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The Gospel According to Matthew

No One Can Repent for You

February 4, 2018

Scripture Reading: Malachi 4

Mat 2:19-23 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, (20) saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." (21) And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. (22) But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. (23) And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, **so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled**, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Before moving on to chapter 3 of Matthew's Gospel we need to take one final look at 2:19-23, specifically the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

The difficulty here is that there is no OT Scripture that announces the Christ would be called a Nazarene. Where then did Matthew find where the prophets spoke this? No one can be certain. Matthew of course was taught directly by Christ and may well have had this knowledge that is not written anywhere. Craig Blomberg says that there are three main theories:

"First, he may be making a play on words, noting the similarity between 'Nazarene' and the Hebrew *neser* (branch), especially in light of the use of this term as a messianic title in Isaiah 11:1 –

Isa 11:1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Second, Matthew may be using

“Nazarene” as a derogatory slang term for someone from the insignificant little town of Nazareth in Galilee – the same attitude that seems to be reflected by Nathanael in John 1:46: ‘Can any good thing be from Nazareth?’ Isaiah 53:2, a text that Christians would come to associate with Jesus in his role as Suffering Servant, and that spoke of one who grew up like a tender shoot but had no beauty or majesty to make him humanly attractive, could tie in with this view of Nazarenes as ‘backwoodsmen’ or ‘country bumpkins.’

Third, perhaps Matthew is alluding to Judges 13:6-7,

Jdg 13:6-7 Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, (7) but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.'"

...in which God tells Samson’s mother that her son will be a Nazirite, especially since this verse also includes a promise that the woman will conceive and bear a son, similar to Matthew 1:21. Although Jesus was

not a literal Nazirite (refraining from strong drink and haircuts), he could be seen as a charismatic individual empowered by the Spirit just as Samson had been.”

It is also very interesting, as Blomberg notes, that this is the only place in Matthew where he refers to “prophets” (in the plural) rather than to one single prophet. This could suggest to us that Matthew is not referring to one single prophet but is summarizing a theme that is found through the OT. The Messiah will be humble, rejected by men, suffering, and so forth. Jesus’ residence in the hick town of Nazareth adds to that image.

With that then, we move on to chapter three and the appearance of John the Baptist.

Mat 3:1-12 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, (2) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (3) 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.'"

(4) Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

(5) Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, (6) and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

(7) 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? (8) Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) 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.

(10) 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. (11) "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. (12) 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."

There is more to John the Baptist than probably any of us understand. His role was incredibly important in the history of God's redemption in Christ. Jesus said it Himself:

Mat 11:7-11 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (8) What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. (9) What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. (10) **This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'** (11) Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

John is spoken of in several places in the Old Testament. In Isaiah, as Matthew tells us here in 3:3 and at the very close of the Old Testament by Malachi, the Scripture Jesus is referring to here in 11:10.

Let's go back to Isaiah and read about this voice of one crying in the wilderness –

Isa 40:1-5 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. (2) Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. (3) A voice

cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (4) Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. (5) And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

John is a pivotal point connecting the Old and New Testaments. Just consider – the OT closes with the announcement of his future arrival as the herald of the Messiah. And here we have him in the opening chapters of the New Testament doing that very thing. John was the last of the OT prophets, heralding in the new era. While all the other OT prophets saw Christ dimly from centuries distant, it would be John who would see Him with his own eyes and herald the King's arrival:

Joh 1:6-8 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. (7) He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. (8) He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

Joh 1:19-34 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him,

"Who are you?" (20) He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (21) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." (22) So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (23) He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (24) (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) (25) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (26) John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, (27) even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (28) These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (29) The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (30) This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'" (31) I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." (32) And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. (33) I myself did not know him, but he who

sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' (34) And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

John, you might say, is the voice of all the OT prophets. His testimony is that Jesus is the Christ, the One of whom all the prophets had been speaking for all those years. It is as if the Old Testament had been gathered together into a person, John, and was now speaking to the Jews and then to all of us, THIS IS HIM!! We see the amazing unity of the Bible in John the Baptist.

And there is more. Look at 3:4 again-

Mat 3:4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Why does Matthew make it a point to tell us about John's clothing and diet? The answer lies in the fact that Malachi called John, "Elijah." And so did Jesus:

Mat 11:11-14 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (12) From the days of John the Baptist

until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. (13) For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, (14) and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

John the Baptist was the "Elijah" who Malachi promised would come. And John's clothing and diet identified him with Elijah-

2Ki 1:7-8 He said to them, "What kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?" (8) They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

We see how Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration as representative of all the OT Prophets, Moses also being present there as the personification of The Law, both speaking with Christ.

