

# A WRINKLE IN THE FORCE

LUKE 3:1-6

*All The Forces In History Are Marching Towards Their Predestined Meeting With God.*

## **I. The Forces Start To Move (Vs 1-2)**

Even Though Political And Religious Forces March On To Their Desired Ends With Pride And Independence, They Will Be Surprised To Find God Waiting For Their Arrival At Armageddon.

A. Political Forces (1)

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# A Wrinkle In The Force

Luke 3:1-6

I think that the closer in time we come to Jesus' Second Coming, we really need to keep this thought in mind. It seems as if God's final confrontation with worldly power will take place at Armageddon. We must realize that both the church and worldly power are destined for this meeting and that is where we are headed. The Bible labels these two forces The Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. The Kingdom of God is under the control of God and the kingdom of this world is under the control of Satan. To be sure, the world will unite and take its stand against God and display a great deal of military might. However, it will prove to be no challenge at all for God and His people. As believers, that is where we are headed. In a very real way, we are already engaged in battle. But there will come a day when the battle will be fought on the Plane of Megiddo. Jesus made it clear that those who are not believers will have no clue as to where we are all headed until they find themselves at the predestined point.

We have already seen how God used the Roman Emperor to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the predestined birth of Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew the confrontation and the collision course was set when King Herod had all the young boys under the age of two massacred in order to prevent the Son of God from growing up.

This morning, we will see that God's Kingdom once again is on the move publicly. We pick up the story with both Jesus and John all grown up and ready to announce the arrival of God's Kingdom.

The problem was that even though many of the people had the information of how to identify the Messiah, they often missed the connections. In fact, we know that people didn't know what to make of John the Baptist, the forerunner and cousin of Jesus. They couldn't figure out if he was a prophet, a wild man, or even the Messiah. John was often the subject of mistaken identity. But in reality we will see that he is being used by God to set the Kingdom of God on a collision course with the kingdom of this world.

I have come to see that sometimes mistaken identity is just an innocent mistake but sometimes is very intentional. Let me give you an example.

One day a woman in my congregation called me up crying and asked if I could come to her house. She said that she thought something bad happened to her husband because he never made it home from work yesterday. I called the police and they asked her for a description of her missing husband.

She said, "He's 35-years-old, 6'4" tall, has dark eyes, dark wavy hair, and athletic build, and is soft-spoken, and is really a gently guy."

I interrupted, "Your husband is short, chubby, bald, and has a big mouth. He is often rude and arrogant."

The wife looked at me and said, "Yes ... but who wants him back?"

I know the world powers have no idea but the main idea of this morning's text is this. **ALL THE FORCES IN HISTORY ARE MARCHING TOWARDS THEIR PREDESTINED MEETING WITH GOD.** It has been Satan's desire to take power and authority away from God. Satan and his army have been waging war with God for thousands of years. Satan is the one who puts in the hearts of human beings to become powerful and rule the world. We have seen world empires rise and fall throughout human history. Caesar Augustus had no idea when he called for a census that he was bringing about God's agenda. Pontius Pilate, the Romans and Jewish leaders had no idea that they were bringing about God's plan of salvation in torturing and crucifying Jesus. And world powers today have no idea that they are speeding rapidly to their predestined meeting with Jesus at Armageddon. In this morning's text we will see how God accomplishes all this.

## I. THE FORCES START TO MOVE

In verses 1-2 we can see the forces start to move. We must learn to evaluate these according to God's Word. **EVEN THOUGH POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS FORCES MARCH ON TO THEIR DESIRED ENDS WITH PRIDE AND INDEPENDENCE, THEY WILL BE SURPRISED TO FIND GOD WAITING FOR THEIR ARRIVAL AT ARMAGEDDON.** In the popular Star Wars movies, the Jedi masters would say things like, "There is a disturbance in the force," meaning that something unusual was happening either good or bad, depending from whose perspective you were looking at. The common attitude of our modern day culture is to denigrate traditional Christianity and Judaism. It is an unprecedented time that we see the Church and Israel under attack at the same time. There are so many public figures who claim to be Christian but if we were to simply measure them according to the Bible, they are not even close.

