

Matthew chapter 3

Verse 1 and 2

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

- John the Baptist was considered Jesus' forerunner. A person who went ahead of an important dignitary to prepare the way for him.
- John not only prepared the way for Jesus, but also announced Him as an important person and implied His royalty. John preceded Jesus in birth, in public appearance, and in death.
- Everything that Matthew was talking about was historically based. John appearing those days was merely a historical account of the start of his ministry which was approximately 30 years after the events in chapter 2.
- John which means "gift of Yahweh" was a very popular name among the Jews. He received the surname "the Baptist" because of his practice of baptizing repentant Jews.
- John was a preacher with a message to proclaim. He appears on the scene suddenly and mysteriously, much like Elijah, whose ministry John mirrored.
- The scene of John's ministry was "the wilderness of Judea. In Israel's history, the wilderness forever reminded the Jews of their 40-year journey under extreme conditions and God giving them the Law of Moses. They associated it with a place of separation unto God, testing for refinement, and new beginnings.
- In a nutshell, John's command to the people of Israel was for them to turn from their sins to God in anticipation of their Messiah. The kingdom of God expressed here was not the kingdom of glory in heaven but the kingdom of grace here on earth.

Verse 3

For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"

Isaiah 40:3

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

- In Isaiah 40:3, "the voice" urged the people to prepare for God's coming while He was bringing Israel back from her dispersion. Matthew identified Yahweh in Isaiah 40:3 with Jesus in Matthew 3:3. This equates "the kingdom of God" to "the kingdom of Jesus."

Verse 4, 5 and 6

And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

2Kings 1:7 *Then he said to them, "What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?"*

8 *So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."*

- In his dress and in "his food," as well as in his habitat and in his message, "John" associated himself with the poor and the prophets—particularly Elijah.
- Elijah called the Jews back to God in a time of their greatest time of sin; John called them back to God on the eve of their greatest opportunity. He was the first prophet from God in approximately 400 years.
- Many people responded to John because they perceived that he was a genuine prophet with a message from God.
- Because of the considerable Jewish interest in the role of Elijah it is likely that John's clothing was deliberately adopted to promote this image."
- Poor people ate "locusts" (Leviticus 11:22), and such a diet was compatible with that of a Nazirite.

Verse 7-10

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees ("**separate ones**") and Sadducees ("**righteous ones**"), coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

- After the ministry of the prophets ceased after the Jewish exile to Babylon, there arose godly men known as Chasidim or saints who sought to keep a reverence or respect and fear for the Laws of Moses, among the Jewish descendants, of those who had been captives in Babylon.
- They later degenerated to the Pharisees of Jesus' time.
- They mixed Jewish tradition with the laws of Moses, claiming that these laws had equal authority to the laws from God.
- The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that denied the existence of angels or other spirits, and all miracles, especially the resurrection of the body. They were in charge of the Sanhedrin and the priesthood

- Vipers" is a word Isaiah used to describe God's enemies (Isaiah 14:29; 30:6). John's use of it associates him with the former prophets and reflects his prophetic authority.
- When John questioned them he was merely saying, "Who told you that you would escape the coming wrath" for he knew that there was no genuine repentance from them.
- Many of the Jews believed that if one was a descendant of "Abraham," he would automatically enter Messiah's kingdom. They counted on the patriarch's righteousness as sufficient for themselves.
- In both the Hebrew and Aramaic languages stones were a reference to children. And if stones could become God's children, certainly Gentiles could.
- The fruits of "repentance" were absent in the case of these leaders. There was no external evidence that they desired to draw near to God in anticipation of Messiah's appearance. Any tree of person that did not bear good fruit was bound to face eternal destruction in hell, regardless of its roots.

Verse 11

"I indeed baptize you with water unto 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.

