

# Matthew 3

Chapter 3, Matthew chapter 3.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for, and pray your spirit would give us understanding and Lord, apply to our lives, our hearts what is being said here. Lord, we don't want just an intellectual understanding of history or of facts, Lord, but we want the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts some very critical truths here that will help us in our daily walk with you, Lord.

I pray for a great move of your spirit this morning, that eyes are opened, hearts are opened, and we take another step closer to you, another step in this journey of discipleship learning to put self aside and to let Christ be exalted. That's what it's all about. And so, Lord speak, I pray in Jesus name.

Matthew chapter 3, verse 1. *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" 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.' "*

*Now 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.*

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees 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 ax 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. 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. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

So here we have John the Baptist appearing out in the wilderness. Really, it's desert that the scripture is talking about here. So John the Baptist is out in the desert. Really this unique character dressed in camel's hair, leather belt about his

waist eating locust, wild honey for food and calling people to repent, to prepare the way of the Lord to make their path straight.

This is the ministry of John calling people to prepare their hearts, for the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And often when we think of John the Baptist, or maybe we see him in these Hollywood movies, he's kind of this angry guy. Obviously, his hair is way out here and just kind of this wild guy, kind of an angry edge to him. I really think a misunderstanding. A misrepresentation because I think with John, there was a real excitement in his heart about the kingdom of God that was coming. I think that's where his focus was. It was, hey, there's something great about to happen. There's something exciting, happy. The Messiah is coming. The kingdom of God is coming.

John was looking forward to that. He was excited. And I believe his heart was to say, hey guys, get ready for that. Prepare your hearts. It wasn't a condemnation, a heavy-handed repent of your sins. God's mad at you. He's coming to get you.

No, it's like, God loves you. He's coming to meet you. The Messiah is coming. The kingdom of God is coming. Wake up! This is exciting. This is good. This is glorious. Are your hearts ready though to receive him? Are your hearts prepared? This is what John's message was. And of course, that's the message for us. If we don't know Christ today, if we've never accepted him into our heart, we need to repent.

I'm going to talk more about what that word means. But we need to prepare our hearts. We need to say, Lord, my heart's ready. Come on in. Come on in. Or if we're believers and we already know the Lord, we need to walk in this every day. This repentance, this humility, this preparation of our hearts for the Lord to come every day and for his kingdom to come, his rulership to be in our life.

It's a daily thing. Have you noticed that every day you have got to start over. You have to die daily and say, Lord, I set aside my agenda and I want your kingdom to come. But you look at the word repentance. What is that? What's he talking about so often. I think we have too narrow of a definition of what repentance is.

We might see a guy with his billboard on saying, "You must repent, the end of the world is coming." Or this kind of angry sort of attitude. I don't know if you saw in the news a few weeks ago, these guys who would show up at funerals of people who died of AIDS. And basically, they have signs saying "You deserve it. You're sinners. You deserve it. He's in hell right now." Whoa. What is wrong with you people? What kind of, representation is that of Christ, going to a

funeral of somebody who died of AIDS and slamming them, condemning them? That is not, I believe, the heart of God. But often that's how we get this kind of preconceived idea of repentance.

This angry sort of, just turn from your sin. Now, there is some truth to that, right? I mean, God is angry with the wicked every day, the Bible says, and we're not to minimize that. And if you will not repent, if you refuse to accept God's will, there is a burning indignation. The Bible talks about that. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We never want to minimize that message. But I think there's a deeper message of repentance in the scripture here, especially for us believers. And that is of humbling our hearts and saying, I can't do it, Lord. I'm not able in myself in any way, Lord. I ask your kingdom, your power, your Holy Spirit to come and empower me to live righteously every day.

You see what I'm saying? Because we, as Christians, we can almost be kind of proud, like, well, I've repented. I don't smoke and I don't chew and I don't go with those who do and all that kind of thing. It's like I'm pretty good.

I told you guys a story when I was a young Christian. How I had come out of drugs and alcohol and smoking, all the immorality. And the Lord delivered me out of all that. And I was just like, I'm like two months into being a Christian, I'm like, well, I'm pretty much done. I'm clean, I'm righteous, I'm good. Because I was, as far as I saw myself a good person. Because I didn't do those sinful things anymore.

And I think that's a misunderstanding. God wants to take us to a deeper place. Of us setting our agenda aside, our self rulership, our self righteousness, our self motives. That's a deep work that God has to do. This is what John is talking about here, where he says I baptize you with water, but He that is coming after me, he's going to do a deeper work in you.

