

WHAT DO YOU SEE?  
[written in oral form]

John was a miracle baby.  
John the Baptizer or John the Baptist was a special gift.  
His parents were thrilled by his *angel heralded* birth; however, he was Not just a blessing to them. John was a gift to all people.

John was in God's extraordinary plan. **He was chosen!**  
Before his birth, he was consecrated and commissioned to do great things for God. Much was expected from John.

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Can you imagine growing up with that burden?  
Just think of the pressure and expectation he had to endure.

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As a young boy, I bet his mother would call out to him, "John! You put down that hockey stick. You know better than to play that violent game. You **can't** risk getting hurt. Everyone is depending on you to do great things for God.  
Don't squander that on such a silly, dangerous game."

And then later, at school, a friend would quietly come to him, and ask, "John, you're God's chosen one, do you mind changing my Failing grade into an A?"  
In frustration, John would reply, "You know I can't do that.  
Yes, I'm "a" chosen one, but the one coming after me has much greater power. I'm not worthy to even tie his shoe laces.  
Go ask him for a miracle when he comes."

To be sure, dating was impossible. Who could he trust as being sincere. All the girls wanted to be close to "God's chosen One."  
According to Luke, John was chosen by God / sanctified to do great things for God.  
Is it any wonder that, after high school, John fled out into the wilderness to live / to be left alone?

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While in the wilderness, there's no doubt, God was calling him to go out and confront people / to expose their sins and demand that they change their ways.

John likely argued with God:  
"Hey God, Nobody wants to hear gloom and doom!  
The economy is struggling. Sure, everyone hates the Romans, and they dread the drones flying by, but the Romans are investing big time in our country. People don't want to change; they want to get a piece of the pie. They don't want to repent."

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*You can hide from people, but it's almost impossible to hide from God, especially when God has plans for you.*

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Unable to resist God's insistent persistence, John came out of the wilderness, albeit.... a little rough on the edges.

He was Not a "sharp dressed man", and his hair did its own thing.

Still, he went forth, as God lead him, loudly and boldly preaching to people to repent and be baptized.

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Turns out, his "wilderness" look worked for him.

He looked the message.

His appearance got people's attention, and many people listened to him. It was part of his persona.

If an image works for a public person, then it's usually used.

A honed guise can be effective.

Don Cherry always wears something outrageous; it's part of how he's identified. People would be disappointed if he looked normal, and they likely won't listen to him either.

Shane Claiborne is expected to look a certain way when he speaks, and he keeps "that" appearance.... because it's part of his persona.

Looking wild was an X factor for John.

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So, not surprisingly, John did have his admirers / his groupies. He was becoming famous, yet he knew his roll.

John was preparing the way. He was doing groundwork for the main event--Jesus--THE Chosen one.

John did essential work. He got the place ready.

People were made ready to hear what Jesus had to say, because of John. And, John was always pointing to Jesus.

In addition, Jesus Needed John, and that is clear.

Jesus NEEDED John.

God knew that, and that's why God called John to prepare the way.

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Nevertheless, the time came for Jesus to appear publically and for John to fade away.

John did his part. He was faithful, but NOW Jesus was in the light.

Jesus was the light, and he had great powers. He helped and cured people. Jesus healed people, as he directed people to see God as the source of healing. Still, Jesus became the hero figure.

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Regardless, John pointed to Jesus, and Jesus illuminated God.

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In Isaiah 35, verses 1, 2 and 5 through 10 stand out:

--wilderness will blossom and bear fruit:

-- the blind will see;

-- there will be nothing to fear and the people will sing for Joy.

That's wonderful stuff!!

Yet, it is prudent to also read verses 3 and 4, because those two verses layout the ground work / the preparation necessary in order for all that Glory stuff to happen.

Verses 3 and 4 are the do list, the other verses are the successful results / the celebration.

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Verse 3 states that we must strengthen the feeble / empower the weak. In other words, We do Justice!  
We lift up the poor and help the weak.  
Doing justice is part of the foundation.

Verse 4 is about proclamation. It's a requirement to introduce God into all situations.  
Speaking, preaching, telling people about God is the other part of the foundation.

Oh,.....but it's much more desirable to brush over that and read about the "rejoicing" parts.

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Typically, we don't think about the "behind the scenes" preparation.

We notice how a house looks, it's features and decor, and rarely think about the person who worked on the foundation or hammered in the studs.

Anyone who has hosted a party understands this.

