

The Gospel of Matthew

Chapter 3

Message 4

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Introduction

Matthew chapter 3 presents the fore-runner who is to introduce the Messiah.

- John was a priest, whom God called to be a prophet - shades of Ezekiel's call.
- Both were called to extraordinary ministries.
- We'll break this chapter into 2, rather obvious, sections:
 1. Ministry of John the Baptist.
 2. Baptism of the Lord Jesus.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

As Matthew assumes a Jewish readership, and Malachi, in the OT, clearly introduces the messenger “*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.*” Mal. 3:1, all that Matthew must do is present John as the messenger.

- Hence, we have no background on John in this book.
- John’s entire ministry can be summed up in the phrase, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” Matt. 3:2
- It’s the exact same message the Lord used in His initial ministry, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*”. Matt. 4:17

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Ministry of John the Baptist

We shall look at this call in 3 parts:

1. “Repent”
2. “Kingdom of heaven”
3. “At hand”

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Ministry of John the Baptist

1. Repent:

- This is a summary of the Lord's call in Mark, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*" Mk. 1:15
- Repentance is a turning from the will of man to the will of God. Salvation, of which repentance is the 1st step, abandoning one's own view and **agreeing with God**.
 - Peter preached it, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*" Acts 2:38
 - As did Paul, "*testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*" Acts 20:21

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Ministry of John the Baptist

2. Kingdom of Heaven:

- Strictly speaking, it is the "Kingdom of the **HEAVENS**" pl (Grk).
- A phrase restricted to Matthew's gospel. Other Gospelists, use the phrase "Kingdom of God". It has been suggested that the 2 are synonymous.
- However, Matthew quotes our Lord as speaking of both in the same context, "*Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the **kingdom of heaven**. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the **kingdom of God**.*" Matt. 19:23-24

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Ministry of John the Baptist

2. Kingdom of Heaven:

- J. A. Savage in his book 'The Kingdom of God and of Heaven' sees one Kingdom with 4 aspects:
 1. Kingdom of God
 2. Kingdom of Heaven
 3. Kingdom of the Son
 4. The Father's Kingdom

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Ministry of John the Baptist

2. Kingdom of Heaven:

- J. A. Savage in his book 'The Kingdom of God and of Heaven' sees one Kingdom with 4 aspects:
 1. Kingdom of God
 - The widest and fullest aspect, encompassing all 4 terms.
 - "*Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.*" 1 Chron. 29:11
 - "*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom*" Ps. 145:13

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Ministry of John the Baptist

2. Kingdom of Heaven:

- J. A. Savage in his book 'The Kingdom of God and of Heaven' sees one Kingdom with 4 aspects:
 2. Kingdom of Heaven
 - Here the Kingdom's ruling power is seen as coming down from the heavens.
 - *"the God of heaven will set up a kingdom"* Dan. 2:44

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Ministry of John the Baptist

2. Kingdom of Heaven:

- The key to this phrase being that the ruling power of the heavens has come down and is contrasted sharply with the rule of man.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

3. At Hand:

- What does it mean that “*the Kingdom of heaven is AT HAND*”?
- Was Christ setting up His Kingdom there and then? Was He going to rule at His first advent?
- What might help to understand this is a phrase Matthew uses twice in his gospel. “*from that time*” Matt. 4:17 & 16:21

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Ministry of John the Baptist

3. At Hand:

- Matt. 4:17 “*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*”
- This marks the beginning of His Public Ministry.
- A clear call to the Jew that the promise has come and the doorway to the Kingdom was close enough to touch, in the person of the Lord Jesus.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

3. At Hand:

- An analogy to this is the Israelites reaching the border of Edom and Israel, the entrance to the promised land.
- Were Moses said, “*the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, ‘Go up and take possession of the land that I have given you,’*” Deut. 9:23
- The promise was right there! Egypt and the desert of Zin could be left behind forever, and the promised land entered
- So it was for the Jew of the Lord’s day - there the King was! All they had to do was repent.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

3. At Hand:

- But as the Israelites of old, who could see the promised land across the boarder, refused to enter; so, the Jew of the Lord’s day refused Him, thought they could see Him - “*at hand*”.
- So, the Lord’s message pivoted, “*From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*” Matt. 16:21
- As the Israelites had turned to the wilderness, so the Messiah must turn to the cross, for their sakes.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

Once repentance was acknowledged in the heart of the hearer, John baptized them.

- *“Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the One who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”” Acts 21:4*
- John’s baptism only took them so far - Repent.
- Then the Messiah came, and He would take them to - Belief.
- *“after John... Jesus came... proclaiming the gospel of God... repent and believe in the gospel.” Mk. 1:15*

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Ministry of John the Baptist

We see this truth displayed in the accuracy of scripture.

- John went as far as the OT prophet could go - *“Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in (into) the Jordan River.” Matt. 3:6*
- *“Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the One who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”” Acts 21:4*
- The concept here being that John put them into the river. Though they surely must have come back out, no mention is made of this second part of baptism.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

Until the Lord Jesus is baptized, “*when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water*” Matt. 3:1

- Christ is the “*firstborn among many brethren*” Rom. 8:29
- Without His resurrection, pictured in the emerging out of the water, baptism would have no meaning.
- So, each believing soul is baptized into repentance. Then, following Christ comes up out of the water in faith and belief.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

But unfortunately, not all were there to repent.

