

Matthew 3

Intro: Matthew has made the case for the lineage and prophesied conception of the Messiah.

1. Now he moves into the anointing of Jesus in preparation for His messianic ministry.

Verses 1-6: John the Baptist as the prophesied opening act for the Messiah.

1. **Who is this John?** - Matthew does not give as much detail about John as does Luke.
 - a. Luke is writing to Gentiles, who may not know of John's priestly family or his miraculous, not immaculate, conception - Here are some details for us.
 - i. Zachariah and Elizabeth were old and infertile, like Abram and Sarai.
 - ii. Zachariah was a Temple priest, & so John would have been by lineage.
 1. Priests were ordained by God through Moses' brother, Aaron.
 2. A priest's role was to be a mediator between God and people; to represent the people before God and offer the prescribed sacrifices as payment for their sins so that the people could stand before God.
 3. We will see John fulfill this role in a different way.
 - b. He also was a prophet in the spirit of Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of the Bible
 - i. Matthew makes it clear that he is not just any prophet, but the predicted prophet in a similar way to that of Elijah as predicted in **Malachi 4:5**.
 1. Lived in the wilderness, wore similar clothes, ate bugs - **2 Kgs. 1:8**.
 2. Preached repentance and a return to God - **1 Kgs 18:21**.
 3. Condemned and threatened by a sinful king & his wife - **1 Kgs 17-19**.
2. John had a divine responsibility to act on behalf of Israel, preparing people for the coming of God, just not in the traditional form of the old covenant Temple practices.
 - a. He was to preach God's Word, as a prophet does, and prepare them for God's coming, similarly to what a priest was to do.
3. John understood his divine role, and fulfilled it faithfully so the people would be ready.
 - a. We don't see John complaining or trying to redefine his role - He served faithfully.

The reason John had to do this, the reason God called him to do this, was b/c Israel had neglected God's Word and lived in open rebellion for many years.

1. The leaders were corrupt and self-focused, being instruments of Roman tyranny.
2. God's Word had become buried under man's word, corrupting Israel's morals and judgment, w/the consequence being the loss of God's presence w/in Israel.
3. The people were in a religious desert and needed to prepare their hearts and minds to receive the Messiah, to realize they were lost and broken and in need of a Savior.
 - a. Does any of this sound familiar?

Our culture is in a similar spiritual desert.

1. It has rejected God, denied His Word, & people have chosen to live however they want.
 - a. They are not open to God, realize they need God, and even churches have lost the Word of God underneath man-made programs, productions, and preaching.
 - i. **Results:** Rising depression and anxiety, especially among young people.
 1. These are often related to spiritual health, a lack of God's presence.
 - ii. When life is meaningless, filled with shame, lacks clear direction, feels hopeless, and the pleasures of life feel empty, depression and anxiety grow.
2. **Positive:** This spiritual desert causes people to be hungry for something real and true.
 - a. They no longer want superficiality, entertainment, unstructured living, or to feel lost or alone in the chaos and uncertainty of our world.
 - i. **Ex.** Barna shows a resurgence in church attendance, specifically by YA.
3. This is why we need to be intentional and committed to proclaiming the gospel.
 - a. Not only do we, like John, have a divine role in the world.
 - i. But, like John's world, our world is lost and dying & needs Jesus.
 - b. People are enslaved to sin, trapped by demonic ideologies, and destined for death.
 - i. They are not ready to die, nor to come face-to-face with God.
4. People need the gospel, and we have been ordained and commissioned to proclaim it.

For John, the way he was to prepare people for the Savior was to proclaim God's Word - **v.2.**

1. John preached repentance and the coming of the *Kingdom of Heaven*.
 - a. He preached that people needed to spiritually turn around and go in a different direction, to repent of their sinful living & return to God's way.
 - i. Meaning of to "make straight paths *for Him*" (Jewish Bible).
2. The people needed to deal w/their sin now b/c time is running out - **God is here!**
 - a. The return of the Presence, Rule, and Reign of God was coming.
3. This baptism was a symbol of that repentance, the acknowledgment and symbolic removal of moral defilement, which was a renewal of Levitical, OT Law practice.

Now, this was the great hope and expectation of Israel

1. They believed that the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven (God) meant that God was going to reconcile and restore Israel, defeat her enemies, judge the nations, & reign with His people - though they often got the order mixed up.
2. John is preaching that God is beginning to fulfill His messianic promises made to Israel.
 - a. To provide a way to restore His relationship with people by forgiving sin and defeating death through the sacrifice and resurrection of the Messiah.
3. But Israel was not ready for it, and the people knew it.
 - a. So, they flocked to him, so much so that it got the attention of the religious leaders.

