

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church  
**Matthew 3:4-12 | Unoffended: Part 2**  
April 3, 2022

**WELCOME:**

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 3
- Bibles in back—our gift to you.

**REVIEW:**

I know it was several weeks ago that we looked at the Gospel of Matthew, but let's do a short review before we dive into ~~today's text~~ today's text.

Matthew introduced us to a new character in his Gospel.

And quite the character he is.

John the Baptizer...aka, Crazy John.

We learned how the last OT book—the book of Malachi, prophesied about John coming in the power and spirit of Elijah.

We learned about his miraculous birth—that John had the power of the Holy Spirit before he was even born.

We learned that John's father, Zechariah was a priest, but John left the priesthood to become a baptist!

After 400 years of God's silence toward's Israel, John shows up with a thunderous message for his people.

And that message is, "*Repent! Be Converted!*"

*You've been living your entire life the wrong way.*

*You're not a good person, and your self-absorbed self-righteousness has deceived you."*

Well, that was John's sermon—and its summarized in Scripture as, "***Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.***"

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Today, we learn more about the person of John the Baptizer.

Not only was John's message not what the Jews wanted to hear, but his very being/essence also raged against the world and its religion.

How so? Let's find out.

*\*Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.\**

### **SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:4-12 CSB**

**Matthew 3:1**—*In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea.*

**Matthew 3:2**—*and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!"*

**Matthew 3:3**—*For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said:*

***A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
Prepare the way for the Lord;  
make his paths straight!***

**Matthew 3:4**—*Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.*

**Matthew 3:5**— Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him,

**Matthew 3:6**— and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

**Matthew 3:7**— 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 coming wrath?"

**Matthew 3:8**— Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance.

**Matthew 3:9**— And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.

**Matthew 3:10**— The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

**Matthew 3:11**— "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**Matthew 3:12**— His winnowing shovel 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 fire that never goes out."

*\*\* This is the Word of the Lord for River Bible Church.*



**EXEGESIS:**

**Matthew 3:4**—*Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.*

Now, ladies, it may surprise you that John the Baptizer is single.

I heard that he was on match.com, so let's look at his profile pic.

➤ John's wardrobe matched his message, didn't it?

① John's physical appearance is a living sermon.

Everything about John is a rebuke—he chastises the luxuries this world offers us.

Why did John wear a camel-hair garment?

Because it was durable and cheap.

John's attire was also in direct opposition to the audacious flowing garb of the current religious leaders.

Now, let's not miss this—It's also a wake-up call for those of us today who spend way too much time shopping for our clothes.

It's a red flag for those of us who spend way too much time looking at ourselves in the mirror and complaining that we don't have enough.

John also had a leather belt.

Once again, his belt was not for fashion, but for durability.

So, in other words, John the Baptizer shows up after 400 years of God's silence, and he is a walking contradiction to the rest of Israel's leaders and a wake up call for us today,

+ The Pharisees and Sadducees we're well-dressed, well-fed, and sophisticated.

In other words, they are incredibly worldly—just like all of us.

I can't help notice that nothing has changed regarding these religious businessmen/religious politicians that we see today on YouTube with their name-brand clothes.

But one look at John, and you would assume that he's a homeless lunatic.

But we want to be careful judging a book by its cover.

Because the Jews also knew that John reminded them of another prophet—Elijah

+ **Matthew 3:4**— *and his food was locusts and wild honey.*

John's food was as simple as his clothing.

Mmmm... locusts!

John ate insects.

The desert locust is a large grasshopper.

The poor still eat today in the Middle East.

How do you eat locusts?

Is it roasted or baked? Locusts stew? Fried locusts? Do they taste like chicken?

Some people believe that Matthew is referring to a tree—

Because there was a certain tree that produced fruit, and it was nicknamed locusts.

It's incredible how people always want to lessen the truth and the reality of God's Word.

The further away we get from the actual narrative, the more we think we know about what happened during that time.

No, dear friends, locusts means locusts.

The honey that John ate was not something he picked up at the local grocery store, where it's processed and clean.

It was the wild honey where he put his hand in the actual hive or underneath the rock risking hundreds of bee stings every time he ate.

Once again, John is getting our attention today—to our own idol of food.

How picky are we when it comes to food?

And the amount of food?

Are we complaining/grumbling about eating the same old thing on a weekly basis?

Do we send things back to the restaurant because it's not exactly how we wanted it?

The main point is that John's life is a living protest against the world and all its luxuries.

Instead of grumbling about food, clothing, and shelter, we need to confess our attitude toward these things as sin.

We have more than enough today.



When was the last time you thanked God for the clothes on your back, the roof over your head, and the food in your fridge?

**Matthew 3:5**— Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him,

John is Israel's first prophet in four centuries.  
That alone draws attention.