He's going inside you, and he's going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. That's an inward work. That's an inward purification God wants to do in our hearts. But again, repentance is not just turning from those external kinds of obvious sins, but it's an attitude of your heart.

It's really a change of mind. I agree with you, God that I am in deep trouble. There is no good thing within me. Paul said that about himself as a Christian, within his flesh, there was no good thing within him. That's an understanding of

sin and repentance where we approach the Lord every day and say, within me, no good thing dwells.

Jesus said, you have no life within yourselves. Outside of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, there's no good thing within us. So a person who's not repentant, and we meet them all the time, don't we? I'm a pretty good person. I'm better than that guy. God should accept me like I am.

Well, that person doesn't understand repentance, right? Because they may be good by the world's standards. Maybe they don't rob banks, they don't cheat on their wife. They pay their taxes. And people think they're good because they're living up to some sort of standard of morality. But we've all fallen short of God's glory of that perfect standard of righteousness.

So we're not to measure ourselves by human goodness, but by the righteousness of Jesus. So repentance is saying, God, I'm not good. I'm not able, I agree with you. I'm in trouble. I need a Savior. So you're a believer. That's how you prepare your heart for Christ to come in.

I was thinking about this “preparing the way of the Lord.” This message that John is preparing the way for the Lord to make his path straight. I thought of how when an airplane comes and lands on a runway, where you want a straight runway, don't you? And you want a runway that's prepared, that there's no obstacles in the way, and it's important when a plane is going to land, that they clear all the obstacles.

I know, like on an aircraft, before the planes land, they have a whole line of guys walk across the whole landing strip and look for anything like a little bolt or anything that would be an obstruction for that plane to land. Because it only takes a little thing. So they're preparing the way for this airplane to come.

And I think this is the same message John is saying - the Lord wants to come, the Lord is coming, but you've got to prepare your way. Otherwise, what does a plane do? If it's coming down and sees an obstruction, it's not going to land. It's going to go around for another attempt, or go find another place to land, or it's going to radio in “hey, clear the runway.” And I think that's the message for us, as believers, is our heart in a place every day where the Lord can come and work powerfully? And some of us might say, well, I don't really experience the power of Christ. I hear people say that. Well, then I would ask you, is your heart prepared?

I know there are days where I'm not experiencing the power that I believe God would desire for me. And I have to ask myself, is my heart prepared? Is that runway of my heart clear of obstructions? And then you could say, well, what are you saying, Pastor Rick? I've got to get every little bit of sin out of my heart, and then God can come? Well, is that possible? No, that's not possible. I can examine my heart and say, well, I don't know of any obvious sin right now, God. But I think the preparation of the heart is this attitude of mind and heart saying, I don't have what it takes in any way. Lord, I need you. Now that's a heart that God can come and land on, that God can come and work with.

A scripture in Isaiah talks about how God, he's a high and holy one, when he dwells in the heavens above. And yet He says, this is the one to whom I will look. He who is of a broken and a contrite spirit. That's the same thought. It's the same truth. God says, this is the one I can work with. He's looking for hearts that are broken, contrite, humble, saying, I need help.

I need you today. And you know what? If as a believer, if we come to the Lord with that humility, that brokenness every day, guess what's going to happen? The power of the spirit is going to come and live in you and empower you. Now what we see here is a contrast where the Pharisees and the Sadducees are coming to John and it seems like he's kind of angry with them. He's kind of harsh with them. He says, you brood of vipers, who woke you up again. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

And I think it was perhaps not so much anger, but it was kind of surprise. I mean, this is the baptism of repentance. People are coming here confessing sin, confessing their inability, confessing their need. You guys don't have needs. You're Pharisees, you're proud. You've got all your religious garb on. You think you're set, you think you're above everybody else.

You can almost see them standing there, all crowded together talking, looking at John. They're like a brood. A brood of vipers is like a snake pit. They're all these snakes together, and they wouldn't want to be defiled by all these sinners. And there's this attitude of self-righteousness, and that's the way we know what was going on in their hearts.

What does John say to them? He says, hey, don't think to say to yourself, we have Abraham for our father. In other words, you guys, you brood of vipers, you're trusting in your own righteousness, you're trusting in your heritage, you're trusting in your religion. We're sons of Abraham. We're set. I follow the law. I'm a Pharisee. I'm good.

