

GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH

Message 9 4231

Text: Matthew 3:1-12

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11:30

INTRO: We are in the section in the Gospels I have called "The Preparation Of The Messiah For The World." The last part of that preparation is the preaching of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus Christ. It is to the first of these points we want to give ourselves this morning. The Scriptures involved are Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-11 and Luke 3:1-22. Since all three Gospels deal with the same events, you will understand that there will be duplication.

What we have seen so far is the accounts of the conceptions of both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. We have seen the births of both men. But of John we hear nothing after he was named, until he begins his ministry. We learned a little more about the early years of Jesus Christ. We even saw one incident when He was 12 years old. But other than that, we know nothing about both lives other than that the blessing of God rested on them.

Our first point this morning is the ministry of John the Baptist. I have mentioned earlier to you that he may have spent much time among the conservative Essenes, in the wilderness of Judea close to the Dead Sea. He has studied the Word of God and he understands the crucial point at which Israel now stands. He was to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers. That can only be accomplished by repentance. John was not able to accomplish his mission. It was not that he did not do a good job, any more than that Jesus did not do a good job. But he failed because the people were bound in their pride and sin and would not repent.

Now I want to show you where, no doubt, John the Baptist knew the nation stood at that time. He had spent his life studying the Scriptures and no doubt he fully knew Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks which were determined on Israel and Jerusalem. These 70 weeks as they are called are 70 7's of years. They break into 3 sections. First is a period of 7 weeks, or 49 years. That is the time in which Jerusalem was rebuilt. Added to that are another 62 weeks which makes it 69 weeks or 483 years. And last is left 1 week, which is the 70th week of Daniel, or what we know as the tribulation

time.

These 70 weeks would begin with the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. That date we have, which was 445 BC. From 445 BC until the Messiah is cut off will be 7 7's and 62 7's. That is 69 7's. That is 483 years. According to Sir Robert Anderson's calculations, who lived from 1841-1918, these 69 weeks ran out the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey. According to Daniel 9:26, after the 69th week Messiah will be cut off. That word 'Messiah' is the NT word 'Christ'.

Matthew says in Matthew 3:2 that John came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Here is how it all works. Daniel's 69 weeks ran from 445 BC to about 30 AD, when Christ was crucified. John the Baptist began preaching just over 2 years before that. Then the 70th week should have begun and right after that, the kingdom of heaven would come. That is the millennium. So, just over 2 years from when John began preaching the tribulation would begin. It would run for 7 years. This is the time of the wrath of God. Then the millennium would begin and so it was only just over 9 years away.

Now let me show you from this picture what happened (show, kingdom of heaven always at hand).

Neither John, nor any other OT prophet knew about the Church age. John preached as though there were only a little over 2 years left before the 70th week, and then the wrath of God would begin. Now let me just mention once more that I believe Christ ministered for just over 2 years, not just over 3 years as most hold. When we come to pertinent Scriptures I will point out to you why I believe that.

So, with that, we begin to look at the ministry of John the Baptist. We are in the point I have called, "The Preparation Of The Messiah For The World."

#### E. The Ministry of John the Baptist

##### 1. The political and religious milieu

We begin in Luke 3:1-2 and it gives us the political and religious setting into which John the Baptist came. As we begin this point, Mark 1:1 says it is the beginning of the beginning of

the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Mark's Gospel begins right at this point. And so, our first point this morning is the ministry of John the Baptist. And so we begin with Luke 3:1-2 (read). Tiberius Caesar was the adopted son of Augustus Caesar. According to Ryrie he reigned from 14 AD to 37 AD. Luke tells us John's ministry began in Tiberius' 15th year. That makes this from 29-30 AD. John was born about 6 months before Jesus, so this makes him 30 years old. Now, Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea. He is the same Pilate before whom Jesus will be tried just before His death. The Herod mentioned here is not the Herod who killed the babies in Bethlehem. That Herod died a most horrible death shortly thereafter. This is Herod Antipas, whom I mentioned briefly in the last message. Well, Luke gives the historical men who were in charge of the various areas around Jerusalem at the time John the Baptist began his ministry. This gives us the political scene.

Let us just note in verse 2 that Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests. This is the highest position in the Jewish spiritual realm. Annas was the High Priest. But Caiaphas, being the father-in-law to him and still carrying a lot of clout is listed as still being High Priest. There were all kinds of politics within the Jewish religious system and Rome, and the secular leaders determined who the spiritual leaders were. So in this political and spiritual climate, the Word of the Lord came to John the Baptist as the last part of verse two says.

