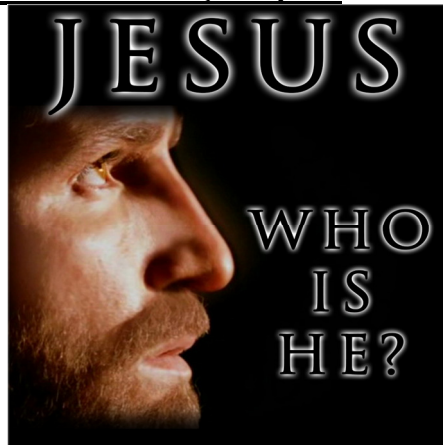


Matthew 3:1-12, Jesus: Who is He? “Redeemer of Repentance”

5.24.15

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapt. 3. This morning, we continue in our series:



And we're going to see another attribute of Jesus: as the “Redeemer of Repentance.”

As we come to chapter three this morning in Matthew's gospel, may I remind us all that Matthew is presenting Jesus as King, as the Messiah to a Jewish audience who has been looking for and praying for the Messiah for centuries. Matthew's approach was simply this: Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and since He is the King, then he needs a “herald” to announce his arrival. That herald is a man named John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:1

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

Matthew says, “John the Baptist came preaching.” The word for “preaching” in the Greek is “kerusso.” It means: “to announce, proclaim or herald.” That was John's job...to herald and announce: THE KING IS COMING!!

Now I want to jump down to verse 4, because I really want to introduce you to John before we start looking at what he is preaching and the message he is heralding.

Matthew 3:4

4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Let me show you a picture of what John might have looked like...



We know John didn't cut his hair or shave. He wore a garment of camel's hair, which is very durable and very tough. He had the attire of a man living out in the wilderness. Quite simply-he needed that kind of clothing for that terrain. He was living an ascetic lifestyle away from the world. He was separated and set apart and many would say, an austere, "PECULIAR." But, as I was thinking about the Christian life...isn't that how we should be living: set apart from the culture at hand. We're in the world, but not of it. We're called to be a peculiar people.

Here's a picture of him eating...



Yikes! Is that a locust he's eating? According to Leviticus 11:22, eating locusts was allowed. Do you know that Israelis still eat locusts? Here's a plate full from an Israeli restaurant:



Yuck! I don't care if you mix those things with a few pieces of celery or not...I'm not eating them. It's like a man who asked me one time if I'd like to eat some escargot. I said, "Did you ask me if I wanted to, "Get in the car and go?" No I'm not eating snails and I'm not eating locusts, **but John did**, because there wasn't a grocery store around there and locusts were plentiful and I guess he mixed it with honey and got by with it! 😊

Now, we know that John was baptizing people in the wilderness of Judea in the Jordan River.



On the right, you'll see where the Jordan River runs into the Dead Sea. The area to the left or west is the area known as the Judean wilderness. I was there in 2007. It is so arid, dry and desolate. This is a picture from our tour bus headed down to the Dead Sea area, where the Jordan empties into it.



The Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth (1400 feet below Sea Level). Here's another picture:



You can see it's a very bleak area and this is where John was ministering. John needed solitude and he needed water so that he could do his baptizing in the Jordan River. Here's how that might have looked:



This is why he is often called, “John the Baptist” or “John the Baptizer.” John is the first cousin of Jesus and was born 6 months before Jesus (Luke 1:26). His name, “John,” means: “Jehovah graciously gave.” Jesus said this about John:

Matthew 11:11

11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

So, we see that Jesus had high praise for John and now that we know a little more about who John is, we can look now at the message (as Herald) that he was preaching:

Matthew 3:2-3

2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

I told you earlier that John is acting as a Herald to the coming king. Did you know that a herald in John’s day would also make certain that the way is prepared and passable on the road the king was travelling? They would literally make the paths straight and fill potholes. It was very important that a King not be delayed.

Now what was John preaching? It could really be summed up in the first word of verse 2: REPENT. The Greek word is “metanoeo” and it means to change course, about face, change direction, do a 180, change your will, be converted. It’s more than being sorry. You can be sorry that you got caught, but not change your direction. The word “repent” means you have been regenerated, converted, born again. It’s a change of mind that leads to a change of ways. Paul describes it as this:

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Why was John “heralding” this? Simple. Jesus, as King of Kings, demands that you repent and receive Him as Lord. Why? Because John knew that Jesus wanted people’s hearts, so John is calling for the people to remove all the obstacles from their lives that might hinder them from receiving the Messiah and His kingdom into their hearts.

