

Matthew 3:1–17

1. John announces the arrival of the kingdom of heaven by telling people to “change your hearts and lives!” In what ways do you think people then needed to change their hearts and lives to live in the way God intended? In what ways do you think people today (including you!) need to change their hearts and lives to live in God’s kingdom?
2. John reserves his sharpest critique for the religious leaders (Sadducees and Pharisees), who he thinks are looking for an easy liturgical fix rather than doing the difficult work of actually changing their hearts and lives. Why do you think it is so hard for the Sadducees and Pharisees to acknowledge that they need to change their hearts and lives? In what ways (if any) do you think it is similarly difficult for religious people to make such changes today?
3. John’s baptism marks a rite of passage for people from one way of life to another way of life. The new way of life is called “the kingdom of heaven,” and presumably the old way of life could be called “the kingdom of Rome.” Do you see baptism today as similarly calling you away from one way of life and into another? How would you contrast the kingdom of heaven to the other way(s) of life available to you today?
4. When Jesus is baptized, he hears a voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him.” Do you think people today are similarly beloved by God today? In what ways do you experience yourself as dearly beloved by God? How does it feel to think that God finds happiness in you?