Luke describes the political forces at work in verse 1. Luke is so careful to date everything for us and give us the historical context of what is going on. He describes the political players that are in place during the ministries of both John and Jesus. By this time, Tiberius Caesar had succeeded Augustus Caesar as the second emperor of the Roman Empire. He officially became emperor in the year 14 and so that would make John and Jesus somewhere in their early 30's during his 15th year.

Now Luke moves regionally and locally. Herod the Great ruled the area Israel was located in from 37 BC thru 4BC. This was the Herod described in Matthew as the one who killed all the babies in and around Bethlehem. At his death, his territory was divided up into four parts and given to his sons. Each son was called a Tetrarch which means the ruler of a fourth. Interestingly, Pilate is mentioned as the governor of Judea. This was because Herod's son Archelaus was such an incompetent ruler, that the Jews complained to Caesar so passionately, that he replaced Archelaus with Pontius Pilate. This is the southwest region of Israel that included Jerusalem.

Herod the tetrarch of Galilee was also known as Herod Antipas. He rules the central western region and the southeastern region of Israel. He is the one who will later be responsible for beheading John the Baptist. He ruled up until 39 AD.

Next, Luke names Philip the tetrarch. Caesarea Philippi is named after him. He ruled up until 33 AD. He ruled the northwestern and central eastern region.

And finally, Luke names Lysanias the tetrarch of the northeastern corner of the region. We don't know much about him at all.

All these rulers came to power in different ways. However, no matter how they came to power, the fact is that God put them in these positions in order for His plan to be worked out in human history. I want to take time to remind all of us that we have been commanded to pay our taxes and submit to the authorities who been placed over us. Jesus paid His taxes and obeyed the cultural and religious laws of His day. At this point in time, there is no military draft and the government is not keeping us from fulfilling our Christian duties. No matter how out of control the world appears to be, we must keep in mind that God is in control and politicians and world leaders are moving towards God preordained meeting place. Even though it seems as if the world governments are rapidly becoming more anti-Christian and anti-Israel, we are commanded to live our lives, to pursue holiness, pay our taxes and obey the law.

And that brings me to the cultural forces described in the first half of verse 2. Actually, the Jewish priesthood was filled with scandal and intrigue during this period of time. The New Testament scholar Barclay says that between 37 BC thru 26 AD there were no fewer than 28 different High Priests. It was normally an appointment for life. But the position became a political position. By the time John and Jesus enter history, the established religion had become so diluted by cultural values, that it no longer resembled the authentic religion laid down in the Old Testament. Here is another interesting point. Annas was the High Priest from 7-14 AD. Then his son-in-law took over. These two were intimately involved in the plot against Jesus. Annas was always considered the power behind the office during his son-in-law's reign.

I think this really needs to be said and it is one of the major reasons I believe the church will go through some of the Tribulation period. Modern day Christianity has wandered so far away from Biblical Christianity that we are in the same state of affairs as the Jewish religion was when Jesus entered history. We have adopted the values of the culture in which we live. We have been hijacked by culture and politics and we no longer can speak prophetically to the culture in which we live. Those churches who have continued to preach the Gospel and call their members to live according to the Gospel are not very popular and certainly not very appealing to people who live in our culture. The message that we are evil by nature and in need of repentance is also not very popular. We'll see later that we should be preaching the same message that John the Baptist got beheaded for. I really think that we Christians, I am including myself, have been so influenced by the culture in which we live, that we will have to go through tribulation and persecution so God can purify the church. The true believers will get stronger and the fake Christians will drop out. Before God deals with the kingdom of this world, I think that He will clean up His own house first.

And we are introduced to God's forces in the second half of verse 2. The last time we left John, he was growing up in the desert, being strengthened in his faith and wisdom so that he could fulfill his destiny in God. In the Bible, the desert is a place of preparation to build confidence in God. It is a place where people learn to trust God and depend on Him. It is a place to become strong. Most of all, it is a place where God's people learn to have confidence that He will bring them safely out on the other side. God led Israel through the wilderness before He brought them into the Promised Land. He trained John the Baptist in the desert and Jesus will spend 40 days in the wilderness in preparation for His public ministry.