- “...*when he (John) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”* Matt 3:7
- Our Lord uses the exact same words of them “*brood of vipers*” in Matt. 12:34. The implication is a likeness to the Serpent.
- They wanted to appear pious - but the act does nothing without a change of ways.
- True repentance bears fruit. It does not look backward with

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Ministry of John the Baptist

John tells them that “*God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*” Matt. 3:9

- God had, after all, made Adam of the dust of the earth.
- Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem the people cried, “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!*” Luke 19:38.
The Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees “*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.*” Luke 19:40
- The Lord was telling them not to boast in being Abraham’s seed but aspire to be children of God.
- GOD HAS NO GRANDCHILDREN ONLY CHILDREN.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

John goes on to tell them how to become children of God by embracing the Messiah to follow.

- “*I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not WORTHY to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” Matt. 3:11
- Strong's 2425 - HIKANOS: ample, sufficient or fit
- The insufficiency of the greatest prophet is highlighted vs. the Messiah to come.

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Ministry of John the Baptist

Matthew uses this word again in the final chapter of this book when describing how the chief priests bought a lie from those that guarded the Lord's tomb.

- *“some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders... they gave a **SUFFICIENT** sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’” Matt. 28:12*
- What sufficient sum could there be to discredit the greatest miracle the world has ever seen!

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Ministry of John the Baptist

John felt that he was not sufficient to do the most menial task for the Great Messiah to come.

- Yet the elders of the people found a sum of money sufficient to betray the truth.
- What do we value the Lord Jesus as in our lives?

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Isaac Watts



1) When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Lord of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

2) Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

3) See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4) Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

According to Luke 3:23, the Lord would have been 30 years of age when He left Galilee for Jordon (about 60 miles).

- The Lord presented Himself for baptism and John was rightly perplexed. *“I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”* Matt. 3:14
- His response has been a source of much consternation, *“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* Matt. 3:15
- Why did the Lord Jesus submit to a baptism of repentance? Certainly, He did not need to repent.

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

In the cultural context of the Judaism of that time, 'righteousness' was viewed as the faithful fulfillment of the Torah, as the full acceptance of the divine will. The Lord Jesus received the baptism of John as a sign of His unconditional compliance with the divine will.

- In being baptized, the Lord is fulfilling His role as the obedient Son of God by practicing the required righteousness of submitting to God's will.
- Whilst, the Lord Jesus submits, heaven erupts with an unconditional statement - This One is different! In Him God is "Well Pleased".

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

The Lord begins His public ministry when He rises up from the waters of the River Jordan.

- Moses had died, after contemplating the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, just before the Israelites crossed the same river.
- Now the Lord Jesus begins His preaching on leaving the Jordan, which was where the life of Moses had ended. It is He who truly brings to fulfillment what Moses had foreseen.
- Again, Matthew shows the Lord to be the New and Better Moses.

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

Heaven's Response to the Baptism:

1. God's 1st statement about His Son.
2. Christ is distinguished from other men.
3. The Spirit of God as a 'Dove'.

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

1. God's 1st statement about His Son:
 - God's introduction of His Son to the world - "*This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*" Matt. 3:17
 - It begs the question - What was man's 1st statement about God's Son?
 - "*Is not this the carpenter's Son?"* Matt. 13:55
 - This is at the heart of Matthew's Gospel - Who's Son, is He?

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus



1. God's 1st statement about His Son:

- Have you ever wondered why the Lord was a Carpenter?
- Not a Shepherd or a Priest - but a Carpenter.
- Our Lord must have known what it was to swing a mallet and drive nails into hard wood.
- Maybe, He thought of day when Roman soldiers would smash 7-8-inch nails into His own quivering flesh.
- Though He knew what awaited Him at the cross "*He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem*". Luke 9:51

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

2. Christ is distinguished from other men:

- On 2 occasions heaven announces, "*this is My beloved Son*".
- 1. In Matt. 3:17, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."
- 2. In Luke 9:35 "*This is my beloved Son: hear Him!*"

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

2. Christ is distinguished from other men:

- In Matthew 3, in the midst of all those repentant sinners, comes One Man whom God finds to be perfect.
- Christ is here distinguished from the WORST of men.
- Though Christ submitted to baptism (symbol of death), upon coming up (only man recorded as doing so), “*whom God hath raised up*” Acts 2:24 as a symbol of approval.

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

2. Christ is distinguished from other men:

- In Luke 9, where the Lord Jesus spoke with Moses and Elijah (the most venerated men in Jewish history), He is distinguished from the BEST of men.
- On the Mt. these men “*appeared in glory and spoke of His departure (exodus), which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*” Luke 9:31
- Both Moses and Elijah had remarkable ‘exoduses’ of their own.
- But the topic, “*in glory*”, was not about what they did but what He was about to do!

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

2. Christ is distinguished from other men:

- Matthew 3 denotes Christ as being obedient and submissive to God's will but "*separate from sinners*".
- Luke 9 denotes Christ as being "*exalted above the heavens*".
- In both, He is God's "*Beloved Son*".
- Together we see what the writer to the Hebrews was saying: "*For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a High Priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens*" Heb. 7:26.

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

3. The Spirit of God as a 'Dove':

- "*the Spirit of God descending like a Dove and coming to rest on Him.*" Matt.3:16
- The Spirit of God is seen here as a Dove. Wonderful evidence of the Triune God.
- He descends from heaven and lands on the only clean thing He can find - the Person of the Lord Jesus.
- Another wonderful allegory appears from Genesis 8 when Noah releases a dove. Keep in mind, a dove will not land on an unclean thing, unlike a raven.

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Baptism of the Lord Jesus

3. The Spirit of God as a 'Dove':

- The 1st time Noah sent out a dove it returned to him because it found "no rest for the sole of her foot" Gen. 8:9.
- The 2nd time the dove returned with an olive leaf but did not land on the earth.
- The 3rd time she simply did not return.
- Never do we read that the dove came to rest!
- One pictures this dove in the air for all the ages of the OT; no one worthy to land upon and rest, until the Lord Jesus comes.