

# The Gospel of Matthew

Title: The Fruits Of True Repentance

Text: Matthew 3:7-8

**Introduction:** John's message was the heralding of the coming king. His message was one of repentance. The reason for his message was the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The inner response was the confession of their sin, followed by the outward expression of baptism. More importantly, a manner of living that demonstrated the change.

**Point 1 - The Congregants.** The Pharisees were very much in the mainstream of Jewish life, and made a point of being noticed and admired. Jesus exposed the Pharisees many times in their toward actions, cf. Matthew 23:5-7. The word Pharisee means “separated ones” and members generally tried to live up to that standard. Admission to the group was quite the tall order. Generally a year long prohibition and proving time was necessary. They separated themselves from tax collectors, and Gentiles. And even those they considered “base sinners” Luke 7:39 “Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.” After they would leave a public place they would perform a ceremonial cleansing to purify themselves of any possible contamination. The Pharisees were strict legalistic folk who believed their works would garner rewards in heaven. But they were the epitome of religious emptiness and hypocrisy.

The Sadducees were on the other end of the Jewish spectrum, they were ultra liberals. They were compromisers both politically and religiously. They were greatly attracted to the pragmatic views of the Romans. They were fewer in number to the Pharisees, but were extremely wealthy. The Pharisees expected their reward in heaven, the Sadducees expected it here. When Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, he was referring to their hypocritical, self serving, dead externalism.

Throughout most of history the church has had its own brand of these. Many are ritualistic, rationalist, whatever works. One looks for salvation in practices, ordinances and prescribed ceremonies, the other funds religious meaning and purpose in private, whatever works standards and beliefs.

Why did John address them so harshly? John's dress and life was unorthodox and one would imagine why self righteous folk would come to John for baptism. Some may have just been curious. However, some may have seen John as a prophet (as many believed) and wanted to check him out. If he was genuine, then getting baptized would be another feather in the cap of righteousness. Whatever their reasons were, they were wrong. They

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weren't seeking God's truth or God working in their own lives, and John seemed to know this.

**Point 2 - The Confrontation.** The word "brood" can be translated "off spring". Vipers are of course a desert snake in context here. Jesus used these same words as well in Matthew 12:34; 23:33 "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart", "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? A viper often looked like a dead piece of wood that was often picked up and the snake struck. This happened to Paul at Malta. The viper refers back to the serpent where the original sin came from, and thus John's condemnation of their religious hypocrisy. Paul warned of such as well in his letter to Timothy "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these" (2 Timothy 3:5). Furthermore in Matthew 23:13 Jesus bring this harsh truth to the religious crowd, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." Jesus also called them "serpents" and "liars" and the devil their father.

Who told you to flee the wrath to come? Farmers would burn brush piles in order to cause the vipers to flee for safety. Commentators agree that the Pharisees and Sadducees were using John's baptism as a sort of fire insurance. Just as in today's world, baptism and church membership don't mean you are a believer, and even as a Christian you aren't going to avoid judgment, we will all give an account to God. John's indictment must have really stung these false religious leaders, who considered themselves to be far above the common man.

**Point 3 - The Condemnation.** The mark of the truly repentant is the fruits in keeping with repentance. 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." In the parallel account in Luke we see a little more detail from John, cf. Luke 3:11,13,14. James 2:17 "Faith, if it has no works, is dead" 1 John 3:7 "the one who practices righteousness is righteous" 1 John 4:20 "If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

This understanding of repentance is consistent with the teaching in the Old Testament. Cf. Ezekiel 33:17-20, even in the story of Nineveh the people showed obvious signs of

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repentance *“When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way.”* The idea of repentance is evidenced by a renunciation of sin and by righteous living did not originate with John the Baptist. Isaiah 1:16-17 *“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup> Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.”*

Author and theologian Eric Sauer in his book *The Triumph of the Crucified*, speaks of repentance as a three fold action, *“Understanding it means acknowledgment of sin, it means pain and grief because of that sin, and then produces a change of will and mind.”*

Recognition of personal sin is the important first step. But by itself it’s useless and even dangerous. A hardened Pharaoh admitted his sin, a double minded Balaam admitted his sin, a greedy Achan acknowledged his, and an insincere Saul confessed his. The rich young ruler admitted his and went away sad, and Judas did so in admission too but hanged himself. All these men recognized sin but never repented. Again we affirm 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.”* Here are two verses in which David began his truly repentant behavior, Psalms 51:1 *“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.”* Psalm 32:3 *“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.”* And David came to the great conclusion when he pleaded with God, *“Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.”*

Puritan writer, William Perkins, wrote, *“Godly sorrow causer grief for sin, because it is sin. It makes any man in whom it is to be of this disposition and mind, that if there were no conscience to accuse, no devil to terrify, no judge to arraign and condemn, no hell to torment, yet he would be humbled and brought on his knees for his sins, because he hath offended a loving, merciful and long suffering God.”*

We can assume that John’s response to the Pharisees and Sadducees is because their repentance wasn’t genuine repentance. John’s words to the religious leaders was a rebuke and an invitation. Hence the gospel message we still know today. His message was you have shown no evidence of repentance. But he said show evidence of repentance and I will baptize you. That’s the invitation today, repent and turn from the wicked, vile, self centered life you live and believe, live for God, righteousness and holiness. True repentance will always bear the fruits of a new man. 2 Corinthians 5:17 *“Therefore if*

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anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”