If it is true that God is going to purify His church through trials, persecutions, and tribulations, then we need to develop right mindsets before we get there. Jesus' brother James writes this to the early churches:

*"2Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. 3For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything" (James 2:2-4 / NLT).*

We are not a people who have learned to embrace suffering. But it seems to me that the Bible is pretty clear that suffering is a way that God shapes us and makes us into the men and women He wants us to be. John spent some 15 years in the desert preparing for his mission. We need to start approaching all situations in life, whether they be pleasant or painful, as ways in which God is shaping us to accomplish our missions in life. As part of God's army, we are marching towards God's final battle with worldly powers. We know this and we should be preparing ourselves for it. We should not be taken by surprise. However, **EVEN THOUGH POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS FORCES MARCH ON TO THEIR DESIRED ENDS WITH PRIDE AND INDEPENDENCE, THEY WILL BE SURPRISED TO FIND GOD WAITING FOR THEIR ARRIVAL AT ARMAGEDDON.**

## II. PERSONAL PREPARATIONS

In verse 3, Luke describes personal preparations God's children must make. In other words, **CHRISTIANS PREPARE THEMSELVES DAILY TO MEET GOD FACE TO FACE.** There is nothing complicated about John's message. It is simple, straightforward, and applicable for today. We find John preaching and teaching around the Jordan River. Let me just mention this in passing, but it is worth pondering. When the Jews were delivered from their slavery in Egypt, God led them through the wilderness through Moses. Then through Joshua, God brought them into the Promised Land by crossing the Jordan River.

During John's time, Jews used to baptize people who converted to Judaism. In other words, it was a ceremony that brought unbelievers into the community of believers. So when John is preaching baptism to the Jews, he is in reality saying that they must view themselves as being outsiders to God.

Here is the crux of salvation. The Jew would have thought of himself or herself as a pretty good person. They were circumcised if they were men. Both men and women studied and knew the Scriptures. They attended synagogue regularly, tithed their money, and went to Jerusalem to celebrate holy days. They didn't steal or cheat. But when John preaches baptism to them, he is saying that what they are doing isn't working. In other words, John is telling them that they must acknowledge that status quo living is totally unacceptable. They must come to admit that when it comes to their status with God, even though they are referred to as God's chosen people; they are hopelessly lost and unacceptable in God's eyes.

Pride is what keeps most people from embracing true Christianity. We don't like to admit that we are as evil in God's sight as the most horrible person we can think of. It is hard to admit that in God's system of holiness, I fall just as far short as Adolph Hitler, serial killers, drug dealers,

and rapists. I have to admit that no matter how much money I give to church, how often I attend church, and even how much a serve at church does absolutely nothing to bring me closer to being acceptable according to God's standard of holiness. The Bible is absolutely clear that it is only Jesus' sacrificial death and our acknowledgement of that that makes us right with God. Can we really accept that? Can we admit that nothing we have done, no amount of good we can do, or how good we think we are can ever get us close to heaven? Can we say that if it were not for Christ in our lives, we would be totally and hopelessly undeserving of going to heaven?

John was calling them to repentance. In other words, repentance in Greek means to change one's mind. In Hebrew repentance means to turn around. True repentance gives up all human claims to goodness. True repentance requires us to change our minds about who we are. Jerry Bridges in his books on holiness says that we must learn to preach the Gospel to ourselves every day. When we wake up in the morning, we should thank God for dying on the cross for us. Before we go to bed at night, we should confess that there was absolutely nothing we did during the day that would be considered good enough to get us to heaven. When it comes to holiness, we are totally bankrupt without God applying the blood of Jesus to our lives.

Let me just read you what Jesus said:

*10“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a dishonest tax collector. 11The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don’t sin, I don’t commit adultery, 12I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’*

*13“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ 14I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored” (Luke 18:10-14 / NLT).*

We must never forget that it is only by the blood of Jesus that makes anything we do, good. That truly is a change in thinking for most of us, isn't it? We should remind ourselves often that we deserve to spend eternity in hell and if it were not for the blood of Jesus applied to us on a moment by moment basis, that's exactly where we would end up.

With this true confession and repentance comes true conversion. With true conversion comes forgiveness. The Bible says and demonstrates quite regularly that when we confess and repent, Jesus forgives us of all our sins and He cleanses us from all our unrighteousness.