Our Message: “Repent and trust in Jesus, for the time of judgment is near.”

1. God has come and dealt with sin on the cross.
 - a. He paid the fine for sin and has risen from the dead to prove it.
 - b. He has fixed the number of days of this period of history, & when it ends, judgment will be poured out upon the Earth, and all will stand before Him as Judge.
2. All need to hear this message b/c all have sinned & fallen short of God’s glory.
 - a. There’s not a single person who doesn’t need forgiveness of sin & to turn to God.
 - i. Every person has broken at least 1 of God’s Laws, which, according to James, means they have broken them all.
 1. **Ex.** You lied once, you broke God’s Law.
 2. **Ex.** You lusted once, you broke God’s Law
 3. **Ex.** You were unloving toward God or others, you broke the Law.
3. And Christians are to carry this message to the world, preaching it so all can hear.

Problem: But are Christians preaching the Word of God so effectively that, not only are people hearing, but are the authorities taking notice? (Sort of an amplification to make a point).

1. Not that Christians are being anti-establishment, politically charged, or dissenting.
 - a. But that the Word of God is being allowed to move through the hearts of others.
 - i. Through clear and consistent preaching.
 - ii. Through widespread urgency and love for the lost.
 - iii. Through consistent demonstration in the lives of Christians.
2. Too often, there is a misunderstanding of what it means to bring the Kingdom of God.
 - a. It is not the forcing of biblical ideals and principles on the world, forcing the world to submit to God.
 - b. It is not the attempt to make this world perfect and sinless.
 - i. God is the only one who can do these things.
3. It means to live as ambassadors of God’s Kingdom, being the followers of Christ we say we are, and allowing God to work through us and into others.
 - a. It means showing the world what citizens of God’s Kingdom look like, so they will be jealous and want to seek citizenship.
 - i. **Ex.** Why do you think so many people want to come to America?
 1. They want the freedoms & privileges that come with/being a citizen.
4. Do you make people desire the freedoms and privileges of being a citizen of the KOG?

Real Quick: Look back at John’s message.

1. This was not eloquent, academic, or artistically crafted in the art of rhetoric.
 - a. It was plain and simple; the raw Word of God.
2. And people flocked to him in response to this message from God.

- a. Imagine if John preached today, how would he fit in w/our celebrity-pastor culture?

Word of Encouragement for us: God's Word is Enough.

1. His Word has all that is needed to bring life-changing conviction to the heart of a sinner.
 - a. This is why we do not have to add to or embellish God's Word.
 - b. This is why we do not have to be God's PR person and hype Him up.
 - i. He does not need us to make His Word more appealing or desirable.
 - c. This is why we are simply called to be messengers: to share the Truth in love.
 - i. And if we believe in the power of God's Word, we will share it simply.

Verses 7-10: Look who came to see John...

1. John's message was so impactful that it got the attention of the religious leaders.
 - a. These guys would never have thought twice about a "lunatic" like John.
 - b. But they could not deny the impact of his message.
 - c. They came to evaluate John's ministry to determine if it was a threat to theirs.
2. John's rebuke of the religious leaders may seem harsh, but he knew that these particular religious leaders were insincere.
 - a. Remember, they were pawns of Rome, who had corrupted the Jewish Priesthood.
 - b. They were here not b/c they received his message, feared God, & wanted to repent.
 - i. They did not believe they needed to repent b/c they believed they were the most righteous of all.
 - ii. They believed being Abraham's children, God's chosen people, was enough and judgment was reserved for the Gentiles, but not for them - a free pass.
 - c. They were prideful and arrogant about their place before God.
 - i. These would cause them to not only miss the single greatest and most anticipated event in the history of the world, but to be on the wrong side of it
3. So, John throws spiritual javelins at them, hoping to penetrate their hard hearts so they will take his message seriously.
 - a. He pleads with them to genuinely repent and live in ways that reveal it (**fruit**).
 - i. God isn't concerned w/what is on the outside, whether religiosity or ancestry
 - ii. God isn't fooled by appearance/pedigree, rejecting all who are unrepentant.
4. John tries to remove their excuses to reject his message and repent.
 - a. But in their religious pride, these religious leaders ignored John's message.
 - i. They had "ears to hear" but did not use them to "listen".

Pride is the greatest spiritual handicap.

1. Pride says, "I am the great I AM. I am great & perfect. I do not need God. I am god."
 - a. Pride thinks it already **KNOWS** God and does not care to **know Him better**.
 - b. Pride looks inward to see one's greatness and looks outward to criticize others.