## 2. The purpose of John's ministry

Now in verses 3-6 we are given the purpose of John's ministry (read). It can be reduced to this that he preached repentance for remission of sins. One of the greatest gifts God has given to man is that his sins can be forgiven by repentance. The longer I preach, the greater the more important this topic of repentance becomes. Today we have reduced the Gospel to this: Believe in Jesus Christ; accept Jesus Christ and you will be saved. But I'll tell you what accepting Christ

wants to fail to do, if that is all one does. It does not bring about real change. But, when you give the Gospel as repentance and faith, now it changes lives! You cannot truly repent without a change of life happening!

I did not allow myself to deal at length with this subject here, but let me reduce it to this. There are two major parts of the mind dealt with in the NT. The one part is the phreen, the thinker, the data processor of the heart. The other is the nous, the data storage part of the heart or mind. This word, repentance is the word *metanoia*. It means a change of mind. It means a change of data in the storage part of the mind. Let me give you one example. Let us say I tell a lie. Repentance means I change my mind about that. But repentance requires then that I go and deal with that lie. A change of mind must bring a change of behavior. It is that dealing with the lie that cures us sinners from further sinning. We must not say we have repented if we have not dealt with our sins. So Scripture says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." You see, repentance brings about confession. We will see shortly how faithful John was in preaching repentance.

Now verses 4-6 which we read earlier tell us that the OT recognized what would have to be preached in order for John to turn this nation around and bring it back to God. It is the very same thing that the Church needs today in order to turn it around from the direction it is going. Oh it is easy to preach faith and joy and love and so on. But any preacher who truly deals with sin will find himself meeting the devil head on. It is a very costly business for the preacher.

I read recently that A.W. Tozer said, "I preach to my congregation week after week. And I pray that I may be able to preach with such convicting power that my people will sweat! I do not want them to leave my services feeling good. The last thing I want to do is to give them some kind of religious tranquilizer and let them go to hell in their relaxation. The Christian church was

designed to make sinners sweat. I have always believed that, and I still believe it. The messages preached in our churches should make backslidden Christians sweat. And if I achieve that objective when I preach, I thank God with all of my heart, no matter what people think of me."

Are you here this morning and you are involved with sin? Lying is sin. Hypocrisy, acting like something other than what we are, is sin. Stealing is sin, whether it be down-loading things from the internet or outright taking something not belonging to us. Jealousy is sin. Envy is sin. These are very popular sins. Drinking alcohol is sin. Smoking is sin. There are all kinds of sins. How do we overcome these? Only by repentance. If we repent and truly deal with any sin when it happens and we will likely soon overcome it.

In verses 4-6 we have a quote from Isaiah 40. It is a picture of the spiritual lives of the Jews when John preached to them. John's voice was a voice in the wilderness of sin. God's nation is lost in the wilderness of sin. They do not know where they are going. It says, "Prepare the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight." The book of Isaiah is structured like the Bible. It has 66 chapters as the Bible has 66 books. The first 39 chapters are like the OT. The last 27 are more like our NT. And the 40th chapter, like the 40th book in the Bible begins with the ministry of John the Baptist and these verses before us come from the first part of the 40th chapter of Isaiah.

You see, when a king or some royal dignitary came to visit a country, they would go out and prepare the road. You cannot imagine a king in his royal chariot going through rough washed out gullies, nor over steep terrain. And so, in preparation for his coming they filled in the low places and made the high places low. The crooked places were made straight and the rough ways were made smooth.

Now we are here talking about the nation of Israel. There was a lot of pride, high places. There were those who were downtrodden and snubbed, the low places. There were crooked people. Many of their business people were crooked. Even many of their religious leaders were crooked. There were those who professed great religious piety, but it was selfish, religious pride. There were rough places. Hearts that were far from godly. They were harsh and cold and cruel. And John had the task of exposing all this sin to them and to seek to change all those hearts to prepare the way of the Lord. And if John would not succeed, and the Jews remained in their sinful rebellion, God's promises to the Jews would not at this time be realized.

I must tell you this morning that in our own nation, and even in our own very religious community there is a lot of sin. There is pride and there are those who are downtrodden. There are crooked people and rough people. We need exposure. But if there is not repentance, woe to those who expose wrong.

Well, verse 6 says that all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Yes, though Israel failed God and failed to repent, yet the Son of God died for all mankind. News of this salvation has gone to the ends of the earth, and in the tribulation it will do so once more as Revelation 7 clearly indicates

3. John's manner of existence (Matt. 3:4; Mark 1:6)

We go now to Matthew 3:4 to see John's manner of existence (read). What we learn from John's manner of existence is that he lived a very simple life-style. If he truly lived much of his time among the Essenes, in the wilderness close to the Dead Sea, he would surely have fit in there. His clothing was that of the common person or that which prophets wore (Zech. 13:4). You see, the OT prophet did not fit into the soft places of royalty. They fit much better among the common people of the country. This is with whom

John also was identified as other Scriptures indicate.

