Series—Intersections: Where God Meets You At Your Deepest Need
Faith's Perfect Storm: When Doubt and Sacrifice Shake Hands
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I think some of you need to take notes today if you don't things can get really confusing.

A couple in their nineties are both having problems remembering things. During a checkup, the doctor tells them that they're physically okay, but they might want to start writing things down to help them remember.
Later that night, while watching TV, the old man gets up from his chair.
"Want anything while I'm in the kitchen?" he asks.
"Will you get me a bowl of ice cream?"
"Sure."
"Don't you think you should write it down so you can remember it?" she asks.
"No, I can remember it."
"Well, I'd like some strawberries on top, too. Maybe you should write it down, so's not to forget it?"
He says, "I can remember that. You want a bowl of ice cream with strawberries."
"I'd also like whipped cream. I'm certain you'll forget that, write it down?" she asks.
Irritated, he says, "I don't need to write it down, I can remember it! Ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream – I got it, for goodness sake!"
Then he toddles into the kitchen. After about 20 minutes, the old man returns from the kitchen and hands his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stares at the plate for a moment. "Where's my toast ?"

You know sometimes it is a struggle to do what we are supposed to do or be where we are supposed to be. That's why today I thought it would be interesting to continue this series Mike started last week on intersections and talk a little about when doubt and sacrifice intersect and what that might say about our faith.

I think John the Baptist is an interesting figure in Biblical history when it comes to doubt and sacrifice. If you'll turn to Matthew 11:2 with me we'll begin to take a look at what I mean.

MAT 11:2 *When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask Him, "Are You the One Who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"*

Now these are John's last words that are recorded in scripture. They are words of at least doubt, maybe some frustration, definitely some concern even possibly some anxiousness. The reason they are quite noteworthy is that this is not the John we have come to know throughout the four epistles up to this point. Did you ever read a book or see a movie where something takes place and then to understand what is going on it goes back to a previous time and brings you forward to understand why a certain thing was said or done? I really hate it when they do that, but that's what we are going to do today.

The first thing that's important to be aware of is that before John appeared God had been silent for 400 years. He had always spoken to the Hebrews through chosen men called prophets. The last prophet that spoke the words of God was Malachi 400 years earlier. Malachi had some interesting things to say, but we'll leave that for another time.

Now we would probably all agree that most relationships don't do really well with a lot of silence.

But sometimes silence itself is a powerful message.

A man and his wife were having some problems at home and were giving each other the silent treatment. Suddenly, the man realized that the next day he would need his wife to wake him at 5:00 AM for an early morning business flight.

Not wanting to be the first to break the silence (and *lose*), he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5:00 AM." He then left it where he knew she would find it.

The next morning, the man woke up, only to discover it was 9:00 AM and he had missed his flight. Furious, he was about to confront his wife to see why she hadn't wakened him, when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. The paper read, "It is 5:00 AM. Wake up."

Have you ever noticed that usually when one person chooses to be silent it is because the other person does not listen. For hundreds and hundreds of years through a multitude of prophets, God's people refused to listen to Him. Ezekiel, Joel, Jeremiah, Amos or Malachi. It didn't matter what they looked like, where they came from or what they had to say, they were consistently ignored. God might have been feeling like the person who once said, "When all you can do, is all you can do, then all you can do is enough." And God stopped speaking because very few were listening.

But, after 400 years some fairly important things were going to start happening and a chosen people needed to have a heads up, an FYI if you will. John was the man chosen by God to prepare God's people to first of all recognize God was coming and make the necessary preparation, which would be confession, repentance and baptism and second to actually introduce Him when he arrived.

It was an unusual assignment. One that had never been given before and one that would never be given again. This assignment lived itself out in four elements that not only John but each of us might experience in our own lives.

The first of these elements is to recognize that we who have a relationship with the living God are on an unusual path.

For John this path was described by his father, Zechariah, in Luke 1:76.

ELEMENTS OF THE STORM

- THE UNUSUAL PATH

Picture Zechariah: He looks into his child's face and tells his son what the angel Gabriel told him. And would continue to tell him.

Luke 1:76 Zechariah prophecy

LUK 1:76-80 *"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from Heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.*

For thousands of years these chosen people of God had struggled and failed to live up to what God wanted for them. For the most part they are a frustrated and miserable people. It's like someone trying to paint a picture and each time they put paint to the canvas it's been the wrong color. And they haven't been able to get a new canvas they have just had to try and paint over the mistakes with new mistakes on the old original canvas. And suddenly you realize you don't have a painting of the image you had in your mind but just a warped, distorted mess.