- i. Always blind to their own sin, but always looking at others'.
- c. Pride causes people to investigate others, rather than to investigate oneself.
 - i. The proud are never the issue. Everyone else is.
- 2. As a result, pride shuts down a person's willingness to listen and receive God's Word.
 - a. These people will think they are spiritually mature, but they will always be spiritually immature, and their lives will demonstrate that (**Galatians 5 - Types of fruits**).

Personal Test for Pride:

- 1. If anyone in here is thinking about someone else during this, you may be prideful.
 - a. Your focus should be on evaluating your own heart, not someone else's.
- 2. If anyone in here thinks this does not apply to them, you may be prideful.
 - a. You should always be self-evaluating, knowing that you can always grow in humility.

John the Baptist is a great example of humility, as he willingly lays aside his thriving ministry to hand it over to the one his ministry is all about.

Verses 11-12: John reveals the nature of his ministry and what it is meant to do.

- 1. John's ministry is preparatory and pointing to something greater.
 - a. His baptism, as in both the OT and NT, is symbolic, indicating a changed life.
- 2. This something greater would be a baptism that truly saved, a baptism by the Holy Spirit and with fire.
 - a. **Spirit:** Baptism is one where God pours out His Spirit on the believer, giving them power, wisdom, and assurance of salvation, as seen in the fruits (**Gal. 5:22-23**).
 - b. **Fire:** Baptism is (debated) where a person's sins are burned away, and they no longer live as they once did - Similar to **Isaiah 6** and the coal from the altar.
 - i. The idols and addictions that once controlled them are no more.
 - ii. They are new people living new lives, with new desires, and are wholly and completely sold out for God.
 - 1. Friends & family of theirs will easily see a drastic difference in them.
- 3. And unlike the baptism with water, which can be faked, this greater one cannot.
 - a. Jesus is ready to separate the faithful followers (useful Wheat to be eaten), who will be gathered with Him in Heaven for all eternity, from the fake followers (useless Chaff to be burned), who will be separated from God for all eternity in Hell.

Don't Miss This: John does not shy away from the heavy Truth.

- 1. He is not afraid to speak the heavy Truth that God says people need to hear.
 - a. He does this not b/c he wants to anger people, but b/c he wants people to repent.
 - i. He knows the dangers of a life of casual faith and unrepentant sin.
 - ii. He knows the consequences of being on the wrong side of God's justice.

- b. He cares more about people's eternal life than his perception or their feelings.
 - i. **Ex.** Guzik on God's Justice.
- 2. People who feel the weight of their sin... repent & trust in Jesus, adding to Heaven's joy.

God is terrifyingly holy

- 1. He is so holy & righteous that standing before Him w/unforgiven sin would destroy you.
 - a. **Ex.** Remember what it feels like to be w/someone you have wronged - the guilt and shame hurts so bad.
- 2. His righteousness is so great that Jesus had to die so we could stand before Him.
 - a. Sin and death are not things we should be casual about or afraid to talk about.
- 3. Therefore, we should not be ashamed or timid to talk about the gospel.

Problem: We put so many things before God and others.

- 1. We do not realize the idols in our hearts that prevent us from loving God and others with all of ourselves, from obeying God and serving others as we would want done to us.
 - a. **Ex.** We love our social reputations r self-esteem, so we do not want to embarrass ourselves or feel awkward by talking about (shh...) Jesus.
 - b. **Ex.** We do not want to make people feel bad b/c our world says that is unloving, so we do not tell them the hard truth that their sinful lifestyles are destroying them.
- 2. When we avoid talking about the difficult things, such as sin and the gospel, we need to reflect on the reasons why.
 - a. Often there is a self-focused reason, and we need to sacrifice that to God.
 - b. Since our eternal life is secured in Christ, there should be nothing we aren't willing to sacrifice in this life to help secure the eternal life of others.

Verses 13-15: The Messiah's inauguration.

- 1. Jesus arrives to see John and asks John to baptize Him.
 - a. John humbly refuses b/c he knows that *he* needs the Messiah.
 - i. John does not become prideful in his ministry to fool himself into thinking he does not need the Savior.
 - b. But Jesus says it needs to be done this way for now to fulfill all righteousness.
- 2. **Big Question:** Why does Jesus need to be baptized?
 - a. First, if baptism is viewed as a mandatory means of salvation, that it removes sin, then it poses a big problem for Jesus and for us.
 - i. If Jesus was not sinless, but had sin and needed salvation just like everyone else, then He is ineffective as a Savior.
 - ii. His efficacy as Savior is predicated on Him being sinless, so that His blood is of infinite value - Mentioned last week (Hypostatic Union)

- iii. Therefore, Jesus could not have been baptized for repentance.
- b. But if baptism is symbolic of the start of the New Covenant in Christ, which requires sinful man to first repent, then Jesus' baptism is symbolic of the inauguration of the New Covenant, but He does not have to first repent.

