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Matthew 3
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Discussion Questions:

1. When Matthew says, “In those days”, what do you think it would be like for John the Baptist to minister today?
2. Why do you think repentance is so crucial to God’s message? What might be “fruits worthy of repentance” for us?
3. How do “religious people” get off track like the Pharisees?
4. Have you been baptized? What brought you to be baptized?
5. To you, what is most interesting and relevant about the three things that happened at Jesus baptism? (Heavens opened, Spirit descending, voice of God being well pleased)

Jesus is the true and rightful king bringing...
...the kingdom of heaven to earth.

He has the genealogy, the parents, the prophecies, He was protected and He is the faithful Son of God.

Just as the Jewish nation was born in Israel and fled for safety to Egypt, Jesus and His family also fled to Egypt.

In Egypt the Jewish nation grew and developed.
And Jesus also grew and developed in Egypt.

As Moses the first prophet, declared the Law of God to the people of God...

...so too John the Baptist the last of the prophets would declare God’s word to the people.

The nation was baptized as they crossed the Jordan River and we will see today that Jesus will also be baptized in the Jordan River.

Jesus the faithful Son compared to Israel, the unfaithful son.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, **2** and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

There are a few things here to understand.

First, in those days...Jesus has grown, Rome is great, and Israel is longing for salvation and freedom.

The wilderness is the training ground of prophets. Moses met God in the wilderness, David hid in the wilderness, God provided for Elijah in the wilderness.

Nearly all of God’s people go through the wilderness. John the Baptist lives there.

And his message is simple and hard.

Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

This is a message of faith.

The kingdom of heaven had not arrived yet...

...but they were still called to action...

...And that action is repentance.

In other words, “Something is coming, make some changes.”

Repentance is a key theme in the Bible and Matthew’s gospel. It means to turn around, to go the other direction.

Repent was the *first word* of John the Baptist’s gospel ([Matthew 3:1-2](#)).

Repent was the *first word* of Jesus' gospel (Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15).

Repent was the *first word* in the preaching ministry of the twelve disciples (Mark 6:12).

Repent was the *first word* in the preaching instructions Jesus gave to His disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:46-47).

Repent was the *first word* of exhortation in the first Christian sermon (Acts 2:38).

Repent was the *first word* in the mouth of the Apostle Paul through his ministry (Acts 26:19-20).

Here is also our first mention of the kingdom of heaven.
The kingdom that is coming is not a physical or earthly kingdom. This is a heavenly, spiritual kingdom.

And now Matthew will identify with another OT quotation.

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.' "

This is from Isaiah 40.

Again, Jews would think of the context of this quotation. This is a chapter of comfort and restoration, and a reminder of who it is who is coming.

Let's take a look...

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!"
Says your God.

2

“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,
That her warfare is ended,
That her iniquity is pardoned;
For she has received from the Lord’s hand
Double for all her sins.”

The punishment of captivity is over and...
...God is bringing back His people.
God doesn’t ignore sin, He punishes it.

But the punishment of 70 years of exile is over.

Now God wants His people to know the comfort of peace and forgiveness.

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.

Notice what it is? A highway for God.

Jesus is Divine King that is coming.
And the king is coming from the desert, thru the desert.

**When the king came someone would go ahead.
The advance man gets everything ready.**

4

Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made [c]straight
And the rough places smooth;

In order to get things ready, they need to know there is something that needs to be addressed.

You think things are fine until someone comes in and starts pointing out stuff that is not right.

This is John the Baptist...he is pointing out the areas that need to be addressed for the king to come in.

Since the kingdom is not physical, it is not roads, but hearts that need to be ready.

The hearts need to acknowledge their need for a savior, their crooked places, the rough places.

5

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see *it* together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
What will they see? The glory of the Lord.

6

The voice said, “Cry out!”
And he said, “What shall I cry?”
“All flesh *is* grass,
And all its loveliness *is* like the flower of the field.

7

The grass withers, the flower fades,
Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
Surely the people *are* grass.

8

The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.”

9

O Zion, You who bring good tidings,
Get up into the high mountain;
O Jerusalem,
You who bring good tidings,
Lift up your voice with strength,
Lift *it* up, be not afraid;
Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

10

Behold, the Lord God shall come [e]with a strong *hand*,
And His arm shall rule for Him;
Behold, His reward *is* with Him,
And His [f]work before Him.

11

He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry *them* in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.

What an obvious and beautiful picture of the Lord!
Coming from Judah.
He is God.
He shall rule, He shall work,
He shall feed His flock
He is a good shepherd and cares for his lambs.

To hear what John says about himself is also to get a clue of who Jesus is.

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

This is a classic description.

Gabriel said in Luke 1, "John will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah"

Elijah the prophet came in the wilderness dressed with either a garment of hair or he was hairy with a leather belt.

Elijah's ministry was very similar to John the Baptist.

- Both anointed with same spirit and power.
- Both familiar with deserts and solitude.
- Both boldly rebuked kings and were sought after by the king
- Both were discouraged and doubted at times
- Both incurred enmity of the queen
- Both were preachers of righteousness
- Both lived simply and were hairy.

5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

So after 400 years of no prophetic word...John was a rockstar.

There were people in the book of Acts that did not know Jesus but they knew the baptism of John.

Baptism was not a new thing.

But, it was a sign of new life, new commitment, change.
They come to confess their sin and be baptized as a sign.

So if Jesus is going to establish his kingdom in their hearts...
...it is their hearts that needs to be ready.

Seeing our sin helps us to realize our need for a Savior.

But then some other people show up...
...and John is going to lay into them.

7 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?”

Pharisees and Sadducees were the religious leaders of the day. Sadducees were the religious elite supported by Jewish leaders.

Pharisees were the religious conservatives of the day. They believed in obeying the Law, and being “separate.” They compiled the Mishnah
Modern day synagogues are due to their work.
...But their traditions and rules overstepped God’s word.

The desire for power, control and man’s traditions corrupted them. They were known for being hypocrites so John calls them vipers.

8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, **9** 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.

“Bear fruits worthy of repentance” means ongoing results.

Don’t think you are off the hook because of who you are related.
Don’t think you are off the hook because of who you know.
No one is off the hook...being a child of Abraham is nothing.

Most Jews, like some Christians would say, I am not a sinner.
My parents went to church.
I attended VBS and summer camp.
I got baptized twice and went forward three times.

10 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. **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.

12 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.”

John’s message is of a judgment that is coming.

And an opportunity to have the Spirit and fire.

Some think this is the fire of Pentecost others judgment of fire.

Jesus is the one that God has given the authority to judge.

He will separate the wheat and the chaff.

He knows the hearts and He has paid the way.

This last scene is so interesting...

13 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?”

15 But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit *it to be* so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.

So Jesus is fulfilling all righteousness because it is “fitting.”

He always does what the Father directs and He is signaling the new beginning of His ministry life.

16 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.”

We don't get the feeling that everyone saw this.

Heavens were opened...

The Spirit of God descended like a dove

A voice came from heaven

This heavenly opening opened up His ministry.

This Spirit descending empowered His ministry.

This voice encouraged His ministry.

Jesus is the faithful and pleasing Son of God.

And as we are in Christ...we also experience some of this.

We minister with heaven's will being done.

We minister with Holy Spirit power

We minister with God's pleasure.