Mat 17:1-3 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

See it? The Law and the Prophets

spoke of Jesus and there they were on that mountain all in agreement, Moses and Elijah confirming Jesus is the Messiah of whom the entire OT spoke. And this is the very same thing that is happening here in John the Baptist's public announcement of Jesus as the Messiah.

Look at vs 5-6 once again:

Mat 3:5-6 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, (6) and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Do you see the exodus in this? The irony is that this "Moses" (John) who is out in the wilderness is calling the Jews out of Jerusalem! They weren't being baptized in the Red Sea, but in the Jordan River. All of this speaks of a new redemption by God of His people, delivering them from their sins and slavery. The redemption, of course effected by Jesus the Redeemer.

The city had become an evil Egypt, the clergy corrupt and wicked as Pharaoh. And sure enough, here they come to try to oppose John:

Mat 3:7-12 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? (8) Bear

fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) 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. (10) 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. (11) "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. (12) 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."

There is more here than we have time this morning to look at and we will plan to look at this section again next week. But notice these points for now:

- The religious establishment in Jerusalem was the primary enemy of God! The "church" in other words. That is exactly how it has been all down through church history. A counterfeit church persecuting the true church.
- These vipers worked to prevent people from finding Christ. Wherever the light of the gospel appears, you can be sure that these snakes will show up on the

scene.

- These vipers can be known not only by their outward show of “piety,” but by their lack of true holiness. Their hearts were rotten and therefore their fruit was rotten. John called them out on this.
- They assumed that they were “shoe-ins” when it came to the kingdom of God. They were cultural and hereditary “saints” in other words, and John nails them on it. Their physical lineage from Abraham will not save them.
- The central theme of John’s preaching and of his baptism was “repentance is required for entrance into the kingdom of heaven.”
- He announced the ultimate destiny of those who truly repented and turned to Christ, and those who refused to do so. Wheat gathered, chaff burned.

And this then is the thing we leave off with this morning – *repentance*. John’s preaching preceded that of Jesus. Repentance must come first, and apart from it there can be no faith, no salvation.

Have you repented? That is to say, has there been a genuine point in your life when you realized that if you continued on the path you were traveling, that of the world and sin,

you were going to end in hell? And then you turned – that is what repentance is – a turning *from* and a turning *to*. From sin, to Christ.

There are many people today, perhaps some of you, who grew up like these very religious Pharisees in John’s day, who really believe that their Christian upbringing assures them of salvation. And yet they walk and live in sin. To them, to YOU if you fit this category, John’s words are “Bear fruit in keeping with your repentance.” In other words, “you say you are a Christian. Alright then, prove it! Show me.”

Mat 7:16-20 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (17) So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. (18) A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

No one can do this for me, or for you. Only YOU can repent for you. John is warning us very sternly and seriously here. Christ is at hand. He is coming, at any moment. If you have not repented, confessed that the way your life is going is evil and wrong, and

turned from it in faith to Christ, then no matter how Christian of a family you have been raised in, no matter how often you went to church – just like that brood of religious leader vipers who came to see John – you will be the It will be because they despised the preaching of John the Baptist when he called them to repent.

Just one more final note. A very sobering one.

“but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire”

Have you ever seen an “unquenchable” fire? There have been some incredibly hot and ferocious fires on this earth, some of which burned for a long time. As hot as the spring bonfire is in my yard – so hot that you can’t even stand very close to it at all – I could quench it relatively quickly with my hose. The most terrible forest fires ultimately have been quenched.

But Christ’s fire of judgment, says John, is UN-quenchable. Do you grasp that? Those Pharisees and Sadducees who came to John, probably very, very few of them repented. In all of Scripture we know of maybe one or two. They now know this unquenchable fire. UN-quenchable. Never to be extinguished. NEVER. That is the destiny of all who spurn Christ, who insist on going their own

willful and sinful way rather than turning and repenting.

Why? If you have not repented and turned to Christ, Why? Don’t say “well it is because God hasn’t chosen me.” That’s a lie. This salvation in Christ was offered by John the Baptist himself *to all who came out to him, including this brood of vipers*. He told them, “repent, judgment is coming. The King is here. Turn from your wicked way.” Why are they in hell? Because they refused.

May that never be found to be true of anyone here this morning when Christ comes again and sorts out the wheat from the chaff.