Baptism symbolizes the start of something new.

- 1. It symbolizes the start of a person's new life in Christ that begins at the moment of repentance and acceptance of Jesus as the master and source of this new life.
 - a. And we do this with our friends and family around us so they can be witnesses to this commitment and support us as we venture down a path that will be the hardest, but most rewarding thing we could ever do.
- 2. Jesus is getting baptized in public, so everyone will see the inauguration of the new covenant and witness the start of His ministry.
 - a. But remember, Matthew's goal is to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.
 - i. So, it is not just the baptism in front of people that makes this inauguration legitimate and authenticating of Jesus' messianic identity.

Verses 16-17: The Public Affirmation of Jesus, the Messiah.

- 1. Matthew is relating Jesus to the messianic figure in Isaiah - **Isa. 42:1-4 (read)**.
 - a. This speaks to who the Messiah is and what the Messiah will do.
- 2. This is who the Messiah is - The beloved and Spirit-anointed servant of God.
 - a. Jesus is confirmed by God's voice and Spirit - i.e., the Trinity in action.
 - i. God, the Son, affirmed by God, the Father, and anointed by God, the Spirit, all individually working together for the same purpose.
 - 1. Three separate persons comprising the one being we call God.
 - b. Both the voice and anointing were essential for the Jews, since both were customary for God's anointed leaders, thus also for His Messiah.
 - i. Prophets and kings were called by God, most through prophets.
 - ii. Both were anointed by the Spirit, who empowered them for ministry.
 - c. Jesus is divinely confirmed as God's anointed, the Messiah or Christ.
- 3. This is what the Messiah will do - Bring justice without violence.
 - a. He will bring reconciliation between God and man, paying the just fine for the crimes committed against God and others.
 - i. Evil will be dealt with according to God's justice system, upon which most systems are based - **Ex.** Equal punishment to fit the crime.
 - b. But the Jews then & now interpret this servant of Isaiah incorrectly to be Israel.
 - i. God was not pleased or delighted with Israel, but the opposite.
 - ii. Israel constantly failed to bring justice to the nations, but the opposite.
 - iii. Israel constantly acted unfaithfully, grew weak & discouraged, & quit.

- c. This is the same issue the Jews have when interpreting the SS in Isaiah 53.
- 4. So Matthew is connecting this prophecy to Jesus, showing Israel that it is about Jesus, so the Jews will put their trust in Jesus as the Promised Messiah.

The Bible is all about Jesus.

- 1. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, it is all pointing forward & backward to Jesus.
 - a. **Ex.** OT saints anticipated the coming of a Savior who could forgive sins forever.
 - b. **Ex.** NT saints look backward to the work of the Savior on the cross and to the resurrection, being reminded of what their freedom costs and in whom they have put their trust.
 - c. **Ex.** NT saints also look forward to what will come, the finalization of God's plan for the world, finding hope in a dark world.

The Christian life should be all about Jesus.

- 1. If the Christian life is built on the teachings and principles of the Bible,...
 - a. There is no Christian life if there is no Bible.
- 2. If the Bible is all about Jesus and teaches Christians how to live like Jesus.
- 3. Then, the Christian life should point people to Jesus.
 - a. People should see us and be able to see Jesus in how we act.
 - i. **Ex.** Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control - **Gal. 5:23-24.**
 - b. And we should desire to better represent Jesus by our lives, since not only is that why we were made (image of God), but also the natural result of our love for God.
 - i. Misrepresenting someone is not loving.
 - ii. Failing to represent someone is not unloving.

Conclusion: The goal of our lives should be to represent God as best as we can, and seek forgiveness when we fail, so that others will see the greatness of God & His grace for His people.

- 1. Everything we do should point people to the truth of Christ.
 - a. Nothing should be left out, nor can it be.
 - i. The gospel must be proclaimed in its entirety, or it is not the gospel of Jesus.
- 2. We are messengers and are not given any authority to change the message of Christ.
 - a. Therefore, we need to ensure we are doing our best to be faithful to the message and Sender.
- 3. So, like Matthew, do whatever you can to prove the truthfulness of Jesus the Messiah, with the hope that others will see Him in you and put their trust in Him.

Alright. Let's pray and sing a final song of praise to God.