On top of that, John's preaching had an immediate and dramatic impact on Israel.

People were walking all the way from Jerusalem—a two to three-day journey to hear John preach.

**Matthew 3:6**— and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

People came to listen to John, but they also came to be baptized by him.

Now today, we may not see anything unusual with this because we're used to seeing people being baptized and confessing sins.

However, John was baptizing Jews.

Jews don't get baptized.

Jews baptized Gentiles into Judaism, but Jews themselves were not baptized.

A Jew had to be ritually pure before entering the Temple.

And purity could be lost in many ways.

So the primary way of restoring a Jew's purity was through a *mikveh* (a pool of water.)

But this was not baptism.

So once again, we see John sticking it to the religious man here—

John was telling the Jews that their days of ritual purity were over.

Israel does not belong to God simply because of its heritage/external works.

They, too, must confess their sins and be baptized...just like everyone else.

Here's the deal.

John's baptism is a special baptism for the Jews.

It's not like the one that you and I participated in.

John's baptism is a sign of repentance that looks forward to the Messiah's coming.

John's role as a prophet was to prepare the Jews for Jesus.

And part of that preparation was a baptism of repentance.

Baptism: *baptidzo*, meaning "to totally immerse or dip."

The concept is like dipping a piece of cloth in a dye to change its color.

**Matthew 3:6**— *confessing their sins.*

We see here how baptism and the confession of sins are two sides of the same coin.

Someone once said that the only prayer God hears from a non-believer is the prayer of repentance.

The first step of repentance is confession.



When we confess our sins, we acknowledge that we are indeed sinners.

Remember the pop quiz from several weeks ago?

Where we learned that we are all lying, thieving, blasphemous adulterers with no hope of salvation except by the cross of Christ?

**+** *Psalm 51:3*—For I am conscious of my rebellion,  
and my sin is always before me.

Dear friends, this is why we must confess our sins on a daily basis.

**+** *Matthew 3:7*— 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 coming wrath?"

The Pharisees and the Sadducees are the religious <sup>VIP'S</sup> elites of the day.

The word *Pharisee* means "separated ones,"

They separated themselves not only from Gentiles, but from tax collectors and anyone else that they considered "sinners" (Luke 7:39).

They did the opposite of what they were supposed to do—

Israel was to spread the Good News of YWHW as the One True Living God to the other nations.

But they refused to do that—they separated themselves from other people instead of engaging with other people.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, were the ultraliberals at the other end of the Jewish religious spectrum.

They were religious businessmen and politicians—more business/political than religious.

They compromised their faith with politics, power, and money.

They didn't care about God, especially doctrine.

For example, they denied the existence of angels, the resurrection, and most things supernatural (Acts 23:6–8).

The Sadducees considered themselves masters of their own destinies.

And that's where they get their name— because <sup>of their belief system</sup> they are...sad-you-see.

The Pharisees and Sadducees didn't care for one another, even though their religiosity put them in the same camp as all other religions.

There are only two religions:

1. The Religion of Divine Accomplishment—Judeo Christian Faith
2. The Religion of Human Striving.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees based their eternal security on their own efforts.

It's a religion based on *outward* conformity to meet their own standards through their own self-effort.

**Matthew 3:7**— he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

Notice John didn't say, "Welcome Brothers! Welcome Rev. Dr. So and So! I've been expecting you."

Can you imagine walking into a new church and someone calling you and your family a brood of vipers?

Why is this man of God so harsh and direct?

Kind & Sensitive

John knew that they were not there to confess their sins and be baptized.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were way above all of this nonsense.

They were not there to participate in repentance—they were there to investigate what all the noise was about.

The Sanhedrin (similar to a religious supreme court) had some unofficial policy to conduct a formal investigation when they heard of anything dealing with the Messiah.

The investigation included two stages: 1) Observation 2) Interrogation.

And that's what we see here—the observation stage.

They were to do nothing but observe what was being said, taught, and done during this stage.

After a certain period of time, this committee went back to Jerusalem to give a report.

I would love to read that report, “He called us a brood of vipers!”

The Sanhedrin would then issue a verdict.

If they thought that the <sup>incident</sup> ~~movement~~ was significant enough to disrupt their careers, they would move to the second stage of interrogation.

But John doesn't give a rip about any investigation.

John knew that their problem was the same problem everyone else had.



*How does a sinner stand in the presence of a holy God?*

You can't, on your own.

And yet, God has provided a way that you can—it's through confession and repentance—but the Pharisees and Sadducees don't want anything to do with that.

***“Brood of vipers!”***— Your translation may read “offspring.”

The phrase means descendants or children.

Vipers are small poisonous desert snakes.

Vipers would have been quite familiar to John.

John chose his terminology very carefully here because young vipers often killed their mothers during the birth process.

*Vipers*  
They often looked like dead branches, and people would accidentally pick them up and get bit.

