

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expositional Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew** 6- The Ministry of the Baptist- Part 1

Church March 27, 2022

Matthew 3:1-12

1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying,

2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'"

4 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan;

6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8 "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

10 "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Now it is interesting that, in his Gospel Record- Matthew goes directly from the visitation of the Magi- when Jesus was no older than 2 years- to John the Baptist and a grown Jesus being baptized. No mention of the almost three decades of the sinless Life of Jesus in between.

But the other Gospel writers are no help here either because the man, who was commissioned by the Apostle Peter- John Mark- *began* his Gospel Record with John the Baptist and an already 30-year old Jesus. Dr. Luke (commissioned by Paul) goes directly from Jesus at 12 years speaking with the lawyers in the Temple- to John the Baptist and Jesus' Baptism; while the Apostle John *begins* his Gospel Record with a Teaching of Jesus in His Eternality and Deity and then goes straight to John the Baptist and Baptism.

So, save from the brief mention of Jesus at 12 in **Luke 2**- God the Holy Spirit did not see the need to “move” on any trustworthy writer to give us any inspired Information at all about Jesus' childhood; or Joseph's death; or the years of Jesus just before He entered into His Ministry. And that tells us that we shouldn't either. So, we should reject out of hand the spurious writings that supposedly give us insight into that time period of Jesus' Life.

Now in this Account by the Apostle Levi (Matthew) concerning John the Baptist- there are four huge Theological Issues that we need to discuss:

1. From where did Baptism come?
2. Who was John the Baptist?
3. What was his Ministry?
4. If Jesus was sinless, why did He need to be baptized?

... and I will begin to exposit these four Issues today and then, Lord willing, finish this next time.

From Where did Baptism Come?

Now we first need to remember that John's last name was NOT “*Baptist*”. That term was used to identify what he *did*- his *Ministry*. It was NOT information about his family's background¹. John baptized people. Now in the original Greek, the people called him, “*John, who baptizes*” or “*John, the one, who baptizes*”. But the “baptizer” had a very *unique* background; and a very *important* Ministry; and the spiritual Act that John *initiated* here- has lasted to this day.

Now somebody baptizing others in water today doesn't make the

¹ Almost all names in the ancient world gave insight into either the family's background or information about the city or region that pertained to that individual.

evening News. And that is because water Baptism has been a part of the Christian Church from the very beginning. Yet Baptism *itself* did not originate with John the Baptist or, for that matter, even with the Christians. The best information that we have- leads us to think that the Jews practiced Water Baptism- certainly NOT in the way that we know Baptism today- but as a ceremonial Act of Purification and Cleansing for Gentile converts to Judaism- long before the coming of the Messiah.

It is thought by some theologians that the origins of Baptism itself are found in the Old Testament Books of **Exodus** and **Leviticus** where the Levite priests were commanded to perform a “symbolic Cleansing” in water before and after performing their priestly Duties. (**Exodus 19:10; Leviticus 16:4&5; 23&24**). However- two things were unique about this particular “Baptism”:

- ✓ It was NOT carried out as a result of Conversion- but only for Purification and Cleansing before priestly duties
- ✓ Only the Priests participated

Outside of that Practice- a study of Jewish history reveals the presence of Water Baptism during Old Testament times when Gentiles wanted to identify with Israel- either *politically, culturally, or religiously*. And as those former pagans were “converted” to Judaism- they had to go through a three-fold Process:

1. Circumcision
2. Animal Sacrifice
3. Water Baptism

The Method of Jewish Baptism

The Jews used rivers; lakes; and streams to perform their *ceremonial* “Baptisms”- which was the more common method that John Baptist followed as the Old Covenant came to its inevitable Fulfillment. But in addition to those natural means- there was also a ceremonial appliance used for these cleansing services called a “*mikveh*”- which was a deep, portable, container- usually made out of clay. Archaeologists have found several Jewish mikvehs dating from before and after Jesus' time in Israel. Some are in Qumran, near where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found; but there have been some of them found elsewhere in Israel.

According to records found in Israel- the mikveh would be filled with water and the Gentile who was being converted to Judaism would be completely submerged under the water. The person being “baptized” in the mikveh could either have someone perform the “Baptism” for them or they could dunk themselves. There is no record of any “sprinkling” of water on the ones converting

but the records concerning these early “Baptisms” always describe complete immersion in the water.