Now, it says he ate locusts and wild honey. Some argue that these locusts were somewhat like our garden peas, only they were wild. It is most likely though, that they were locusts. Amazingly, locusts were kosher for Jews to eat (Lev. 11:22). I expect that locusts, done right, would be good. They are very nutritious. They certainly are no less appealing than our canned oysters, or oysters period, for that matter.

But the point of it all here is John's simplicity of life. He certainly did not fit in a palace and he certainly would have been at home among the lowly of the land.

#### 4. The flavor of John's preaching (7-14)

In Luke 3:7-14 we get a flavor of John's preaching. I wonder, do you think you would have liked John's preaching? How do you like preaching when it brings your sin to the fore and you get convicted? If you are like I am, I do not like that. How do we like it when we are made to sweat because of conviction? I know how I like it so I can guess how you like it. But that is our only hope.

So let me ask, what was society like in general in John's day? Alfred Eedersheim, writing in the 1880's, speaking of how evil the days into which John the Baptist came preaching, says, "Whatever of good or of evil the ancient world contained, had become fully ripe. As regarded politics, philosophy, religion, and society, the utmost limits had been reached." Let me add that it was something like it is fast becoming in North America. Then he says, "Absolute right did not exist. Might makes right. The social relations exhibited even deeper corruptions. The sanctity of marriage ceased. Female dissipation and the general dissoluteness led at last to an almost entire cessation of marriage. Abortion, and the exposure and murder of newly-born children were common and tolerated; unnatural vices, which even

the greatest philosophers practiced, if not advocated attained proportions which defy description." A little later he says, "But among these sad signs of the times three must be specifically mentioned: the treatment of slaves; the bearing towards the poor; and public amusements." Yet a little later he says, "And so the only escape which remained for the philosopher, the satiated, or the miserable, seemed the power of self-destruction! What is worse, the noblest spirits of the time felt, that the state of things was utterly hopeless. Society could not reform itself; philosophy and religion had nothing to offer; they had been tried and found wanting" (II:259).

So much for the secular world. What about the religious world in John's day? Luke 3 will tell us. Notice what John says in verse 7 (read). Did he preach like this to everyone? No. A special audience was in mind here. From Matthew 3:7 we learn that this special audience was the Pharisees and Sadducees. He is preaching here to preachers! He is preaching to the religious leaders! He said, "You are a brood of vipers!" That is a brood of snakes. Albert Barnes says of vipers, "Vipers are a species of serpents. They are from two to five feet in length, and about an inch thick, with a flat head. They are of an ash or yellowish color, speckled with long brown spots. There is no serpent that is more poisonous than their bite; and the person bitten swells up almost immediately, and falls down dead." That is what John says these religious leaders were. Whomever they infected with their pious teachings, they infused with deadly venom.

Eedersheim makes a noteworthy statement on the state of religious leaders. Speaking of Annas, the High Priest, the highest of the religious world he says, "It deserves notice, that the special sin with which the house of Annas is charged is that of 'whispering' --or hissing like vipers--which seems to refer to private influence on the judges in their administration of justice, whereby 'morals were corrupted, judgment perverted, and the Shekinah withdrawn from



Israel" (II:263). It is interesting that the NT word 'whisperers' is psitheureestis. There is the viper, psss,sss, sss. And according to the prophecy of Isaiah, here the high places are brought low!

Both the secular and spiritual realms in John's day were saturated with sin. I am tremendously burdened when I hear that some of our young people are listening to music that will be harmful to them and the church in days ahead. It is very unlikely young people, if you keep listening to this music, even supposedly Christian music like modern CCM music; that you will not slide off the narrow path. If you listen much to modern Christian radio programming, your tastes of music are going to become contaminated with that which will lead you into the modern church. I am further burdened to hear that some of our young people are into pornography. I want to express to you what a deadly sin you are involved in if you do that. It will harm you before you are married and after. Repent! Parents, do you know where your children are? Do you allow them access to internet? What is John's message for us? Repent!

CONCL: As we close, I want to remind us that the wrath of God and the kingdom of heaven are just as much at hand today as they were 2,000 years ago. And I believe that just any day now Jesus Christ will return to take His bride home. I want to call us to repentance as well. I believe with all my heart that Christ could come at any time and the time to be ready is now.