There is a lot more to it than simply opening the door to welcome guests.

It's natural to focus on the fruit because that is what we want, and ignore all the work of cultivating the seed to a bearing tree, not to mention the picking and transporting part.

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The Isaiah text is a message of hope that paints a complete picture to see. Yes, imagine and celebrate the fulfillment to come / the fruit.

And, include the process / the journey in your vision, too.

There is also hope, maybe more hope, in the building/ creating / the working towards something wonderful and delightful.

Consider all the excitement in preparing for Christmas.

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From the Matthew passage, we learn that John was locked up in prison, and he was likely quite frustrated and concerned because he could no longer do what he was called to do.

He knew Jesus, yet John still sent his friends to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah.

Did John really need to know if his job was complete or was he trying to get his followers to see and focus on Jesus? ???

And notice what John was thinking about while in prison--Jesus.

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Jesus told them to go and tell John what they had seen. They saw:  
people were being healed, miracles were happening and there was relief for the poor.

That was the picture they saw and took back to John to gaze upon.

Jesus, then addressed the crowd.

He gave John praise and affirmation.

Twice, Jesus asked them, "What did you go out to see?"

What were you looking for in John?

If they were focusing on what the secular world values or bold promises without work, then they would be greatly disappointed.

If they were looking for hope / for a message that points to justice / redemption / something beyond human failures, then.....John was greater than any prophet.

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John pointed to Jesus. Subsequently, some saw the Messiah.....and those who refused to change their vision, only saw a weird vagabond spouting off. End of story / nothing more.

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With John's help, many people did cast their eyes to Jesus.  
And Interestingly, when Jesus captured their eyes with his message and miracles,.....Jesus redirected their sight to God.

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What we look at / what we focus on matters. It matters a lot.

There are plenty of influences / there are lots things that draw our attention.  
There are endless possibilities for our minds' eyes / our spirits' vision to dwell upon.  
Billboards, signage, social media, the news and so on vie for our attention.....our devotion.

What we look at matters.....because we go where our eyes take us.  
This is true physically, emotionally and spiritually.  
Anyone will have tremendous difficulty walking backwards through life, and most of us have stumbled when something pulled our focus away from our intended path. That's why texting while driving is so dangerous.  
We go where our focus is / where our eyes take us.  
This is obvious.

Yet, we church folks often say we are followers of Christ, while our vision is focussed on other things.  
No wonder we are frustrated and keep tripping over life's hazards.  
I often hear, "We need to have a clear vision".  
We do! WE DO have clear vision. Well, most of us.....with optical aids,.....but the real question is what are we looking at?

If we want a fruit, and there isn't one, then.....what good is it to dwell on the fruit's absence?  
That obsession with loss leads to the despair of deprivation.  
Another image is one of nurture and planting seeds.

For example, if we are broken, grieving and hurting, we can make our pain the focus of our vision.  
And, please hear.... that there is a time for caressing our sorrows, and there are situations to be rescued and nurtured by others.  
Nevertheless, we must know that the vision of self pity is not the path to healing.

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Another example:  
Suddenly, the world's future seems bleaker. We all see it don't we?

But, think about it: what has captured our minds' / our spirits/ eyes?  
Is that the place we want to go?  
Yet, that's what we are looking at. ?????

We do Not Need to focus on the blasting sound of Trump-Pence!  
[Trump .... Pence.... get it? ]

*I want an app that deletes all media references to Trump.*

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Yes, it's essential to be fully and accurately informed; however, we all need to get our vision checked.

What are we looking at? What are we obsessing about?  
What do we see? Do we see the church failing or opportunities?  
What do we see?

There is power in positive vision, but the power does Not come from our own discipline.

The power is found when we cast our sights down the path of God's way / of seeing and following  
Christ's example....doing God's way.  
We choose where to look. God's Spirit leads along God's way.  
What do you see?

Do you see the historic unity of many indigenous nations coming together for the environment?

Are you looking for miracles?

Do you see God working to lift up the poor and weak?  
Do you see income parity down that path?

Do you see a God who values justice, not wealth and brute force?

Do you see God loving and welcoming everyone, everyone, to join in God's way?

Do you see flowers in the desert?

Can you envision burning sand becoming a pool, and the feeble becoming strong?  
for healing and redemption?

Do you look

Do you see God's way?

Do you see a God of Grace? Do you see a God of love?

What do you see?

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Whatever we are looking at / whatever has captured our heart... that is what we will be and where we  
will go.