And did you know that Jesus wants the same from us today? Jesus wants our hearts! He wants our lives! But, He can't have your life until you are converted and you can't be converted unless you repent. You see, in order for you and I to be able to receive Jesus, we must repent and that's what John's baptism represented.

Listen, Jesus wants our lives, but He can't have our lives until we do something about the sin in our lives. Listen...to be able to TURN TO Christ...we must TURN AWAY from something and that something is ourselves and our sin! Do you understand...you and I cannot be converted and changed by Jesus Christ until we first recognize that we're sinners and repent? In other words, there is no forgiveness and there is no salvation without the confession and repentance of our sin and that confession and repentance can only happen if we choose to accept by faith, the free gift of eternal life offered to us by Jesus. But the first step must be: REPENTANCE and that's exactly what John was preaching! So what happened?

Matthew 3:5-6

5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Let me show you this map again.



Matthew records that the entire region of Judea was coming out to this desolate place to be baptized by John. Many of them were literally camping out along the Jordan to hear him preach...



but, it wasn't just the average, common people who were coming, there were others coming too.

It's about to get a little tense...

Matthew 3:7

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Oh wow! The religious leaders show up: the Sadducees and the Pharisees! Can you picture them in all their religious garb...in their wealth and arrogance standing there on the banks of the Jordan River watching John baptize. I can just see them looking down their pious noses and JOHN WAS ON TO THEM! He saw right through them to the core of why they came.

The Sadducees and Pharisees hadn't come to be baptized. No way! Jews didn't get baptized...only Gentiles converting to Judaism as a proselyte was ever baptized. No! They were there because everybody and their brother was going out here and they were intimidated. They were losing their people from the Temple and the synagogues in Jerusalem and Judea and they've come to check this out.

You see, I'm convinced these guys saw that their religious influence was slipping and they were coming out there to make it look like they were going to get in on John's deal so they could move in and take it over. I believe they were thinking, "Hey...if this guy is going to take all the people, then we've got to be willing to go out there and make it look like we want in on it too."

But John knows better and he calls them snakes! Look at it again...

Matthew 3:7

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Let me tell you about the word, "viper." That one word is the word John would use to describe these men, because it's with the one word that exposes the truth about these men. The word "viper" in the Greek is "ek-id-na." It refers to a small, very poisonous, desert snake that anyone in the first century would know about.



These snakes are very hard to distinguish from a stick lying on the ground. In fact, you might remember from our study of the book of Acts that Paul was gathering sticks for a fire in Acts 28 on the island of Malta and was bitten by a viper but miraculously he didn't die. The inhabitants of the desert region there in Judea were very careful when building fires because of vipers...so when John called the Pharisees and Sadducees "vipers," everyone knew what he was alluding to... They were fakes!

They were trying to make it look like they were interested in coming to hear John's message, but they were like a viper lying in the grass trying to look like a stick, so they could attack their prey! And you know who the originator of this whole deal is don't you? None other than Satan, who slithered his way into the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to deceive all of mankind with the bite of that forbidden fruit.

You know Jesus called the Sadducees and Pharisees a "brood of vipers" too, don't you? Matthew records it in...

Matthew 23:33

33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

So, here's John and he's on to these phonies and he's now going to tell all the crowds who are listening to him how they can tell that these guys are phonies.

Matthew 3:8

8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Do you know how you can tell if someone is saved and they aren't faking it? By looking for the fruit of the spirit in their life. John said, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." What is the fruit? Well it's the fruit of the Spirit of course: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**. That's what you'll see in the life of a Christian. Hey, can anyone see that kind of fruit in your life?

Jesus said, "You will know people by the fruit they bear." John was saying, "If you guys are the real deal, you should be bearing fruit that proves it." And that's true of all of us here today.

If you are truly a follower of Jesus Christ, you ought to be living like it. Faith without works is dead. You and I will never prove that we have repented and received Jesus Christ, unless there is the fruit of repentance...the evidence that shows in our lives. It's got to be visible. True repentance will manifest itself in a changed life!

Listen...do you want to know how God evaluates repentance? Fruit! By our fruit...by our works. You see, if we have truly been born again, we will bear fruit and it will be evident to everyone by looking at our lives. There will be no guesswork...it will be as obvious as the nose on your face.

But, John is going to go even one step further, because it appears he was able to read their minds when he said:

Matthew 3:9-10

9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. **10** Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John knew what these pious, pompous guys were thinking. They were thinking, "Hey, we're sons of Abraham! We are part of the chosen seed of God! We're in the kingdom of God just because of who we are!" John said, "No you're not!" John said, "God doesn't need you. In fact, he could raise up these rocks as His children if He wanted to!"