Also- the records show that the water source used for these “Baptisms” could *not* be a stagnant pool- but had to be flowing water. There were no water lines back in that day and only rivers and lakes were considered "flowing." A lake was considered "flowing" because of the springs or creeks which fed into it and the water that seeped out of it. The mikvah qualified because it would have a small man-made channel that connected it to a "flowing" water source- such as a river or lake.

While it was common that only Gentile men would use the mikvehs for conversion purposes (accompanied by circumcision) both the men and women of the Jews used the mikvehs. Most of the time- the ladies only used the mikvehs for ceremonial cleansing after their menstrual cycle while the men would use them for cleansing before and after some spiritual Duty or Act.²

Many modern Jewish rabbis believe that the first instance of the use of ceremonial cleansing through water occurred just prior to the giving of the Covenant at Mt. Sinai. They cite **Exodus 19:10** as their justification:

The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments;

These rabbis believe that the "consecration" and the "washing" of the garments were related actions.³

Summary of the Origin of Water Baptism

So, it appears from ancient Jewish records that an incomplete and primitive type of water “Baptism” was being carried out by the priests based upon an understanding of several passages in **Exodus** and **Leviticus**. Also, it appears that Jewish males were *ceremonially* washed by emersion before and after conducting certain spiritual Activities and that occasionally women also utilized this process. It also appears that in between the two Testaments- that Gentile converts were *required* to go through this cleansing before “becoming a Jew” either *politically, culturally, or religiously*.

And while rivers and lakes were the *primary* means of conducting this “Baptism” there was also a clay appliance called a “*mikveh*” in which the converts were baptized.

² *The Jewish Book of Why* pages 123&297

³ *The Second Book of Jewish Why* pages 128&129

An Important Note

Now it is very important to understand that while we do not know for certain if any of this information is absolutely true- these are the best ideas that are available as of this date from all available records. So, we must use this information with caution and not simply accept it as an indisputable Fact- because it isn't. However- if these things *are* accurate- they present some very interesting parallels with John Baptist's Ministry; the Day of Pentecost; and the giving of The New Covenant.

For example- when first John Baptist and later Peter commanded the Jews to "be baptized"- they were in effect saying that these natural born Jews were pagans and Gentiles in their hearts and needed to be "converted" to the Truth- even though they were born Jewish and had been circumcised and raised on the Teachings of the Old Covenant. This pierced the Jews at the very heart of their entire Existence. And nothing made them more hostile to the New Covenant than the thought they too needed to be "cleansed" "converted" and "saved" like the Gentiles.

The Biblical Record of Water Baptism

What we *do* know to be true, however and what we *can* rely upon is the indisputable fact that Scripture clearly and repeatedly records that both John Baptist and the Apostles preached; taught; and carried out the baptizing of new converts in water by complete immersion and that Jesus commanded ALL believers to be baptized throughout the world until His Return. And we also know that Jesus Himself set the perfect Example by personally being baptized in water by immersion in the River Jordan.

Now normally when we think of Baptism today- the Christian Church is divided into two groups:

1. Those who baptize babies/infants (Paedo- Baptists)
2. Those who baptize believers (Credo- Baptists)

... but all Christian Churches baptize in one of those two ways; and all Christians are commanded to baptize and to be baptized. Those religious groups that either reject water Baptism outright or who neglect to baptize their followers (for any number of reasons)- are not Christian Churches.

Now one of the great Scandals of the modern Church is the literal "sea" of people, who lay claim to be saved; and who supposedly love Jesus- who have never been baptized. And all those, who are physically in the Church and yet have never obeyed the Bible and been baptized, fit into one of these five categories:

1. They are Ignorant
2. They are Proudful
3. They are Indifferent
4. They are Defiant
5. They are Unregenerate

I have developed a “White Paper” about Baptism that goes into great detail. I think it’s on the Church website (www.covenantofpeace.net) where you can download it and read it to give yourself some background into this important Ordinance.

Now the closest example we have in the Old Testament to somebody “sprinkling” is when the Priests sprinkled the people with the blood of animals (**Exodus 24**). And the closest example we have in the Old Testament- of somebody connecting a person being immersed in water with a spiritual Act- is when God commanded the Priests to bathe before they handled the holy things of God (**Leviticus 14, 15, 16, 17; Numbers 19; Deuteronomy 23**). But as you read these accounts- you would be hard pressed to get the “Sacrament of Baptism” from either one of those Old Testament examples.