The Jews believed they were good and stood in a very special relationship with God. We church people have come to think we are good and that's why God blesses us, saves us, and forgives our sins. But the way we prepare ourselves to meet God, is to practice humility, confession, and repentance. We are to practice holiness. CHRISTIANS PREPARE THEMSELVES DAILY TO MEET GOD FACE TO FACE.

### III. GENERAL PREPARATIONS

John prepared himself by spending more than 15 years in the wilderness with God. When Jesus came on the scene, John was ready to meet Him. Here John is preparing God's people to meet their Messiah. In verses 4-6 we see general preparations being made. For us the question is this. **WHEN JESUS RETURNS, WILL WE BE READY TO MEET HIM?** In other words, if Jesus were to return right now, would you be ready?

In verse 4, God's preparations are described. These verses come from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and the quote comes from chapter 40:3-5:

*"3Listen! I hear the voice of someone shouting, "Make a highway for the LORD through the wilderness. Make a straight, smooth road through the desert for our God. 4Fill the valleys and level the hills. Straighten out the curves and smooth off the rough spots. 5Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!" (Isaiah 40:3-5 / NLT).*

Now here is what the context of Isaiah's prophecy. It was given about 700 years before John the Baptist quotes it here. King Hezekiah had pridefully showed the Babylonian ambassadors all his weapons and riches. The prophet Isaiah pronounced judgment on him and Israel. He prophesied that Israel would be defeated and carried off into captivity by the Babylonians. This prophecy was meant to be an encouragement to the Israelites that their captivity would not endure forever. Instead God would once again deal with them and rescue them. We know their captivity lasted for 70 years.

God prepared the world so Jesus would enter human history at just the right time. We know that Jesus will come again and God has that date all set as well.

When secular kings and dignitaries announced they were coming to a particular city, local politicians started to spruce up the city. They would fix the potholes, level out the walking paths, and in general give the city a facelift.

John was preparing Israel to receive her Messiah. We know how we are to be cleaning out the garbage in our lives in preparation for Jesus' second coming. We need to be cleaning out the junk from our lives and from our church. Worldliness must go. Self-centeredness must go. Lust of all kinds must go. We must be filling these potholes with humility, holiness, love, and service.

God's power is described in verse 5. There is no mountain too high for God to bring it down. There is no valley too low that God cannot fill it up. There is no street so crooked or broken that God cannot fix it and straighten it out. Look, we have already confessed that without God we are totally and hopelessly lost. But the Bible says that with God the Holy Spirit, there is nothing that is impossible with God. It doesn't matter what sin or situation we are struggling with. God can heal it and fix it. There is nothing God cannot accomplish in our lives. Listen to how Paul blessed the church in Ephesus:

*"20Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. 21May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21 / NLT).*

And God's purpose is described in verse 6. God was sending Jesus to save all of mankind. He was rescuing us from our slavery to sin, slavery to our lust, slavery to our fears, slavery to death, and slavery to Satan. Jesus came to make us right with God. Our purpose now is to continue cooperating with God's Holy Spirit in preparing us for Jesus' Second Coming and to prepare us to live in heaven eternally. Could we say that we are dedicated every day to becoming more like Jesus ... or are we still drawn to the things and power of this world? The war has already begun and God is advancing towards Armageddon. If we are true believers then God is preparing us every moment. Our lives should be living advertisements that Jesus is coming soon. Listen to what Jesus commands:

*"13You are the salt of the earth. ... 14You are the light of the world—like a city on a mountain, glowing in the night for all to see. 15Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. 16In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:13-16 / NLT).*

That's how we prepare for Jesus' return. The question we should constantly ask ourselves as individuals and as a church is this. **WHEN JESUS RETURNS, WILL WE BE READY TO MEET HIM?**

I find this fascinating. As God's children we know that human history is headed for Armageddon. Even though the world doesn't have a clue, they are also headed for Armageddon. God will separate believers from unbelievers. We should be aware of this and preparing ourselves for it. We can count on this. **ALL THE FORCES IN HISTORY ARE MARCHING TOWARDS THEIR PREDESTINED MEETING WITH GOD.**

Please listen to what A.B. Simpson says:

*"God is preparing His heroes; and when the opportunity comes, He can fit them into their places in a moment, and the world will wonder where they came from."*

Please let's allow God to prepare us to accomplish many great things for Him and let us be alert to see where and when He is calling; as individuals and as a church.