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Matthew 3:1-12, Luke 3:1-20

**John the Baptist: The Man, The Message Part 2
True Repentance Produces Spiritual Fruit**

When John the Baptist began his preaching out in the wilderness of Judea, his message was a simple one. **Matthew 3:2, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

John had more to say than this which we will look at in a minute but we first want to consider the implications of what John was saying.

For the Israeli audience this meant that the long awaited Messiah, Savior of the Jews, was coming and He was going to set up an earthly kingdom that where He, and all of Israel with Him, would rule the world.

While they had this partially correct, we know in hindsight that Jesus is going to set up an earthly kingdom but first, the kingdom of heaven was going to be a spiritual kingdom inside of each believer. The presence of the Holy Spirit was given to place inside each believer a conviction of right and wrong according to God. The principles which ruled heaven could now be found in men and women and as they followed these leadings of the Holy Spirit, what was happening in heaven could now happen on earth, at least in part.

But for the Israelites and the individuals who believed in God and in a coming Messiah, the message of John was a message of urgency. Repent, make yourself ready because the King is coming and if you don't want to miss it.

This is where we read in verses **5-6, “Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordon; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordon River, as they confessed their sins.”**

People heard the message and they were responding. They were getting their hearts right with God. But then we come to verses 7-12. Look with me.

Matthew 3:7-12, “But when he (John the Baptist) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’”

There is a whole of things going on in this passage but before we examine this message let me first tell you about this wand. This is a miracle wand. I saw advertised on Facebook and I just had to get one.

It is made of all of the highest quality material and the videos I saw, showed, when you hooked it up to your hose, it made such a fine and powerful stream that you could take the paint off of your house. You could redo your deck, wash your car if you are careful and many other uses.

I ordered it and was looking forward to it coming in the mail. It took about four weeks and when it arrived it was in a really nice box. I took it out and was impressed with the craftsmanship.

I was anxious to use it so I took it out to the backyard, hooked it up to our hose, turned it on and guess what happened. Not much. It didn't do any more, didn't have any greater pressure than when you put your thumb over the end of the hose and created a some pressure.

In all the advertising videos I watched, what you didn't see is they had it hooked up to a pressure washer. Sure it was made out of sturdy materials, it felt heavy and looked nice but when it came to using it, well, forget it. It wasn't any better than your plain old hose. When I used it the source of the power was missing.

This is some of what John was dealing with when the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to hear him preach. I wanted to give you a description of these two groups because as we move through this study of Matthew they will be referred to many times.

A Pharisee were mostly middle-class businessmen and leaders of the synagogues (the Jewish temples where worship took place). Though the Pharisees were a minority in the Sanhedrin (the Sanhedrin was the supreme court of ancient Israel, made up of 70 men and the high priest) and held a minority number of positions as priests, they seemed to control the decision-making of the Sanhedrin because they had popular support among the people.

The Sadducees were an aristocratic class connected with everything going on in the temple in Jerusalem. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including that of chief priests and high priest, and they held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin.

So what you have with the Pharisees and the Sadducees were the powerbrokers. In the nation of Israel, everything revolved around the temple and the Jewish religion. These individuals were kind of like the Pope and the Council of Cardinals of the Catholic church.

Everything that occurs within the Catholic Church and those who profess to be Catholic is controlled by the Pope and the Cardinals and then it bleeds down to the local priests.

This is who the Pharisees and Sadducees were. They were the powerbrokers of the nation of Israel. By the time Jesus came along and for hundreds of years there was no president or king of Israel, only this group. But like my magic wand they looked good but they were not who they were professed to be. They were not hooked up to the source of power.

Have you ever met someone that was not who they professed to be? I mean, to hear from them they were the best. They were great workers, got along with people, were even leaders according to them. I remember someone like this. The list of accomplishments and what they did for everyone and everywhere they worked was incredible.

But when you looked back at their lives all you see is shambles. They were actually disruptive, couldn't get along with anybody and even though they may have had good ideas, they were way too forceful to have anyone jump on board with them. They thought more of themselves than anything.

This is who the Pharisees and Sadducees were, at least most of them. Who they professed to be is not who they were. There were a few good ones but the good ones were in the minority.

A couple of things were happening that we can identify happening here.

1. John the Baptist didn't pull any punches against sin

As I said last week, it didn't matter who was in front of him. The common peasant or the religious elite. He called them like he saw them. John the Baptist is the first before Jesus to call these religious leaders out. He called them a brood of vipers. Pretty strong language.

But as you read through the Gospels, you read these religious leaders were all show and no substance. They looked good, sounded good but in reality they had no strong relationship with God, were not hooked up the power source and therefore what they preached, taught and lived was not truth. And if it is not truth then it was not leading anyone to God. In fact, just the opposite was occurring. Look at what Jesus said about them.

Matthew 23:15, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are."

Because they were not teaching and living the truth of the scriptures, they were leading men and women straight to hell. They weren't helping people to connect with God, they were just going through the motions themselves, the motions of religious duty.