So, that begs the Question: *“From where did John get the idea to take penitent people and immerse them in water?”* The only hint that the New Testament gives- is found in **John 1:33**, where the Baptist said,

I did not recognize Him [Jesus], but He who sent me to baptize in water [God the Father] said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

... so, evidently, God the Father sent John to baptize.

But does that mean that God taught John about Baptism? I don’t know, perhaps. Did John just make it up? No. But how do I know that? Because he said that God sent him to baptize. So, while the Bible clearly *commands* water Baptism- outside of what I have already told you- the Bible does NOT give us a clear account of just how the Act began.

Now for the purposes of expositing **Matthew 3:1-12**- I’m NOT going to get into the 500- year-old Controversy about Infant versus believer Baptism. That will be another Sermon for another day. Suffice it to say that I have personally become convinced that, with every Issue pertaining to the Lord- people need to understand what they’re doing and why. And babies or even infants have no idea why they get wet in Church. And that is why I ONLY baptize those, who have convinced me⁴

⁴ I am not anybody’s Judge. But if people want me to baptize them- they need to convince me that they have already been justified.

that they have already experienced the Miracle of the New Birth; they have already believed the Gospel; and they have already been justified- by Faith alone.

Now Rome teaches that there are seven Sacraments, while those who still have a “protest” against the Man-made and unbiblical Teachings of the Roman religious system- have two. And those people are called, “*Protestants*”. Now a few years ago, when I was studying the Issue of Marriage- my respect for the Institution of Marriage was so elevated and the battle against Marriage appeared to me to be so severe- that I was very tempted to include Marriage as a “third Sacrament.” And there is only one reason I didn’t: Marriage is NOT commanded. There are some people that God has called to be eunuchs; and they will refrain from Marriage and not have any children their entire lives. Yet both the Lord’s Table and Baptism are *commanded* for ALL believers. So, all genuine believers are *commanded* to be baptized- in water- by full immersion and to baptize others.

Now I want to rehearse with you what the Lord Christ told His followers- just before He ascended into Heaven from **Matthew 28:18-20**:

18 ...All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Now the “**Age**” that Jesus was referring to here in verse 20- is the “*Church Age*”- in which we are now 22 years into the 3rd Millennium. And throughout the New Testament, the “Church Age” is also referred to as: the “*Last Day*” or the “*Last Days*”. So, from the time of Jesus’ Resurrection until His physical Return- the Church of Jesus is to be faithful, fruitful, and busy in baptizing those, who say they have trusted in Christ for Salvation.

And along with the sister Passage in **Mark 16:15**- please notice what Jesus told us to do in Obedience to what is now called, the “Great Commission”. Jesus said we are to:

- Go into all the world
- Preach the Gospel to every creature (**Mark 16:15**)
- Make Disciples of ALL Nations
- Baptize those Disciples in the Name of the Father; Son; and Holy Spirit
- Teach those Disciples to obey Jesus and hold them accountable

And the Authority that allows us to go into every single Nation on earth (even when we are not invited); preach the Gospel to everybody; Call them to Repentance; Call them to turn away from and abandon the false Religion they have

been raised with their entire lives; Reject any Custom that the Bible condemns; And embrace Obedience to Jesus as a way of life- is what Jesus said in the beginning of verse 18:

... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth

So, we are to preach to as many people every day as God gives us opportunity- using every Means God has made available to us. And we are to do this- until Jesus comes back to this earth. And part and parcel to this “Great Commission” is the baptizing of those who say they have been redeemed.

Now one reason Baptism has taken on a “back seat” position in our day- is the proliferation of all of these “*Para-church Ministries*” that abound all around us. And the term, “Para-church” has to do with the fact that, even though these groups are very busy with church things- these Organizations are NOT churches. They are NOT set up like Churches and they do NOT operate like Churches. They are almost always set up like Businesses and they operate like Businesses.

Now I’m not throwing rocks at anybody- I always assume that people are doing what they are doing with the very best of intentions. But the Reality is that there is little or no accountability for those who support these Ministries- to be baptized or to obey any other Commandment found in the New Testament.

For example, I am personally familiar with one “Para-church Organization” that specializes in helping people study the Bible. And they do great work. And yet the employees and researchers who work there don’t even go to Church! So, the people helping others read and study the Bible- so they may be more obedient to Jesus- either don’t know or don’t care that their own employees are not obeying Jesus.

Another group tailer-makes their Bible-studies so they are attractive to every religious group- including many of the cults. This allows them to sell their Goods to every conceivable group. But wouldn’t it be better to help those deceived by false Teaching by giving them information from the Bible- so they could escape those wayward groups? A Church that was interested in glorifying God would do that. But a Business that is being run pragmatically to make a profit would be careful not to offend anyone.

