

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

FEBRUARY 8TH-9TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

## ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS (MATTHEW 3:1-6)

Matthew's narrative of the life of Jesus skips over a few decades from His childhood to the events preceding the beginning of His adult ministry.

- We're introduced in verse 1 to the character of "John the Baptist".
- John was actually related to Jesus through their mothers (Luke 1:36), and likely had contact during their childhood and early adulthood.

John preached "in the wilderness"- somewhere beside the Jordan river.

- His message was simple- "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (vs. 2).
- **The word repent means to "change one's mind and act on that change".**
- John's message wasn't for people to express regret or remorse, he wanted "fruit" (vs. 8).

By saying "the kingdom... is at hand" (vs. 2b), John was essentially saying that God was coming, and the time was NOW for a decisive response.

- Matthew tells us that John fulfilled the prophecy given in Isa. 40:3- the imagery is of a herald who would come before a king, announcing and making sure the roads were straight for the king to travel. There is a correlation between John & OT prophets.

God announced through He would send Elijah to announce the "Day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5-6)

- This "Elijah" would turn people back to one another, but he would also bring a decree of God's coming judgment.
- John is that Elijah (Matt. 11:7-15), and he in many ways resembled Elijah by being a prophet that called people back to God after a long drought.

John's unusual clothing and unconventional diet (vs. 4) were intended to be symbolic of his role and ministry- garments of hair were traditional dress for prophets (Zech. 13:4)

- Elijah was described as dressing similarly (2 Kgs. 1:8) and also living in the wilderness
- John had a huge following of those coming out to hear his message! (vs. 5)

The crowds weren't just coming out to hear John preach, he was also baptizing ("immersing", "dipping") them in the river Jordan as they confessed their sins (vs. 6).

- The only type of baptism known to Jews at this time was the kind given to Gentiles.
- But these were mostly Jews who were being baptized by John.

John's baptism signified a person's willingness to turn from sin and the false belief that being born a Jew automatically put them in right relationship with God.

- John was proclaiming that Israel was in crisis and about to be judged (vs. 9-10).
- John's message was the first for Israel in 400 years, and it's fitting that when people received the message they expressed the sincerity of repentance through baptism.

## PRODUCING FRUIT (MATTHEW 3:7-10)

John noticed that many of the Pharisees (**legalistic, fundamentalist Jews**) and the Sadducees (**liberalized Jews**) were coming to the baptisms (vs. 7).

- These two groups disagreed about almost everything related to Jewish observance, but the fact that they came together suggests a sort of "cross-party delegation" to check things out. Their appearance greatly angers John!

John was preaching revival and repentance- warning people of God's judgment and pleading with them to get right and real with God.

- But for the Pharisees & Sadducees, relating to God had more to do with tradition, rituals, political posturing, and superficial conformity.
- Many in our day still attempt to relate to God through these things, and they're suspicious of any message that says otherwise.

John's anger towards them is justifiable- to John they represented all that was wrong.

- So he confronts them by publicly calling them a "brood of vipers" (vs. 7b).
- The image of poisonous snakes connotes danger as well as stealth.
- The sarcastic imagery of snakes wriggling away from a spreading fire captures the idea of them "fleeing" from the wrath to come.

John tells the insincere religious leaders that they really want to be right with God, they must "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (vs. 8).

- **Real repentance is not a matter of words or ritual, but of a real change of life!**
- **It's WHAT WE DO in response to God's Word rather than by what we hear or say.**
- **Real heart change always means real life change.**

In vs. 9 John warns the religious leaders not to presume that their status before God was safe simply because of their family heritage.

- A refusal to repent will result in judgment, regardless of ethnicity or family heritage- a good family heritage doesn't automatically make someone a follower of God.
- John claims these hypocrites had no more in common with God's people than a rock.

The ax of God's judgment was ready to cut them off- the warning is of a very present and real danger

to which these people were completely blind (vs. 10).

