

Refuge City Church — January 14, 2024
Gospel of Matthew: “Repent and Believe!” (Matthew 3:1-12)

Introduction

- *Last time:* Joseph and Mary had to flee as King Herod was seeking to kill Jesus. Yet, when we trust in the very word of God, we realize that He has greater plans in store!
- *Today:* We pick up with the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus by looking at the one who preceded Him to prepare the way for the Way.

[verses 1-3]

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

- John precedes Jesus. All for the purpose of preparing the way.
 - John appears in all four gospel accounts.
 - I believe there are 19 events that appear in all four gospels.
 - 12 of them refer to the last week of Jesus’ life, after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection.
 - The previous 7 spread throughout his three years of ministry.
- The reason for the significance of John’s ministry is that it had been prophesied about in the Old Testament.
 - Quoting from *Isaiah 40:3*, John’s intent was to “prepare the way of the Lord”.
 - John was not an “advance team”:
 - He wasn’t there doing military reconnaissance; as if to prepare for the arrival of a political-warrior king.
 - John was not there to make sure the accommodations were perfect and accurate for some celebrity arrival.
 - John was there as a prophet-herald announcing the arrival of the promised Messiah!
- So it’s John’s message that we focus on.
 - “Repent” = a change in thinking that causes a change in direction; in no way solely based on feelings.
 - Repentance is a determinate decision to leave sin behind and pursue righteousness.
 - **Ephesians 4:22-24**, “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”
 - **QUOTE:** “Faith means to turn to Christ, and when you turn to Christ, you must also turn from something. If you don't turn from something, then you aren't really turning to Christ.” [J. Vernon McGee]
 - “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” = the Messiah has arrived; *so many implications!*
 1. *Prophetically:* what we’ve been waiting for.

- **Daniel 2:44**, “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,”
 - 2. *Physically*: the king has arrived; along with the anticipation of His earthly reign.
 - **Matthew 4:17**, “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
 - 3. *Spiritually*: submission and discipleship to the one who will change your life.
 - **Romans 14:17**, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”
 - 4. *Eternally*: One day, when the Lord returns to bring his children into eternal glory, we will then praise and worship our king for all eternity!
 - **2 Peter 1:10-11**, “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- Have you done this? Have you repented? Do believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the only one who can save you from your sins?
- “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,”

[verses 4-6]

“Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

- First, John’s dress and diet is mentioned for a specific reason.
 - Elijah is introduced in 2 Kings in the same manner.
 - And what was Elijah’s purpose as a prophet of God? To call Israel to repentance.
 - But John wasn’t trying to be *like* Elijah. He was influenced by the very same Spirit of God!
 - [spoken to John’s dad Zechariah] **Luke 1:16-17**, “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”
- Baptism
 - John’s ministry was attractive as many went to listen to him.
 - Many agree that Israel had not had an influential prophets speak to them for over 400 years!
 - Ritual cleansing was a part of the Jewish tradition.
 - Exodus 19: God was going to present Himself on the mountain, and He told Moses to consecrate [purify/dedicate] themselves; and they washed their garments... they got ready for the arrival of God!
 - Also seen in a multiple occurrences within the Mosaic Law [both in personal care and worship practices].

- Yet apart from ritual cleansing, John was now baptizing people for repentance of sins in anticipation of the coming Messiah.
 - We are told to “be holy, for He is holy”.
 - When Moses came in contact with God, he had to remove his sandals for he was standing on holy ground.
 - This is why there was so much care and attention in the purification of priests before they entered into the holy of holies, as they were about to step into the presence of God.
- **QUESTION:** Can darkness coexist with light? At what point can we hold on to sin and invite a holy God into our lives?
- Baptism is what we do to display to those around us what has taken place inside.
 - It is what we do as a display of our salvation, and testimony that we have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus.
- Have you been baptized? Granted, it is not necessary for salvation, yet it is something we participate in as an outward testimony of our salvation.

[verses 7-10]

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

- Let me remind us who the Pharisees and Sadducees are, as Jesus will have contact with them throughout His ministry.
 - Pharisees: legalistic keepers of the Mosaic Law; traditionalists to the old ways.
 - Sadducees: defined as ‘religious rationalists’ of their day; not associated with any particular doctrine and denied the supernatural.
- The message is clear, not only to the ‘religious elite’, but to all who believe their good nature will save them from the wrath of God.
 - The Pharisees were connecting themselves to the faith of Abraham, believing his salvation was their salvation; simply because they were good ‘law keepers’.
 - This is the same today. Your salvation is not validated because you were raised in a religious home, or go to church, or read your bible.
 - The ‘works’ of religion are no good by themselves.
 - Jesus’ interaction with the rich young ruler [\[Matthew 19\]](#)
 - **Matthew 19:16, 21**, “And behold, a man came up to him, saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?... Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”
- Salvation comes by faith in Jesus Christ!
 - The evidence of that faith is ‘bearing good fruit’. [\[Galatians 5:22-25\]](#)
 - **James 2:26**, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

- **QUOTE:** “If not fit for fruit, they are fit for fuel.” [Matthew Henry]

[verses 11-12]

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

- As prophetic and powerful as John was, he proclaims that the one coming after him is greater... the very person of Jesus Christ.
 - John’s claim is that he was not even worthy to be the lowliest of servants to Him.
- When we believe in Jesus, His promise is that we will receive the Holy Spirit.
 - **John 14:15-17**, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”
 - **1 Corinthians 12:13**, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”
- So what does it mean that we will be baptized with ‘fire’?
 - One, we’ve got to consider that fire can do two things: purify & destroy.
 - *Malachi 3:2* tells us that He will come like a refiner’s fire. Purifying us to make us more like God.
 - Fire destroys, and this gives us a picture of the future judgment.
 - John just got done explaining to the Pharisees that those who don’t repent will be cut off and thrown into the fire.
 - He then closes this portion by discussing how the Lord will separate the wheat from the chaff. Those left over will be burned with unquenchable fire.

Conclusion

- So what do we gather from all this?
 1. The message of John the Baptist then, is the same message for today!
 - Too many are missing the boat when it comes to who Jesus is and His salvation.
 - So, we who are followers of Jesus have been given a commission.
 - **Romans 10:14**, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” [Preaching = proclaim/herald the good news of Jesus!]
 2. For those who do not have a relationship with Jesus, come and see!
 - Repent of your sins and place your faith in Him today.
 - **Romans 10:9**, “...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.”
 3. For those who do, continue to bear fruit in keeping with your repentance.