- John baptized in water "in connection with" repentance. However, the One coming after him, the King, would "baptize . . . with the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29) and fire" (Malachi 3:2-5). The Malachi prophecy speaks of fire as a refining or purifying agent, not as an instrument of destruction.
- Some interpreters believe that this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4).
- While others, like Dr Thomas Constable believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire are which are one and the same will be done Jesus at His second coming since they involve Israel and the day of the Lord according to Joel.
- The baptism "with the Holy Spirit" would refer to Spirit baptism that will happen when Israel accepts her Messiah (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28-32). A foretaste of that baptism occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The baptism "with fire" would refer to Jesus' judgment of unrepentant Israel.

Verse 12

His winnowing fan is in His hand (the fan that keeps His wrath hot), and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor (separate the true from the false), and gather His wheat into the barn (the kingdom); but He will burn up the chaff (unrepentant) with unquenchable fire (dreadful and never ending).

- John metaphorically described God separating the true and the false, the repentant and the unrepentant, in a future judgment. This thorough judgment will result in the preservation of the believing Israelites and the destruction of the unbelieving.
- What was John essentially doing here? John preached *both* a personal salvation, involving the repentance of sins, *and* a national salvation, involving the establishment of the millennial kingdom with Israel delivered out of the hand of their enemies.

Verse 13 and 14

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

- John hesitated to baptize Jesus because he believed that Jesus did not need to repent. John evidently suggested that it was more appropriate that Jesus baptize him, than that he baptizes Jesus, because he knew that Jesus was more righteous than he was.

Verse 15

But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

- John agreed to baptize Jesus, only after Jesus convinced him that by baptizing Him, both of them would "fulfil all righteousness."

What did Jesus mean?

- When the apostle Paul talked about righteousness, he used was talking about right standing before God, personal righteousness.
- Matthew used it to describe conformity to God's will or ethical righteousness. The action of the way you conduct yourself in the eyes of God. It does not deal with getting saved but with responding to grace.
- Ethical righteousness is a major theme of the Old Testament, and it was a matter that concerned the Jews in Jesus' day, especially the Pharisees.
- Jesus understood that it was God's will for John to baptize Him.
- There is no Old Testament prophecy that states that Messiah would undergo water baptism, but there is prophecy that Messiah would submit Himself to God (Isa.53). That spirit of submissiveness to God's will is primarily what

John's baptism identified in those who submitted to it. Consequently it was appropriate for Jesus to undergo John's baptism, and John consented to baptize Him.

- In doing so, Jesus authenticated John's ministry and identified Himself with the godly remnant within Israel.
- Jesus' baptism was the occasion at which His messiah ship became obvious publicly. Matthew recorded this event as he did to convince his readers further of Jesus' messianic.

Verse 16-17

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

- The person who "saw the Spirit of God descending" was evidently Jesus.
- John the Evangelist recorded that John the Baptist also saw this (John 1:32), but evidently no one but Jesus heard the Father's voice.
- In fact, the baptism of Jesus appears to have been a private affair with no one present but John and Jesus. ***John 1:19-29***
- The phrase "the heavens were opened" or "heaven was opened" refers to instances of people receiving visions from God. In them they saw things unseen by other mortals (e.g., Ezekiel 1:1; Acts 7:56; Revelations 4:1; 19:11)
- What Jesus saw was the Holy Spirit in the form of "a dove," not in a dove-like fashion, descending on Him.

(Luke 3:22).

And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

- "The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus indicates the divine God empowering Him to accomplish the messianic ministry. It however does not mean that Jesus didn't have the Holy Spirit because Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. It simply was a sign that Jesus was mightier than John the Baptist as John had said that He would be.
- It was also a sign remind them of the authority in which He carried out His Messianic ministry, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- By being empowered by the Spirit of God, Jesus was acting as a mouth piece of God and an instrument of God.

Conclusion

There are 5 things we can take away from chapter 3 of Matthew:

1. We must be prepared for the second coming of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. How well are we prepared?
2. We must be forerunners for Christ to prepare the unbelievers for His second coming. How are we doing that?
3. We must decrease and let Christ increase. Everything should be by Him, for Him, for His glory.
4. We must do everything for Him by the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit.