

Matthew 3:1-12
Preparing for the King
The Ministry of John

We left off last week with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus seeking refuge and returning to their hometown, a city called Nazareth in the region of Galilee. It would be here that Jesus would live until his public ministry which would begin approximately 30 years later.

NOTE: There are no clear OT prophecies that teach us that Messiah would be raised in Nazareth. So, what is Matthew referring to when he says that Jesus would be called a Nazarene?

Matthew doesn't use a direct quote from the OT, because likely he is referencing well known prophecies outside of holy scripture that were being circulated in Israel at this time.

- Some connect this to the vow of the Nazarite, a special vow of consecration to God. Number 6:1-21
- Some see this to a play on Hebrew and Greek words, relating it to the prophecies concerning Jesus being the branch of Jesse.
- Still others relate this to the humble nature of his life and ministry, as the town itself was not known for anything good. Nazareth would be connected to the name and ministry of Jesus from this point on.

Regardless of what exactly he is referring to, we pick up Matthew's narrative many years later while Jesus is remains in relative obscurity in the city of Nazareth.

READ: Matthew 3:1-12

- **The Man**
- **The Mission**
- **The Message**

1. The Man

a. Called

- This is more clearly presented in the first chapter of Luke's gospel.

- His name (*God is Gracious*) was instructed by God - 1:13
- He was filled with God's Spirit from the womb - 1:15
- His birth was miraculous - 1:36-37

NOTE: As an unborn child, John was one of the first people to rejoice over the coming of Jesus, leaping in the womb when Mary met his mother, Elizabeth. Luke 1:41

- John was a vessel prepared and called by God for a special purpose. When Jesus speaks of him later in the gospel of Matthew, He describes John as more than a prophet and the greatest of men to have ever been born!

NOTE: There is no doubt that John was given a special calling with a special spiritual empowering. Incredibly however, his ministry though deeply significant was only briefly prominent as it was meant to ultimately direct others to Jesus!

John 3:30-31

He must increase, but I must decrease.

APPLICATION: This ought to be the heart of all those called by Christ. Too many people seek their own glory, but like John, those who recognize their calling is from God ought to also recognize that all glory goes to Him! As Christians, our ultimate responsibility is to bring people to Jesus, not to ourselves.

b. Committed Vs. 4-5

- John's appearance and lifestyle are connected to his calling to be a prophet according to the spirit and power of Elijah. It also demonstrates a commitment to his calling that was uncommon in his time, and certainly in modern times.

NOTE: Another important detail that we gain from Luke 1:80, is that John not only ministered in the wilderness, but that he lived the entirety of his life there. His calling and commitment to it

caused at least some conflict in his life, and even brought slander from some of the people in Israel.

Matt 11:18

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

APPLICATION: A calling requires a commitment. A commitment to God's calling doesn't mean an absence of conflict with other people. In fact, a strong commitment to God's calling and the truth will often bring conflict, slander, and persecution.

A commitment to God's calling doesn't always result in a convenient or comfortable lifestyle. If you think following Christ means an absence of conflict, and a life of convenience and comfort there is a good chance you have listened to some false teaching along the way.

c. Courageous Vs 7-10

- John's lifestyle may demonstrate a tremendous commitment to his calling, but his courage is seen in his willingness to openly rebuke the most influential people of his time.

NOTE: From the language it appears that these men were coming to John to be baptized, but that their intentions were impure. John didn't soften his language to keep from offending their feelings. Instead, he used intentionally offensive language to warn of the dangerous hypocrisy that was present within these groups of men.

- These religious men assumed their Jewish heritage was enough to save them, but John's rebuke ties their salvation to fruitful repentance.

NOTE: John's ministry was attracting a lot of attention at this time, these men wanted to be a part of the excitement, but they were not sincere in their repentance. True repentance bears outward fruit, and this was more important than the act of baptism.

APPLICATION: While we are not all called to a prophetic ministry like Johns, when it comes to standing for the truth what the world needs are followers of Christ who will not be afraid to stand up and say what is right even with the threat of slander, violence, or death. As the Spirit filled followers of Christ, we are all called to live as light in this world which means exposing sin and truth!

Ephesians 5:8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

2. The Mission

- Listen to how Luke describes the mission of John.

Luke 1:16-17

16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

a. Preparation

NOTE: In ancient times it was common that before a great king was to travel that he would first send a delegation whose bore the responsibility of preparing the roads and making them smooth and straight so that the king could travel with more ease. In a similar manner John's mission was to prepare the hearts of the people to receive their king!

- Something that John became known for was the way in which he chose to prepare people for Messiah, through water baptism in the Jordan river.

NOTE: At the time baptism was used within Judaism as a ceremonial cleansing for Jews as well as for those who desired to convert to Judaism. John's baptism was connected to repentance and demonstrated a turning to the Messiah who was to come.

- John was preparing the people to look for the remission of sins outside of the sacrificial system, which by this time had become corrupt.

APPLICATION: God still uses His people to prepare hearts to receive His word!

1 Cor 3:5-8

5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

You may not be around for the harvest, but are you faithful to plow the soil? Are you faithful to cast the seed? Are you faithful to water it?

b. Proclamation

- Teaching can be described as the imparting of knowledge, but preaching is the heralding or declaration of a message with an exhortation toward action.

NOTE: The ministry of preaching remains one of the primary ways in which God speaks to people, and it is one of the primary tasks of the church.

- In our time, people don't seem to have a desire to hear such preaching. Instead, people prefer more conversation and less confrontational approaches, and while there may appear to be more culturally effective, emotionally sensitive, or more fashionable ways to communicate truth in certain contexts, we must not abandon the preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

2 Tim 4:1-5

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

3. The Message

Luke 3:3

preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,

a. Repentance

- John's message was a message of repentance, which is a message of action.

NOTE: Some wonder if repentance is necessary for salvation, but I think they look at it wrong. Repentance is a component to the process of coming to Christ. It is the commitment and action of leaving your old life behind and coming to Christ. When you turn to Christ for salvation, you turn from your sin to do so.

APPLICATION: We read here that people were coming and confessing and being baptized. To confess means to agree together with, and to repent means to turn away from. When we come to Jesus these things are of great importance. We must agree that Jesus is Lord, and that are sinners. We must then commit to follow Him while abandoning our old lifestyle.

NOTE: Confession of sin is to remain a part of our lives even after coming to Christ, in order to maintain fellowship with him and with one another.

James 5:14

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

1 John 1:5

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

b. *Readiness*

- John was a prophet, and his message was one of warning that the kingdom of God was at hand. This message of readiness came with a promise of a Kingdom and warning of judgement.

NOTE: John pictures the Messiah as one who would come to separate the wheat of Israel from the chaff and baptize people with fire, which contextually is related both to the Holy Spirit and to judgement.

- Joel 2:28 informs us that there would come a time when the Spirit of God would be poured out upon all flesh, but in Malachi 3:2 the Messiah is also one who would come as a refiner's fire to purify Israel.

APPLICATION: The message of the Gospel of Christ really cannot be separated from the warning of judgment. Through Christ we can be saved from our sins and embrace the hope of heaven but the reality that those who reject Jesus, that person is destined for God's wrath.

NOTE: We may not have a John the Baptist in our time, but we have the collective prophecies of scripture informing us that the time is short, and that Jesus is coming soon!

- I believe that we are in a time of preparation, as God is preparing His bride that He will receive to himself.

APPLICATION: I suppose the real question for you, are you ready? Are you prepared? Are you remaining committed to your calling to follow Christ and make disciples of others? Are you walking in holiness or are you stumbling in sin? Are you living to entertain your flesh, or exercise your faith?

Rom 13:11-14

11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

2 Peter 3:10-13

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.