

MATTHEW 3

THE COMING OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER

During those 30 years in which Jesus was living with Mary and Joseph in the village of Nazareth, His cousin John was also growing up to manhood in the land of Judea. In this chapter, we read of how John began his Divinely-appointed public ministry as the Forerunner of the Messiah. The time had come for him to preach to the people, and God commanded him to go and tell them to make themselves ready for the Savior by repenting of their sins. Few preachers ever produced such effects as John did; for “there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan.” And no person ever received such wondrous praise from the great Head of the Church, for Jesus calls him “a burning and a shining light”; and He even goes so far as to say that “among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John.”

What was so outstanding about John’s ministry? He spoke plainly about sin, and he taught the absolute necessity of repentance before anyone can be saved. He preached that repentance must be proved by its fruits. He warned people not to rest upon outward privileges or outward union with the Church. He told the Jews of his time that the promised Savior was soon coming among them; and he warned them that He would save the righteous, but destroy the wicked. The Jews must not think, John said, that their sins would be forgiven by virtue of their being descendants from a righteous man like Abraham; rather, they must obey God themselves.

This is just the teaching that we all need, even today! We are naturally dead, blind, and asleep in spiritual things. We are ready to content ourselves with a mere formality of religion, and to flatter ourselves that we shall be saved if we merely go to church. We need to be told that except we “repent and are converted,” we shall all perish. Unfortunately, we live in a day of much false teaching; therefore, let us never forget the leading characteristics of a faithful minister like John. Happy would it be for the Church of Christ if all her preachers were more like John the Baptizer!

But although John made sure that his listeners understood the necessity of repentance from their sin, yet he did not leave them without the hope of the ultimate answer to their sin-problem; for he also spoke plainly to them about our Lord Jesus Christ. He taught the people that One Who was far mightier than himself was coming among them. John himself was nothing more than a servant, but this Coming One was the King. John could only “baptize with water,” but the Coming One would “baptize with the Holy Ghost” and take away the sins of the world. Baptism represents purification and cleansing from our sins; but

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The preaching, lifestyle, and baptism of the Messiah’s messenger – verses 1-6
- ❖ John reproves the Pharisees and Sadducees – verses 7-12
- ❖ He baptizes the Lord Jesus – verses 13-17

they are not washed away by physical water, but by the Holy Spirit being sent into our hearts. That is why John told the people who came out to hear him, “I indeed baptize you with water; but the Saviour, who is coming after me, is greater than I; he will baptize you with the Holy Ghost.” What John meant to say was that although he baptized the people with water, he could not wash their sins away; but Jesus, Who had the power to send the Holy Spirit into their hearts, *could* cleanse them from their sins.

At length, Jesus Himself came from His home in Nazareth to the Jordan River so that John might also baptize Him. The office of John was to prepare the minds of people for the coming of Christ; therefore, he was reluctant to officiate in this capacity toward the Person Whose mere messenger he felt himself to be. He felt that he needed to have his own sins washed away, and he did not understand why Jesus must be baptized when He had no sins to be cleansed from. But Jesus told him that although he could not understand it now, yet it was right that he should baptize Him. So John consented. And then, as Jesus was coming out of the water and praying to God, the sky above Him opened; and there came down from heaven what seemed to be a dove, and it lighted upon Him. This was the Holy Spirit coming down upon Jesus; and at the same time, God’s voice spoke out of heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Just like Aaron and his sons were anointed with oil after they were washed and cleansed in preparation for the fulfillment of their priestly duties; so also, our Lord Jesus – the Great High Priest – was anointed with the Holy Spirit in preparation for the work of redemption that He was entering upon.



By nature, we are children of wrath; but in baptism, we are made the sons and daughters of God! Because of our sins, we are hateful in the sight of Him Who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; but when we are washed clean at the laver of regeneration, we are born again – born to a renewed nature, to new powers, to new hopes, to new privileges, and to new duties. Let us perform those duties, make use of those privileges, hold fast those hopes, and exercise those powers! And then the heavens shall be opened unto us also; and He Who dwells in them will acknowledge us as His own sons and daughters, in whom – for Christ’s sake – He is well-pleased! “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!” (1 John 3:1)

Lord Jesus, we praise You as the Father’s beloved Son, for He is well-pleased with You on account of Your redeeming love for Your Church and Your finished salvation for Your people! Amen.