

# The Gospel of Matthew

Title: John The Baptist And His Ministry

Text: Matthew 3:1-6

**Introduction:** What makes a man great? Matthew 11:11 "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." A **success** according to the **world** is a **great name**, **wealth**, **success** at a **job** or **event**. John the Baptist was none of that, in fact, he was a hermit, one in the wilderness who was obscure for much of his life. Luke 1:15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord" and in chapter 1 we see **Jesus' Kingship** shown by His birth from a **royal line**, chapter 2 His Kingship is shown by the **circumstances surrounding His birth**, the **miracles** and **protection**. Now we see the evidence though the **herald of the Kings arrival**.

In ancient times it was common for a herald to prepare the way for a monarch. To announce it and make the way clear. John's two fold duty was to **proclaim** and **prepare**.

**Point 1 - The Man.** John's parents were described as "**They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord**" cf. Luke 1:6. Zacharias was a humble man doing priestly work. And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in Luke 1:13-14 "**Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. <sup>14</sup> You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.**" **God named John and he was filled with the spirit before he was born, "He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb"** cf. Luke 1:15. **For thirty years both Jesus and John lived in somewhat obscurity**, but now the **heralding message** of the **coming King is being announced**.

**Preaching** - from the Greek word *kerusso* and its primary meaning is "*to herald*". It was used as an official way to announce a coming king, and was done so **loudly** and **extensively**. John knew his calling and his task. He never sought **recognition** or **honor**. When asked by leaders who sent him he said, "**I am not the Christ**" cf. John 1:20, and he denied being Elijah the prophet. **He stated his calling clearly in John 1:23 "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."** Of course, the Jews didn't want this **homely, obscure man** telling them of a **King** that was **coming** who came from **Nazareth**. John was ultimately **hated, ridiculed, imprisoned** and **beheaded**.

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The ministry of John was to call people away from the corrupt and dead religious systems of their day, away from ritualism, worldliness, hypocrisy, and superficiality. Interestingly, John ministered to them in the wilderness away from all the city stuff (vs. 5).

**Point 2 - The Message.** His message was so simply it is contained in one word...repent. The Greek word behind repentance is *metanoeo* which means more than regret or sorrow. The Scripture speaks about Esau in Hebrews 12:17 "For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears." The word means "to turn around, to change direction, to change the mind and will." It does not denote just any change, but a change from wrong to right. John A Broadus observes, "Wherever this Greek word is used in the New Testament the reference is to changing the mind and the purpose from sin to holiness." Repentance involves sorrow for sin, but sorrow leads to a change of thinking, desire and lifestyle. 2 Corinthians 7:10 "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death." His command to repent can only lead to a command of "be converted."

God isn't interested in a people's heritage. That won't satisfy the justice of God. He doesn't care about where you grew up, who your father is or how many times you have been to church. He doesn't even care if you think good things or memorize Scripture. In fact Matthew says in vs. 9 "And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham for our father." Repentance calls for radical change that affects the mind, will and total life.

There's a sorrow that seems right for many. Proverbs 14:12 "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." If your repentance does not produce a change of lifestyle and behavior, then your repentance is not biblical oriented repentance. Jesus started His ministry with the same message. Mark 1:14-15 "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." And Paul continued the same message in Acts 26:20 "But kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

**Point #3 - The Motive.** The kingdom of heaven is at hand. People should repent and be converted because the King was coming. The unrepentant cannot give the King the glory He deserves, do not belong to the heavenly king and are unfit for the kingdom. The Jewish

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people weren't ready for this Messiah. They wanted one that was like them what they wanted. But John's message wasn't a political, ideological driven message, it was God's message, God's Messiah and repentance was the preparation for it.

Matthew uses the phrase Kingdom of Heaven because the Jewish people would not speak God's name, such as the Kingdom of God, and his audience was primarily Jewish. How does this apply today? The King is coming again. He is going to set up His Kingdom. However, the message today is still repent and believe. It's not a message of you can do better just find the good in you. It's not a message of claiming some kind of destiny in yourself as the charlatans proclaim. The message today is repent for you do not know what a day brings forth.

**Point #4 - Some Closing Thoughts.** The Mission John the Baptist had was to cry out for the coming King, cf. Isaiah 40:3-11. The way of the Lord is repentance. The way of the Lord is making a crooked path straight. Thus remains the mission today for believers. No external, eye candy church services, just preach and herald the message of repentance.

The manner of John was humbleness. He wasn't well dressed, and his diet was extreme.

The ministry was heralding the truth of the coming King and notice, people were coming to him. No selling of the gospel, no how to programs to draw a crowd, no lights, no smoke and concert style meetings and no affirmation of what the culture wants to hear. He heralded the truth of Scripture and it drew people. When you begin to add dangling carrots to the gospel in order to draw a crowd, you have in essence another gospel. Because that crowd will only keep coming if more carrots are there. I have emails and snail mail on people giving seminars on how to build a church, grow a Sunday school class and have an effective ministry. Of course, they will share all that with me for a price. But I say as Jesus told Peter, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18 NKJV).

Finally, Jewish folk submitting to be baptized was more than just significant. This was not typical Jewish ceremony, the Levitical washings were often daily, or multiply times daily and even every hour. They represented repeated purification for repeated sinning. One time washings were for outsiders like Gentiles. Thus, the baptism of folks by John for the remission of sins and repentance was, quite frankly, offensive to the Jews. The baptism was a public confession of repentance. But we also know that many followed the ritual but didn't follow in behavior. In conclusion, actions speak louder than words. And true

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repentance produces a different behavior. I will continue, in spite of cultural and even evangelical trends, to herald the message of repentance by proclaiming the gospel of truth. It's the only truly saving way!