from resting in that work which HE has both purposed and carried out, there is no basis for a man to hope in any salvation or deliverance from this present evil age. If we should consider that there is any uncertainty in the matter of the salvation of sinners, then we must consider that the salvation of men depends upon them and not the SAVIOR. But we do have hope in HIS promise, because *"HE changes not"*. There is no shadow of turning with HIM and what HE has determined in HIS purpose to bring to pass must be done. *"For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"* (Isa 14:27)

Long before his parents were conceived by their own mothers and fathers, the LORD had determined to bring a child into the world who would be the "forerunner" of CHRIST. The exact time and place when and where he would be born was established in the heavens, by HIM who doeth all things well. When that time arrived, it appeared unto men that those chosen to be his parents were too old (i.e.; *"well stricken in years"*) to conceive a child. On top of that Elizabeth, (John's mother) was childless, as a barren woman. The LORD does not work around what men call "circumstances", rather HE is the GOD of "circumstances" as HE works HIS sovereign will through them, confounding men in the process. *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"* (Rom 11:33-34)

John (who would be called John the Baptizer (i.e.; Baptist, immerser)) was quite an odd fellow by the standards of that day, let alone by our own standards today. He was a Nazarite who was filled with the HOLY GHOST in his mother's womb. Mary was overshadowed by the LORD and made to be with the HOLY CHILD, JESUS, about six months after John's conception. We see the evidence of the indwelling of the SPIRIT in John when Mary visited Elizabeth, and he leapt in her womb, perceiving the presence of HIM whose NAME is above every name.

Isaiah identified John as *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness."* Being the last of the Old Testament prophets, he could only see the purpose for which CHRIST came into the world through very dim eyes, even though he could see more clearly than any who had gone before. Thus, we see him *"crying in the wilderness"*. Now surely this world is a wilderness to all of those whose citizenship is in another country which is not made with hands, yet, he could only behold CHRIST (from the wilderness) even as Moses could only view the promised land, from afar. He was given to know that HE was the LAMB that taketh away the sin of the world, he could recognize HIS place of honor in the Kingdom of GOD, and he had some understanding of the power of CHRIST to bestow HIS SPIRIT upon HIS disciples, baptizing them with fire.

Yet he was not allowed to see the complete work of CHRIST in dying for sinners and then rising again from the dead as the FIRST FRUITS of them that sleep. He could not fully grasp the SPIRITUAL nature of CHRIST's Kingdom, since he sent men from prison to inquire of HIM when HE would restore the Kingdom to Israel. Thus the LORD said of him, *"For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."* (Luke 7:28) What a privilege is bestowed upon those who have been given eyes to see the finished, substitutionary work of CHRIST in the behalf of those whom HE has loved with an everlasting love. We should not be amazed at the lack of understanding which John had, especially when we think of the fact that HIS disciples who accompanied with HIM from the beginning of HIS ministry; actually missed the point of HIS coming as they asked the same question on the eve of HIS ascension. *"All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."* (Mat 11:27)

Yet with all of his limitations and odd habits, John alone, is that Messenger sent by the FATHER to herald the advent of CHRIST to the world. No one else was called to this work and none could perform it except him to whom it was appointed.

His declaration was a word of Comfort to the sons of GOD. In the very first verse of Isa. 40, the LORD commands, *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins."* (Isa 40:1-2) Thus John bears witness of the gospel in the clearest of terms when he told his own disciples, *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29) This is a message of certainty. He bore witness that what HE came to do, HE would most certainly accomplish. There is no greater word of comfort which can be given to the children of GOD than the declaration that *"HE has obtained eternal redemption"* for them. HE has not attempted to do it awaiting their cooperation to make it certain, but by HIS own blood HE has purchased their redemption and they are HIS possession. *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."* (John 10:27-28)

This voice crying in the wilderness said, *"Prepare ye the way of the LORD."* This word "prepare" literally means, "turn to face, or behold", and is often translated from the Hebrew as "turn" or "looked upon". *"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* (2Cor 3:18) This is in direct contrast to "beholding" the Law of sin and death. The perfect law of liberty, which is *"the law of the SPIRIT of LIFE in CHRIST JESUS"* has made us free from the *"law of sin and death."* Because of the work of CHRIST, we fear no condemnation. Thus, we preach with John, for men to *"look unto CHRIST, and be ye saved, ye ends of the earth"*. (see Isa.45:22)

The WAY of the LORD is a *"straight way"*. This means in the Hebrew, a *"pleasant or prosperous way."* This WAY (being CHRIST) levels hills, straightens curves, and smooths the path for those who are sojourners through this land of sin and sorrow. HE is our PEACE who has broken down the walls of separation between us and the riches of HIS Kingdom. *"Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Rom 8:39) The GLORY of the LORD is here seen as HE described it to Moses, *"And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy."* (Exo 33:19) Have you beheld HIS GLORY? mam