“Nope,” John said, “You’ve got it all wrong! The axe is laying right at the root of your life and you are getting ready to be cut down and thrown into fire (hell), so you better repent before it’s too late!”

Wow! What a scathing message. Yep...John preached the truth and it was so powerful and confrontational, that it would cost him his head, which was given to Herodias (King Herod’s wife), when he them they were living in adultery. He would be decapitated because he told the truth. But, telling the truth was what John was sent to do and that’s what he did when he preached repentance!

And now John is going to point to the King...

Matthew 3:11-12

11 “I baptize you with water for 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 fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Do you know those terms: “winnowing fork” and “threshing floor?” We don’t use them much in our day. But, threshing and winnowing is still done in many cultures. See this picture:



The man is taking the winnowing fork, which is literally like a large wooden fork, that looks like a leaf rake and he takes it and scoops up wheat and tosses it into the air and the wheat is heavy and will fall to the ground, while the chaff will be blown away and then gathered to be burned.

Do you understand the analogy John is using? Those who are saved are the wheat...there is substance...there is fruit...it’s heavy. The chaff is fake...it’s false...there’s no substance...it will be gathered and burned. You see, the granary of God for the saved is heaven, while the fire for the lost is hell. One day, Jesus is going to separate the real from the fake...the saved from the lost. But, He came to give the lost a chance. He came to seek and save that which is lost and He came preaching the same message of repentance that John did.

You’ll see in Matthew, chapter 4.

Matthew 4:17

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

When Jesus sent out the 12 apostles He gave them instructions to tell people to repent:

Mark 6:10-12

10 And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. **11** And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” **12** So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

Jesus, as he travelled throughout Israel denounced the cities who would not repent. Matthew records in Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:20-21

20 Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. **21** “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

You see the Gospel is bound up in repentance and it’s the same message Peter preached at Pentecost:

Acts 2:37-38

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” **38** And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul preached the same message on Mars Hill at the Areopagus in Athens when he said:

Acts 17:30

30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

If you go all the way to the book of the Revelation, you will see that Jesus is still preaching repentance. Jesus said to the church at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:5

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Jesus said to the church at Laodicea:

Revelation 3:19

9 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Indeed, Jesus came to seek and save that which is lost. And the only way to go from being lost to being saved is to travel through the conduit of repentance. It’s the only way. You see, Jesus is the Redeemer of Repentance and it’s the message of His Gospel...the Good News...that we can be born again, converted, regenerated, and given eternal life because we recognized we were sinners

and were hopeless and helpless without a Savior.

But, we've got to come to that place in our lives and understand the absolute essentialness of repentance...much like the Prodigal Son.



He had to come to the place in his life that he was eating slop with the pigs, but then he repented. He hit rock bottom and it was there that he saw his need to repent. Some of the most beautiful words in all the Bible are found in Luke 15:17: "And he came to his senses." Luke recorded the young son's words:

Luke 15:18-24

18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." **20** And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. **21** And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' **22** But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. **23** And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. **24** For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

You want to know why they celebrated...because the young man came to his senses and repented. And this is what repentance looks like when we come to the Father...



Preacher, Dwight L Moody visited a Chicago prison in the late 1800's and he preached the Gospel to the inmates in the large open courtyard. After finishing his message, all the prisoners were returned to their cells. Moody asked if he could take a few minutes to visit with the prisoners. He was granted permission.

Moody walked past the first cell and he found two men playing cards and they said, "We're here because we were framed. We haven't done anything wrong."

Moody walked past a second cell and the man said, "What are you looking at...I don't belong here...they got the wrong man...they guilty guy got away."

Moody walked by a third cell and found a man on his knees beside his bunk crying out loud, "I am wrong! I did it! I did it! I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!" And it was there that Moody stopped.

Why? Because it was the man in the third cell who showed the fruit of repentance. He was ready. The others weren't. You see, like the Prodigal son and the inmate, true repentance means we no longer make excuses. We know longer care about other people's opinions. We quit listening to the devil and holding back. We come to our senses and we just want to go home! We know we have wronged the father and we just want to come home and make it right!

And you know what...when we do...when we repent...just like the Prodigal's father...God will receive us and kiss us and robe us with salvation.

Oh...do you need to repent today? Who is Jesus? He is our merciful and gracious, redeemer of repentance. So, I say with John, with Peter, with Paul and with Jesus, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."