A very large “Para-church Ministry that owns and operates around 180 radio stations around the country has even invented a term that supposedly describes genuine Believers. This Ministry calls them, “*People of Faith*”. Now that may sound great- but the Reality is that this Ministry consciously developed this term- so they could include Catholics; Mormons; Jehovah’s Witnesses; conservative Jews- and even Muslims- in their political activities. Now why would they do

that? Because they don't think there are enough genuine "Born Again" people in the country to make up a large enough "voting block"- so they can impact Federal Legislation. So, they purposely DON'T speak of believers being "Born Again" so as not to alienate those Man-made and unsaved groups, who don't believe in the New Birth.

But the New Testament speaks ONLY of the Church that Jesus is building; and over which Jesus is Head. And the way the New Testament is written is that everything that God wants done in the earth today- should be done *in, by, and through* His Church. And the Church wants people to be born again. And they want all of these who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth to be baptized. Why? Because the Church is ONLY interested in bringing Glory to Jesus Christ- not effect Legislation. And we simply can't bring Glory to Jesus unless we do what He said.

Also, we need to know that there is no such thing in Christianity of people "going it alone"- even though many "Para-church" Ministries actually encourage that. But there are no more "lone rangers" like Elijah and Elisha or like Abraham in the New Testament. All that is done today "in the Name of Jesus" and "to the Glory of God"- should be flowing *out from* the Church to the world; while every single Ministry on earth today should be accountable to the Elders of the local Church.

But that isn't the worst part. Because of the proliferation of these 'para-church' Ministries - many churches today see no need to do what these various Ministries" are doing. So, for example, for the most part- the local Church doesn't teach men how to be godly, loving and strong Husbands and Fathers anymore- because several "*Para-church Ministries*" are doing that.

But the New Testament teaches us that the Church is supposed to be teaching young men how to be loving and godly and strong Husbands and Fathers. And the Bible says that the Elders are supposed to be holding these men accountable to actually accomplish that. But that is simply NOT the dynamic of "Para-church Ministries".

And so, many of these Ministries will say they exist, *primarily* because the Church on earth today IS NOT DOING THEIR JOB! And I agree with that. But instead of starting a "*Para-church Organization*" a much better thing would be that we should hold the Leaders of the Church accountable; and make sure that every single Issue that is commanded in the Bible for the Church to do- is actually being carried out by the local Church.

Who was John the Baptist?

Now those of you who were here when we took nine years and 10 months to journey through every single verse of Luke's Gospel Record will remember how Dr. Luke gave us a first-hand inspired Narrative account about John the Baptist's Parents: Zacharias and Elizabeth.

And we saw that Zacharias was a godly Priest and Elizabeth was a godly woman. And they were both old and had never had a child. But as Zacharias was tending to the incense in the Holy of Holies- the angel Gabriel appeared to him in **Luke 1:13** and said,

... your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

... and then the angel told Zacharias:

14 "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

16 "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

17 "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:14-17)

So, here we see a Prophecy or a Promise by an angel- of John the Baptist- as he was speaking on Authority from God. And we notice several aspects of this Promise that are amazing:

- The angel promises an old man and his wife- who are both well passed the age of childbearing- that they will have a child
- The angel promises that this child will be a male and even gives Zacharias his name
- The angel promises that this child will bring his parents and others great Joy
- The child will be "great"- not in a general sense- but he will be "great" in the eyes of the Lord
- The child will live within the "Vow of a Nazarite" his entire life (**Numbers 6:1-21**)⁵

⁵ The term, "**Nazarite**" comes from the Hebrew word, "*nazir*", which means: "*consecrated or separated.*" The Nazarite vow is a temporary Old Testament vow that God gave to Moses for the Jews, who were especially consecrating themselves to God for period of time.

- He will be filled with the Holy Spirit before he is born⁶
- The child will turn many to the Lord
- He will go “*in the spirit and power of Elijah*” as a Forerunner of the Messiah- preparing the people for Jesus

... and although John fulfilled all of these things- and baptized many people- his main Purpose of Ministry was to *identify* the promised Messiah.

Now one of the most amazing attributes of John’s Ministry is that it was ordained to only be temporary. It was NEVER designed to continue. Once the Messiah was identified- John’s Ministry began to fade away. And John actually taught this- when he said this in **John 3:30**:

He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.