In fact, this happened to the apostle Paul when he was on the island of Malta.

He was gathering firewood to stay warm and got bit by a viper.

Jesus also borrowed this phrase from John.

The reason that John and Jesus liked the term “brood of vipers” is because it pointed to the Pharisee's and Sadducee's religious hypocrisy.

Like the desert viper, they too often appeared harmless, but their self-imposed brand of works based salvation was deadly.

**Matthew 3:7**— Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

We see more of John's personality come out here in verse seven.

Like many of you, he has the spiritual gift of sarcasm.

*"Who deluded you into thinking that you can escape God's wrath for your own sin?"*

The picture here in verse seven is that of a farmer burning his field after harvest.

Obviously, all the snakes and other critters that made their home in the field would flee from the fire.

**Matthew 3:8**— *Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance.*

So in verse seven, John calls the religious mucky-mucks, "vipers."

But maybe John is having second thoughts here in verse eight.

If any of these Pharisees and Sadducees change their minds, he tells them exactly what to do—produce good fruit.

Now Luke's Gospel tells us what this good fruit looks like in our lives.

John was speaking to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but look what happened.

**Luke 3:10**— *"What then should we do?" the crowds were asking him.*

**Luke 3:11**— *He replied to them, "The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same."*

**Luke 3:12**— *Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?"*

+ **Luke 3:13**— He told them, "Don't collect any more than what you have been authorized."

+ **Luke 3:14**— Some soldiers also questioned him, "What should we do?" He said to them, "Don't take money from anyone by force or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

Bearing fruit in keeping with repentance— changes us from the inside out.

Dear friends, if you have confessed your sins, been baptized yet, you're are still acting like the same grouchy, grumpy self-centered, self-righteous, arrogant person that you've always been— something is very wrong.

+ **KEYPOINT 1:**

*A "fruitless" Christian is no Christian at all.*

It's impossible for God to save your wretched soul through the imputed sacrifice of Jesus Christ and for you not to change.

There is a volitional side of repentance— there is a deliberate, voluntary, and intentional willingness to change.

Now the change is slow and gradual with lots of setbacks...but there is change, there will be fruit.

As James points out, "Faith, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17).

~~Your faith is dead.~~ You are still spiritually dead if you are not compelled unto good works.

Because <sup>true</sup> repentance always, always, always involves a changed life.

Our change is motivated by love—love of God and love for people.



Now we talked about the recognition and the confession of our personal sin.

But as John continues his sermon here, we learn that an intellectual confession is only the first step.

In fact, if we don't continue through this process of repentance, we could find ourselves in a perilous place.

Repentance is not a one and done deal.

If we stop here with confession, we tend to think that's all we need to do.

We see examples of this throughout all of Scripture:

1. Pharaoh admitted his sin but didn't repent. (Ex. 9:27),
2. Balaam admitted his sin but stopped there. (Num. 22:34),
3. Achan acknowledged his sin (Josh. 7:20),
4. King Saul confessed his sin (1 Sam. 15:24).
5. The rich young ruler went away sad but not repentant (Luke 18:23).
6. Even Judas confessed, "*I have sinned by betraying innocent blood*" (Matt. 27:4). JESUS

All of those men recognized their sin, yet none of them repented.

## KEYPOINT #2

*Repentance: Sorry enough to change.*

They were sorry from a worldly standpoint, but they were not sorry enough to change.

They were not sorry enough to stop doing what they've always done.

**2 Corinthians 7:10**— *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death.*

A truly repentant person is overwhelmed with guilt.

Not because they got caught, but because they primarily sinned against a holy God.

*That's the difference*

**Matthew 3:9**— And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.

Don't you hate when prophets read your minds?

God is not impressed by lineage.

No one avoids God's judgment because of his ancestry.

For us today, that means it doesn't matter if you grew up in a Christian home on the back's of your parent's faith.

John is saying, "*Abraham is your father? Big deal! You see these stones? God is able to create children from these stones with a snap of a finger!*"

In other words, "You're heart is as hard as a rock spiritually. You need to be converted."

BTW, remember the story about the Jewish rich man and the poor man named Lazarus?

Jesus said this...

**Luke 16:24**— 'Father Abraham!' he called out, 'Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame!'

The Pharisees should have recognized this.

+ **Ezekiel 36:25**— *I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols.*

+ **Ezekiel 36:26**— *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

God is the one who does the work of salvation for us—our fruit is proof of that salvation.

+ **Matthew 3:10**— *The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*

Do you see the urgency?

The kingdom of God is not going to come at some distant time.

No, no no. The picture is that one more swing of that ax and the tree will come crashing down.

That is how close things are.

At the end of every harvest season, the farmer would go through his vineyard looking for plants that didn't bear good fruit.