The entrance of God's Son represented the beginning of a new covenant between God and His people. Not a covenant of law but a covenant of love. Not a covenant that lived in condemnation and judgment but a covenant that lived in grace and mercy. It was a new canvas with a new set of paints.

And John the Baptist was the first stroke on that canvas.

MAT 3:1-6 *In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near." This is He Who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'" John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.*

This was a bold first stroke on the canvas. It was a color nobody expected. It has a shape and form that no one had ever seen before. And people responded. Did you ever notice that there are times when you are not very hungry, you don't even realize you might want some food and then you walk into the kitchen while dinner's being cooked or step into a restaurant and suddenly you the aroma awakens the appetite. That's what was happening. For 400 years people had been hungry to hear God but had not realized it. John was that first aroma of God's voice and they responded.

But John's unusual path wasn't just to prepare the hearts and minds for the Messiah but to actually introduce Him. And there were some real challenges to this because John was being led in the moment. What I mean by that is there are some things he knew and some things he didn't know. It's like going into a party with some friends saying you know that really great guy I've been telling you all about well he's here, and as soon as I find him I'll introduce you to him. Now this may take a while because I don't know who he is or even what he looks like because I'm not sure we've ever met. But trust me I'll know him when I see him.

JOH 1:29-34 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the*

one I meant when I said, 'A Man Who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.' I myself did not know Him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that He might be revealed to Israel." Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from Heaven as a dove and remain on Him. I would not have known Him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The Man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He Who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

And then the Father comes up and say, yeah this is my son. By the way everything you said about Him is true.

MAT 3:16-17 *As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment Heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him.*
And a voice from Heaven said, "This is my Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

The Unusual Path

He was sent to give a message.
He believed the message
He trusted the message
He shared the message

If there was ever a man who was sure of his role, sure of his message, sure of his God, sure of the path he had been asked to walk, it was John the Baptist.

THE GOOD STRUGGLE
When God sets us on a path, there will always be cost. Sometimes it's cost others can see and appreciate, sometimes it's cost that no one sees. Cost simply means to intentionally lose or give up something you had.

JOHN 3:22-30 *After this, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where He spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.) An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan - the one you testified about - well, He is baptizing, and everyone is going to Him." To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from Heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of Him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.*

I believe that the words of John that you hear are a place of arrival after some kind of struggle. There had to be a place and time where John understood this is what would happen and he would be alright with it. We are never able to step inside the mind and understand the thoughts of the one we are reading about. What they might say, what they might do is only the culmination of where there thought process has taken them.

John has a pretty good ministry going. People are coming to him at least by the hundreds maybe more. He has men who are his disciples who follow him and hang on every word. Some see him as the return of the prophet Eijah some as the Messiah himself. It’s got to be a pretty heady experience.

Luke 14:28 Jesus talks about counting the cost.

I will lose my position
I will lose my disciples
I will lose my identity
I will lose my life
Wait a minute – high cost – Begin to check to make sure.

Wheelbarrow
Man asking how many of you believe I can push this wheelbarrow on a rope across this canyon. He does it and everybody believes he can do it. Next question, how many want to go for a ride.

This is the difference between belief and faith. I may believe but do I trust? That is where doubt enters in. But in spite of the doubt, in spite of having a hard time trusting, we choose to do it anyway.

The people who ask the hard questions – who say "Wait a minute" take their faith seriously.

Person falling in love with an unbeliever

Give up what you love most
Possibility of a life of loneliness
Is this really what's best for me?
God said He would give me the desires of my heart
What if is the only chance I get?

- THE REASONABLE DOUBT

When things don't go the way we expect.

Matthew 11:2
Isolation
Circumstances
Disappointment out of personal assumptions

John
I have lost my position
I have lost my disciples
I have lost my identity
I have lost my freedom
I will lose my life

The "Because of" and "In-Spite of" and response

- THE UNDERSTANDING GOD –

MAT 11:4-6 *Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me."*

Because of the unusual path
Because of the cost and sacrifice
Because of the good struggle
Because of the reasonable doubt
Because of what I ask?

Every time we witness for many of us it becomes the perfect storm. We walk the unusual path. The “because of” and the “in spite of.”

Jesus loves us not because of who we are but in spite of who we are.