... so, many of John’s disciples *abandoned* him after he was arrested and they joined themselves to the disciples of Jesus. And they did this will John’s Blessings.

So, there are at least three ways in which John the Baptist was radically different than the Levitical Priests during his day:

1. Who he was
2. How he dressed and ate and lived his life
3. What he preached

1. Who He Was

John was chosen by God. The Levites were Priests because they were born into the Tribe of Levi- and were Priests *regardless* of whether they were saved or even loved God. John’s birth was miraculous; and he was endued with Power by being born again and filled with the Holy Spirit before he was ever born. The Levites all had normal births and had no infilling of the Spirit. How do we know this? Because God the Holy Spirit ALWAYS leads people to Jesus. And as a group, the Levites of the 1st Century were not only NOT led to Jesus- but they whole-heartedly *resisted* and *rejected* Him. And John had specific Prophecies about him that he was to fulfill during his life. The Levites had only their Custom.

2. How He Dressed and Ate and Lived His Life

⁶ The destroys the false Doctrine that many have developed that teaches that people are filled with the Holy Spirit AFTER they have been justified

One of the most obvious Contrasts that we see clearly was how John was so physically different than the Pharisees. They were constantly seeking to “blend in” with King Herod- even to the point of what they ate; how they talked; and how they dressed. Contrast that with John, who ate locusts and wild honey; lived in the desert; and dressed in a garment made of camel’s hair. So, in that sense- John was truly “holy” (separated from the world and set apart for God’s use).

Now many people get from this that we are to be mystics and nomads and live in the woods. Some of the greatest Leaders throughout Church history thought that the path to Holiness lay in things like this. But God wanted a contrast between John and the Levites of the 1st Century. And a hint as to this comes from what Jesus said in

Matthew 11:7b-19 that says,

7 ..."What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

8 "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces!

9 "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet.

10 "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'

11 "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone 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 suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

13 "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

14 "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.

15 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

16 "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children,

17 and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

18 "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!'

19 "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

Now the phrase, **“a reed shaken by the wind”** (verse 7) had to do with the Levites being careful to never do or say anything that might upset or offend Herod. That is the equivalent of them blowing in the wind like the reeds that lined the River Jordan where John was baptizing. If the wind blew that way- so did the reed. But if the wind blew in a completely different way- the reed would follow. So, a reed blowing in the wind meant that there was nothing consistent; nothing steadfast; nothing sure and steadfast that the Levites stood on without flexing one way or the other.

But John spoke the Truth- regardless of who might be offended. And he didn't bend by whichever way the wind might blow. John believed in Divine Truth that was rock-solid; steadfast and unmovable. And John's Confidence was in the God, Who was Immutable (does not change).

Now the Levites were invited to Herod's Palace all the time. And when they went- they didn't wear the normal garments identifying them as Priests of God found in the Old Testament. Instead, they wore colorful, frilly, effeminate garments that Herod provided for them- that symbolized their acquiescence and submission to this Gentile Ruler. John, however, wore a garment of camel's hair- which wasn't what the Old Testament prescribed either- but it symbolized ruggedness and independence from Herod.

Herod would also have sumptuous meals with the finest foods available to feed the Levites. But this was NOT out of respect for their Position and Calling- Herod respected no man. This was a reminder that their easy life- came from him- not God. John, however, ate locusts and wild honey- again- not to merely be different or primitive- but to show absolute independence from Herod's authority.

And John lived in the desert- away from Herod's control and rule. So, when John came to speak- his words had not already been bought and paid for by a wicked pagan King- but were from God.

3. What He Preached

John's Message was entirely unique from the Pharisees. He knew that the average Jew did not obey the Words of the Old Testament and he also knew that the Pharisees had invented a religious System that was so convoluted – that the people had to ask the Pharisee about every detail of their lives- which made the Pharisee indispensable. Also, John had no desire to enrich himself in the Ministry as the Pharisees did (and as many false Teachers do today). So, John basically had one single Sermon that he constantly preached:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:2)

John and Elijah

When the angel came to John's father- he told this old Priest something amazing about his son that hadn't even been born yet:

It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

So, there are several things we need to consider about John from this verse:

John was a Forerunner to Jesus. He went *before* Jesus to prepare people *for* Jesus. So, when John preached, "*Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand!*"- and then baptized them- that was preparing people for Jesus.