You think that heart is prepared for God to come and dwell in? That's a proud, self-righteous heart. But I will tell you, we as believers, I think, have many areas in our hearts where we're proud and we're self-righteous and we're doing it on our own. And I believe that is that fiery baptism that the Lord wants to do in each of our hearts daily.

And when you go through difficulties, I believe God is trying to get you to let go of self-dependence, self-righteousness. Now, it's not that you're doing it on purpose, that you're standing on your own, it's just so deeply embedded in our hearts, this self-righteousness that only a work of Jesus Christ by the power of his spirit and fiery trials, he takes us through, are we able to let go of self and have that kind of repentant heart. Paul talks about this over in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and just these fiery trials that he was going through that God was doing a work in his heart to get him to let go of self. And Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 8, we do not want you to be ignorant brethren of our trouble, which came to us in Asia.

Now listen to the trouble Paul had. I believe one of the greatest men of God that ever lived is such an example for us. "Trouble came to us. We were burdened beyond measure." You ever feel that burdened beyond measure, above strength, do you ever feel like that? You know what? God lets you get into that place often as Christians and that doesn't sound fun.

Well, that's a path of discipleship and it's worth it because the Lord can work in our hearts. But he was burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. Now there it is.

We had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. That's why God let these fiery trials come upon him so that he would learn not to trust in himself. That is, I believe our number one problem as Christians is we trust in ourselves, like these Pharisees. They trusted in themselves - we have Abraham for our father, we're good.

I've been a Christian for 30 years. I'm good. I know the scripture. I'm good. I've been doing this, whatever I do, I've been serving the Lord in this area. I'm good. Well, no, and God takes us through these difficulties to show us hey, wake up. You're depending on yourself. Prepare your heart. Humble your heart. See, I can't do it, God.

And it's different areas in our life that God works. I know. There was a time where I kind of prided myself. I was a prayer warrior and I didn't understand

why other people couldn't pray like I was. And there was really an element of pride there. And I'd kind of caught the vision for reading books on prayer. I remember having a discussion with somebody like, I don't understand why other Christians don't get this, why they don't pray as diligently as we do, and God really humbled my heart and it brought me to a point where, Rick, you can't pray, you don't know how to pray at all.

He humbles your heart to where, now, I approach prayer and I'm like, I don't know how to pray as I ought. Lord, let the Holy Spirit pray in me and through me and give me the prayer life of Jesus Christ. And the pride has been kind of burned out, and I'm sure there's much more that needs to be burned out, but that, I believe, is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we would not trust in ourselves.

And of course, there's many examples in scriptures of this. I was sharing with a couple of guys at breakfast yesterday. Just this revelation the Lord gave me yesterday morning about God working pride out of us. And it's a story in Luke, I think it's chapter 8, where Jesus was with his disciples and he said, Hey, we're going to go to the other side of the sea of Galilee.

They got in the boat and they launched out, and I just got this sense from reading the story that the disciples, and I'm using a little, sanctified imagination here, but I think it's valid that the disciples, Peter, James, John, they're fishermen, right? They're going to launch out, they're going to go to the other side.

Jesus said, we're going to the other side. It's like, everybody get in, we're in charge now. See, we know how to do this now, Jesus. You know how to preach, you know how to do that. We know how to sail a boat across the sea. We can do that. And they launched out, they were ready to go.

And there's this sort of self-dependence, depending on my experience, my ability, not depending on Jesus Christ, humbly depending on him. And what happens? Well, the wind starts picking up. The boat starts filling with water. I can see them, starting to bail. They can't bail fast enough, and now fear starts to grip them.

They start to panic and Jesus is asleep. I can imagine a little earlier on - the wind is just right and the sails, they're making good time across and Jesus is asleep. Isn't that sweet? He's sleeping. We're just kind of, watching over him and taking care of him and giving him a ride to the other side.

And, everything's good, and the wind starts picking up, the boat starts filling up, and all of a sudden it's like, wake him up, we're perishing, we're dying, we're going to die, we're going to sink. That's what happens with us. We think we're cool, we think we're good. We've got it all together in this area.

And then the wind starts picking up, the water starts coming in and it's like, oh man, this never happened before. I was able to handle this. And God says, no you weren't. You're doing it in your own strength. You're not recognizing the supreme son of God is in the boat with you. Your heart isn't humble.