- Which "trees" will get cut down and thrown into fire? The ones that don't bear fruit.
- Fruitlessness is an indication of lifelessness- and **spiritually fruitless people are often spiritually lifeless people who are in danger.**

## HOLY SPIRIT AND FIRE (MATTHEW 3:11-12)

John was called by Jesus "the greatest born of women" (11:11), and yet he understood his place in the bigger picture.

- John's job was to serve as a forerunner to the coming Messiah-King.
- John says that this coming king is so great that he's not even worthy to perform the lowest of all tasks (removing sandals) for him (vs. 11).

John's baptism was of "water for repentance", but the Messiah-King would baptize in two different elements (the Holy Spirit and fire).

- Fire is associated with judgment & burning- the Messiah will be a savior, but He will also bring judgment to the unrepentant.
- **We can't minimize or soften the teachings of Jesus and His coming judgment- He will bring a holy recompense to all wickedness.**

Being "baptized in the Holy Spirit" has many different meanings to those of us who have come from various church backgrounds.

- What John is referring to is not necessarily a "Day of Pentecost" experience, but rather the transforming work of Jesus by placing the Holy Spirit in us and changing our hearts from the inside out. This "baptism" happens at salvation (Rom. 8:9).

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was given only to prophets, priests, and kings- but the prophets pointed to a day when the Holy Spirit was to be "poured out on all flesh" (Joel 2:28).

- Now John is saying that through the Messiah, we all can have access to an "immersion" by the very Spirit of the living God.
- We're either immersed by His Holy Spirit or we're immersed by the fire of His judgment.
- Winnowing forks (vs. 12) were used to toss a harvested grain and chaff mixture in the air, allowing the wind to blow away the chaff, and keeping the grain on the winnowing floor.
- John is saying that judgment will be so thorough that no one will be able to escape.
- The perfect Judge will make no mistakes in sorting out the believer from the unbeliever.

## A KING'S BAPTISM (MATTHEW 3:13-17)

When we last saw Jesus at the end of chapter 2, he was still a child settling in Nazareth.

- Now we see Jesus coming from Galilee to the Jordan (vs. 13) so that He can be baptized.
- John seems to understand Jesus' superiority (and maybe even His divinity), so he's understandably confused by this request.

If John's baptism was for repentance, then why would Jesus need it? He didn't have any sin!

- So John tries to prevent Him (vs. 14), but Jesus answers in a surprising way.
- The first words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel are in vs. 15- "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness". The 1st words of any character are important.

Jesus is asking John to do something out of the ordinary, outside the confines of his understanding, and outside the boundaries of old orthodoxy.

- Jesus is inviting John (and all of us) into a world that is beyond our understanding and asking us to be a part of a new reality that lies beyond our old ways of thinking.
- Experiencing that reality involves obedience to Jesus- "then he consented" (vs. 15b).

As Jesus came up out of the water (vs. 16), the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended "like a dove" coming to rest on Him.

- The voice of Father God from heaven spoke (vs. 17).
- We see at Jesus' baptism all three members of the Trinity- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bearing witness to a new work and beginning.

This is the inauguration of Jesus' earthly ministry- where He will carry out the will of His Father (Jn 5:19) and be led by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 4:1) in the mission of redeeming humanity.

- Why exactly was Jesus baptized? First, His baptism gave approval to John's ministry.
- Secondly, it was to identify Himself with sinners and to provide us an example of what entrance into the Kingdom looks like.

We're also to be baptized, just as Jesus was.

- **Our baptism is a symbol of union with Christ (Col. 2:12), our forgiveness of sins (Titus. 3:5), and the beginning of the new life we find in Christ (Acts 2:41).**
- We may not understand it all, but we're to be obedient to Jesus' command, just like John.
- Jesus' baptism also pointed to His future "baptism" on the cross, where He would be "immersed" in the fire of God's judgment.

"I love you" "I'm pleased with you"

Will you **relent & repent**? Will you **believe and receive**?