And that means that without repenting- we are NOT prepared to meet Jesus. And John preached that to everybody. So, everybody needs to repent. Why? Because everybody is a sinner. Now being a sinner does NOT mean that you are a child molester or a drug pusher or a mass murderer. What being a sinner means- is that you have insulted the Holiness of God and you have offended the sensibilities of God by your thoughts and actions.

So, you can be a real nice person, who is thoughtful; and considerate; and kind; and generous- and still be a sinner. Being a sinner does NOT mean you have done outwardly wicked things that even other sinners would agree are real bad.

But it *does* mean that you do not love Jesus. And by the word, "Love" I'm NOT talking about human sentimentality; or a warm fuzzy feeling. I'm talking about sacrificially following Jesus for one reason- You truly see Jesus and striving to obey what He said- as being the path to the fullness of your own Joy.

Loving Jesus means that you agree that striving to obey Jesus- *regardless* of what that may do to you personally- is worth it- because you see Jesus as being BETTER than Life itself- and you simply cannot bear to hurt Him or disappoint Him. So, in Christianity Obedience is the way we prove our Love. And so, if there is no Obedience- there is no Love- no matter what you say.

Now Talk has always been cheap. But Talk today is *especially* cheap because we have re-defined so many words. So, loving Jesus means that you see Jesus as being the Treasure of the Universe and a Person, Who has the right to completely alter the way you live your daily life.

And being a sinner means that you have taken your Loves and your Affections and you have robbed Jesus of those Affections because you placed them on something else- that has been made and that is falling away. And you simply don't have the right to do that.

So, loving Jesus also means that you agree that Jesus has absolute Lordship Authority over your life. So, Jesus has the Right to tell you how to live your life; what to buy; who to marry; how to raise your children; how long you will live and when you will die. So, agreeing with Jesus' Lordship Authority over your life also means that you do NOT have that Right yourself. And here is the key- when you come to the Realization that Christianity and Salvation means that you are now a "bought and paid for" bond-slave to Jesus- FOREVER- that understanding brings you to the fullness of Joy!

So, John the Baptist said there is a Kingdom that is different from every other Kingdom on this planet. And there is a King, Who is over this Kingdom Who is MORE Powerful; and MORE Kind; and MORE Merciful and MORE glorious than any other King! And John said that the way we enter this Kingdom is through Repentance and Belief!

And in this Kingdom- there is NO Crime; and NO Injustice; and NO Poverty; and NO disease. In this Kingdom we will NEVER die! And there is no need for the Police or the Army or the FBI in this Kingdom. In fact, in this Kingdom, we will have no need for the light of the Sun or the Light of the Moon. But in this Kingdom- Jesus is the Light!

But John and several other writers said that the ONLY people, who can live in this Kingdom- are those who have humbled themselves and who have rejected the Logic and the Ways of this fallen world and have been adopted by the Father and now live their lives to the Glory of God. And so, John is preaching about this Kingdom and how to enter into it. And he is baptizing people to signify that they have turned from the Sin of this life and have embraced God as Sovereign over every aspect of their lives.

Now it is hard to find anything more important than that. And it appears that this kind of preaching is so important and so necessary- that what John is doing should go on forever. But one day, as John was preaching and baptizing- a group of people walked up to where John was. And this is the Account of that as recorded by Matthew:

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8 "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for

our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

10 "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

So, one day, the single most fastidious religious people on earth at that time walked up to John. These people studied the Old Testament 12 hours every day. From the time they were 12 years old until they died- these men dedicated their entire lives to calling people back to obedience to the Law of Moses and to prepare themselves for the Messiah. And yet, they are the only group of people Jesus never said anything Good about.

The Pharisees were the religious Conservatives of their day. The Sadducees were the religious Liberals; the Essenes were the religious mystics of their day; while the Sicarii were the Terrorists of their day.

So, when these religious experts walked up to John- John began to speak to them. And he said,

... You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

Now we need to understand that John is NOT merely insulting these men. No, God the Holy Spirit, Who walked inside of John, was anointing him to give these men a correct diagnosis of their spiritual Condition before God. So, this is NOT merely John's invective against the Pharisees because he just happened to not like them. No, this Diagnosis was true. And John is actually giving these men a series of very important Biblical Truths that we need to know today:

- False Teachers are like poisonous snakes (Vipers)
- There is a powerful and frightening Wrath of God that is coming that people MUST flee from
- Repentance ALWAYS brings forth godly Fruit

- Being a “*Child of Abraham*” or a “*Seed of Abraham*” has NOTHING to do with Birthright; Nationality; or Ethnicity

... and, Lord willing, we will finish this next time.

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