Your heart isn't ready for me to rule and reign in. You think you're ruling, you think you're on top of the world. I'm going to let you sink a little bit here so you'll get your eyes on Jesus and his ability and who he is. That's the whole point. We're humbled. He's exalted in every area of our life, and that's what I see God doing in my life, area after area, this fiery baptism.

He's wanting me to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to humble me. Of course, you know the story where they woke Jesus up and he spoke to the wind and the waves. Peace be still and it calmed. And they were like, wow, who is this guy that even the wind and waves obey him, but that's where God wants us, our eyes back on Jesus.

See, who is he? Well, he's the son of God. He's our creator. He's the Lord of all. He's the king of king. So he's to be the Lord of every area of my life, and my eyes are to be on him and my heart's to be humble in his presence. Recognizing my inability, recognizing his ability. And then the Lord said to them, hey, what's wrong with you guys?

Where is your faith? Where is your faith? In other words, why aren't you trusting me? And I think that's again, a question for us in our lives. Hey, where's our faith? The fiery trial comes, the difficulty comes, and I believe it's God working in our hearts to prepare our hearts for a deeper work of his Holy Spirit.

So John preached this message of repentance. A baptism of repentance. You see John taking someone, dipping them in the water, bringing them back up. Of course that represents death. Going under the water represents death and coming up to new life. That's what he's trying to show you.

That's what should be going on in your heart. I'm demonstrating something here externally. Spiritually, this is what should be happening to you. A death to self and new life now. Then he says, but I baptize you with water. In other words, I



can only do this, a limited work, but he who is coming after me, is mightier than I, and I'm not even worthy to unloose his sandals.

He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. So now see Jesus standing there, baptizing. What does he do? Jesus takes you under and brings you up. We are going to talk more about that next week where Jesus was baptized, but I think it's important we understand that it's Jesus that does this internal work in you of death and life.

You have to come to him. You can't make this happen yourself every day. We're to prepare our hearts, to humble our hearts. I can't, Lord, but you can. Here I am. Will you baptize me? Will you let me identify with your death on the cross? I want to die with you daily. I want to be raised with you daily. But Jesus, you're the one who does that baptism.

You're the one who takes me under, brings me up, does this internal work in me. He talks about, separating the wheat from the chaff and the chaff being unusable. The part of the wheat that you can't eat. It's not of any value. So the Lord is working to burn up that chaff in our lives, those things that aren't of any value to him.

That's the purifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. To conclude this morning, let's just think daily, coming to the Lord and saying, Lord, I want my heart to be prepared for you to come in the fullness of your spirit this day. Lord Jesus, I don't really have anything of value in myself, but yet you love me.

I have no righteousness in myself. Lord, I need your righteousness. So my heart is prepared. My heart's humbled before the Lord. The Bible says God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. So he's working out these proud areas in our heart, and we're to just come before him humbly saying Lord I cannot, in my own strength, please you. Lord, would you baptize me?

Can I identify with your cross, by dying to self, rising to new life? And you burn away, Lord, those things in my life that are displeasing to you.

So let's close in prayer. Lord, we pray this morning that the pride that is obstructing the fullness of your work in our lives, Lord, we would humble ourselves, even now. Lord, we need you in every area of our life.

And Lord, as you allow us to go through trials, that we not panic with the wind and the waves, but we'd look over at you and just say, Lord, it seems like you don't care. It seems like you're asleep, but I know you're in control and you're

doing an internal work in my heart that I might learn not to trust in my own abilities anymore, but to trust in your abilities, not to try to change myself, but to let you change me. That our eyes would be on Jesus and that our self would die. Christ would be exalted. So, Lord, baptize us in the power of your spirit. Our hearts long for that, Lord. You said blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God. We are poor in spirit.

Blessed are they who mourn. They shall be comforted. We mourn for our state of sin. So we come to you humbly, praying that you give us understanding of this internal work that you want to do Lord, that we would learn not to trust in ourselves. As Paul learned, all those trials came to him, so he would trust in the living God.

So speak to each one this morning, Lord.

Let's just take a moment here and ask the Lord, speak to our hearts, show us those things that would be prideful, where we have pride and we need to set that aside and let the Lord do his work in us. Lord, we long for that. We desire that. Baptize us Lord in the power of your spirit.

Let us identify with your death on the cross, daily. The power of sins, broken through the cross, raised to new life daily, Lord, as we humbly look to you. Amen.

Let's close in a song and then you'll be dismissed. Let's all stand.