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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

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John, the Voice in the Wilderness.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

After Jesus returned home from His first Passover at 12 years of age, He set about developing His skills and knowledge as a youth, well ahead of starting His public ministry at the age of 30.

In the Jewish culture, it was a father's responsibility to teach his sons the trade he had and the mother to teach her daughters how to run a household. So Jesus became a carpenter like Joseph.

The town of Nazareth was small at the time but a large Roman city was being constructed nearby. Joseph and Jesus may well have done some work on that project together. We don't know when Joseph died but Jesus, as the first son, then took on the responsibility of providing for the family.

Nazareth was known as a wicked place. But Jesus never let Himself learn to do wrong by the example of others. If people scoffed at Him for His purity of thought and time devoted to learning Scripture, He never let this disturb His peace of mind.

Over the centuries, numbers of men have withdrawn from the world to live in monasteries. In isolation from others, they believe they can live purer lives. The Lord Jesus never stayed apart from others except for times of prayer with His Father.

Jesus' cousin, John, was born to elderly parents, who were the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. John, however, spent considerable amounts of time alone in deserted places in preparation for his role as the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah.

When it was time for John to start preaching about the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, he started in the wilderness close to the Jordan River. Even from here, crowds of people heard about him and went out to see what he had to say. But the rulers of the Temple were upset by this. Could a lone man like John be much of a threat to the religious leaders' power and influence of that day?

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When reading the Old Testament, not only can you read about the coming of the Lord Jesus, but also about John the Baptist too.

In Malachi, Chapter 3, the Lord said: "I will send my messenger to prepare the way for me." And in Isaiah, Chapter 40, it says: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'."

Each of the Gospels records something of the life of John the Baptist. In Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 11, the Lord Jesus spoke to the crowds concerning John while John was in prison. Jesus confirmed that a prophecy in Malachi was fulfilled in John the Baptist. In Chapter 4 of Malachi, it says: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Because Elijah was taken up into heaven alive, the Jews always expected that one day he would return. However, John denied that he was Elijah.

The ordinary working people who sought John out in the desert of Judea accepted him as a prophet. They took his teaching to confess their sins and get right with God seriously. John pointed to a future time close-at-hand when the Messiah would appear among the Jewish people. They had to get ready to receive Him.

Neither John nor Jesus came from the Jerusalem schools of learning that were respected or run by the priests. Why, we wonder, didn't these priests try to reform the priesthood of the day and teach the truths of God that John was preaching through their already-established groups of scholars? John was the son of a priest and therefore eligible to work in their system.

Even though John was well away from any township, the fact that lots of people made the effort to go out to hear him made the priests in Jerusalem jealous of him. It appeared to these priests that God was now speaking through someone outside of their control and not through them anymore, even though they were the official guardians of Temple worship.

John didn't personally seek attention or strive for the popularity his ministry brought. His ministry goal centred on his role of making the common people aware that God was about to do something amazing in their country.

There are some people who crave popularity so much that they will put themselves through no-end of trouble to gain the attention of a crowd. But a peer group can be very fickle and can cause heartbreak for those who want to be accepted at all costs. Living for the approval of others doesn't win any approval from God.

A pastor's wife led a campaign to stop rude advertisements being displayed on public notice boards. As the days went by, one opponent of her decency campaign sent her a message, claiming she was one of the most hated woman in the country. If we seek the approval of God, it doesn't matter if we are not accepted by those in the world.

There is a difference between being popular and being accepted. A baby girl was born with a deformity to her upper lip called a cleft palate. When she went to school, people would ask her what happened to her face. She told them that she had fallen and cut her lip on some glass. She told this lie because she thought it was more acceptable to others to be a victim from an accident than to have been born with a deformity. She was convinced that no one outside her family could love her.

In her second year at school, the time for the annual hearing tests came. The teacher would whisper something in one ear while the child had the other covered. The child being tested had to repeat back what the teacher had said to them. The teacher doing the testing that particular year enjoyed teaching, and the children loved her. The teacher whispered to the little girl with the deformity, "I wish you were my little girl." Those seven words changed this little girl's life. Someone outside her own family actually accepted her!

When a new believer comes into a church, that person needs acceptance. There may still be some of the world's baggage that that person needs to lose under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but God's transforming work often takes time. The new believer mustn't become discouraged that those people who are senior in the church won't accept them until they are perfectly like them.

Just because something is popular, it doesn't mean this is always good for someone. The many popular substances like recreational drugs and alcoholic drinks are harmful to the user's health, particularly used long-term. And abuse of one's body or sin of any type is deadly in the end.

John the Baptist gave the people a message to hope in a better future. The common belief was that the Messiah would come to free the Jewish people from the Roman conquerors of their country. They wanted freedom from their Roman rulers. Like the Jews, have you ever asked yourself what is true freedom?

Freedom isn't being able to do anything you want to do when you want to. That type of freedom lives for one's self and soon harms others in a person's life. True freedom is not being free from:

- want
- fear
- political interference
- injustice in the courts
- free worship
- ability to go in and out of a place without question.

At times in his life, the Apostle Paul experienced a lack of most of these things, but this didn't stop him from doing the work God had given him to do.

True freedom comes to a person only through the Lord Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel, Chapter 8, He said: "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

How can we find this freedom in Christ? Each and every person is born enslaved by sin and needs to understand that they have a spiritual need that they can't help themselves with. Romans, Chapter 6, makes it clear: "The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Each person who wants God's free gift of freedom and love in their heart must give, not only themselves, but all that they have to Jesus. This is accomplished by a person believing that Jesus is the true Son of God and knowing that He is able and willing to pay for their sins. Confessing and turning away from known sin is now the right attitude to have.

A person needs to ask Jesus to be their Saviour and Lord, and they will find freedom from God's judgment of their sins, as well as their guilty conscience. Once the Spirit of God comes into a person's life to give assurance of this new freedom, the person will find things to turn away from because they displease God.

Are you a person wanting freedom in life? Then find God's freedom before all else.

Here's a verse of Scripture from Romans, Chapter 10, Verse 9 to remember: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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