Farmers do this to prevent these unproductive trees from using all the nutrients in the soil.

In other words, a fruitless tree is a worthless tree.

A useless fruit tree is only good for one thing—firewood.



Jesus said the same thing:

+ **John 15:5**— *I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.*

+ **John 15:6**— *If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*

John the Baptizer continues...

+ **Matthew 3:11**— *"I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

In verse eleven, John gives a glimpse of hope.

John says, ***I baptize you with water for repentance.***

In other words, John's baptism represented an outward profession of inward repentance.

However, John's baptism could not change a person's heart.

+ **Matthew 3:11**— *... but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals.*

One of the lowliest tasks of a slave in the first century was removing the sandals of his master and then washing his feet.

This task was so repulsive that Jewish slave owners did not require a Jewish slave to perform it.

Remember the Last Supper— Jesus, washed the Disciple's feet, but the Disciples themselves refused to wash one another's feet.

John the Baptizer, however, saw himself more unworthy of a Jewish slave in the presence of Jesus.

**+** **Matthew 3:11**— *He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

In other words, Jesus Christ will baptize you in the very power of God Himself— making you holy through inner transformation.

This doesn't have to do with external works.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit changes your personhood.

Theologically, we call it regeneration.

The moment you are born again, God has regenerated your soul and sealed you with the Holy Spirit.

**+** **Ephesians 1:13**— *In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.*

Such good news!

**+** **Matthew 3:11**— *He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

There are several interpretations when it comes to this phrase, "Holy Spirit and fire."

Some people say that this verse refers to Pentecost.

Others believe ~~or~~ that this fire is a refining fire in the Believer's life. — Sanctification

Let's take a look at both.

If we look at Acts 2—*Pentecost*

**Acts 2:3**—*They saw tongues like flames of fire ...*

It wasn't fire, but the tongue resembled fire.

This is where context remains king for a correct Biblical interpretation.

Back in verse 10, fire is used as a metaphor for judgment.

In verse 11, we have a question about the term fire...so let's keep reading the narrative.

**Matthew 3:12**—*His winnowing shovel 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 fire that never goes out."*

In verse 12, we also see John using fire used as a metaphor for judgment.

Moving back to verse 11, it seems logical that fire also represents judgment.

Why would John change his meaning of the word "fire" in mid-sentence?

Secondly, some people believe that this fire in verse eleven refers to a refining fire in the Believer's life—but this is not one of them.

The context of the whole passage shows us that.

We have three verses, all with the same context of fire being a metaphor for God's judgment on sin.

**Matthew 3:11**—*He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*



We're seeing one baptism that has two elements.

1. John is making a huge distinction between believers—those baptized with the Holy Spirit (conversion and regeneration.)
2. And unbelievers —those baptized with the fire of God's judgment.

And we see this as John the Baptizer continues in verse twelve.

**Matthew 3:12**— *His winnowing shovel 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 fire that never goes out."*

John is now using the image of a farmer separating the wheat from worthless chaff.

The farmer would take a flat shovel and toss the grain into the air.

The wind would then blow the chaff away, and the wheat would fall to the ground.

The wheat (Believers) is preserved for the barn—aka Heaven.

Verse 12 says "**His wheat.**"

The chaff, (unbelievers), is burned with fire—aka hell.

*C.F. - Psalm 1 - Gateway B. Sh*

In other words, this passage teaches that every person, believer or non-believer, will experience a baptism/immersion of Jesus when He appears.

It will either be an immersion of blessing with the indwelling Holy Spirit, or it will be an *immersion* of fire and judgment.

Do you see the crisis that John is presenting?

The axe is laid at the <sup>tree</sup> ~~tree~~ and the shovel is already in Jesus' hand.

That's why John preaches, "*Repent, The Kingdom of Heaven is near.*"

### **PREACH:**

What's all this mean for us today?

We live in a world of:

- Pandemics
- Vaccinations and Injections
- Mask or no mask
- Defund police departments
- Riots
- Race relations - CRT
- The legal marriage rights of sodomites and lesbians.
- The legal rights of transsexuals
- Verge of World War III.
- Inflation.
- Digital currency is right around the corner.
- Threat of cyber attacks that could change the landscape in which we live.
- Supreme Court Justice nominees who don't know a simple definition between men and women.
- Hollywood actors who feel its completely appropriate to physically assault Hollywood comedians because they can't take a joke—and then blame the whole thing on Satan.

Let me ask you this—

1. How much control do you have over these things?
2. How much control do you have over your faith?

Dear friends, these things going on in the world are indicators that the axe is indeed at the root of the tree.

These headlines prove to us that Jesus has His winnowing fork in His hand.

The things that you've heard from God's Word today are true.

And my message to you is the same message of John the Baptizer.

***“Repent, The Kingdom of Heaven is near.”***

**PRAY:**



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