PAUSE

I am afraid that today too many preachers like this today. They are not staying hooked up to the source of power and have gone soft on sin. They avoid preaching the hard stuff. Maybe they're afraid they're going to upset someone, or a whole church. Maybe they are afraid they are going to lose their jobs. I'm not sure.

It certainly is not easy to stand up here and preach the hard stuff. There is always that chance that someone will be offended. But do you know what happens when the truth is preached?

Last week the main point that came across was the biblical discipline of confession. Confess one to another your sins and you will be healed. And do you know what happened? Two individuals were convicted by the Holy Spirit and they were obedient in their convictions.

They came and confessed their sins. And do you know what else happened. The promise of God is occurring and the sins they were struggling with have been taken away by God. That is His promise. Confess and you will be healed.

It is when the truth is preached or when we read the truth found in scripture that is when the conviction of the Holy Spirit moves in our lives and when this happens and we are obedient to that conviction healing and transformation begin to occur and that is what we want.

The other thing I see that occurred as John was preaching is that...

2. John was presenting the New Covenant (new promise) through Jesus

Look back with me at Matthew 3:9, 11, “and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Up until the time of Christ and even today, Jewish people rely upon their heritage as God’s promised people. Because they are Jewish, because they can trace their heritage back to Abraham and the promises God made to him and those who would come after him, they thought they were golden in God’s eyes. They were relying upon something besides their obedient relationship with God.

Since they thought they were okay concerning salvation, they thought how they lived their lives was not important. They could enter into sin and still be okay with God. But here is where John the Baptist calls them out.

Look at verse 8, “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

3. **True** repentance bears spiritual fruit.

The great blessing of being in a relationship with Jesus Christ is not just the fact that when we die we get to go to heaven, as wonderful as that is. The life we are given in Christ places us in the wonderful position where we get to be fruit bearers in God’s Kingdom.

John made reference to what this looks like in Luke as he was answering some of the questions people had. Look with me at **Luke 3:10-14**, “**And the crowds were questioning him, saying, ‘Then what shall we do?’**”

Through spirit lead preaching of John the people fell under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and they were asking John what to do.

“And he would answer and say to the ‘The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise. And some tax collectors also came to be baptized and they said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.’ Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, ‘And what about us, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do no take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.’”

As these individuals were coming under the conviction of the Holy Spirit John encourages them to be obedient in three areas of their lives.

The first area is speaks into is the area of generosity.

4. The spiritual fruit of generosity

PUT THE ABOVE AND THE BELOW PARAGRAPH ON THE SAME SLIDE

The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.

Generosity is the spirit and action of freely and frequently giving to others. Generosity can also refer to an overall spirit of kindness.

Generosity flows out of a heart that is soft and tender towards the Lord. We know how much we have received from God and we are willing to keep an open hand to share the blessings we have received with others.

5. The spirit of honesty

PUT THE ABOVE AND THE BELOW PARAGRAPH ON THE SAME SLIDE

And some tax collectors also came to be baptized and they said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.’

The tax collectors were known to be dishonest in their dealings with others. They charged whatever they could get away with and kept the extra for themselves.

Being dishonest can slip into our lives in many different ways. I doubt that anyone here is in the habit of cheating others out of money. But I wonder if we can get in the habit of telling little white lies to cover ourselves.

Someone asks you to help them and because you really don't want to do it you say you have something else going. You exaggerate to make yourself look better. It is easy to fall into these and many other little white lies that are dishonest. When you do you are not operating in the spirit of honesty.

Lastly

6. Do not use your position of authority to force your way

PUT THE ABOVE AND THE BELOW PARAGRAPH ON THE SAME SLIDE

Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, 'And what about us, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do no take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.'"

When we are in positions of authority it is easy for us to push our weight around and take advantage of those who are underneath us. This can happen in our jobs, as parents, as children of elderly parents. Even as husbands and wives. In a lot of different ways we can use the God-given positions of authority to push our own agenda while running roughshod over the people around us.

This is just a few of the areas John the Baptist mentions that are bearing fruit in keeping with your repentance.

But lets be honest. This is a tough world we live in. In so many ways the world hardens our hearts to the Lord and His ways. The only way I know of to stay completely, as much as possible, in a soft place with the Lord and His ways is to

7. Live in a constant state of repentance

There is a power source that is available to each and every one of us that will keep our heart clean and soft. It will not only do this but it has the ability to knock off even the toughest dirt and grime and build up. The power sources name is Jesus.

As we come to Him He will not only cleanse and purify us but He will keep us clean.

In closing here are two scriptures that I would encourage each of you to pray every day. I have taken the liberty of changing the second one just a bit to make it more personal.

Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.’

2 Corinthians 10:5, “I am destroying (with the help of Jesus) everything that rises up against the knowledge of God; and I am taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

These are two verses that I not only recommend that you pray every day but I would recommend you take them, write them down on a card and carry them with you for a while.

The key to bearing spiritual fruit in keeping with repentance is keeping in a constant state of repentance.

God has great things in store for you. He has already blessed you in so many way but the world we live in is getting darker and darker and you cant help but have some of it splash on you. Use the power of God’s word to cleanse yourself and to keep you clean.

Let’s pray.