

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW; YOUR KINGDOM COME...ON EARTH
JROC - A Voice Crying in the Wilderness
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For 430 years since the close of the OT, during what has been labeled “the years of SILENCE,” no prophetic VOICE had been raised in Israel. And then...

Matt. 3:1-6 - *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.’”*

⁴ Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him ⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

OBSERVATIONS/QUESTIONS:

- *In those days John....* Matthew assumes that his readers know this man, John. How would they know?
- John is given a title. What does it mean? Would it resonate with the Jewish people?
- John came from somewhere? Where?
- John’s first word is “Repent.” WHY?
- There’s a reason John says, “Repent”!
- Do we read of John mentioning the kingdom of heaven/God in the other gospels? NO! WHY?
- John is connected to the prophet Isaiah about 700 years prior to *In those days* (the time of John).
- John is the voice spoken of in Isaiah! What is the significance of using the word “voice”?
- Why was this voice crying? To whom is the voice crying?
- Where is the “wilderness”?
- What preparation is to be assumed by the recipients of the voice’s message?
- Who is the LORD?
- What is the LORD’s way? His paths? What does straight mean?
- What is the relationship between these people and the LORD?
- Why are we being told about John’s garments? Are these typical garments?
- Why are we being told about John’s diet? Is this a common diet?
- What is the response on the part of people after hearing of the message of the voice, of John?
- WHY?

In those days – cross referencing Matt. 3:1 with...

Luke 3:1-2 - *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of*

IturEa and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John....

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...we are told that this “John” is, in his timeframe, set solidly in the time of Jesus. Some have speculated from this passage that John began to preach in late 28 AD/early 29 AD. Some have estimated a year or two earlier. MORE than the timeframe – *the word of God came to John....* WHY?

Continuing in Luke 3:2...

the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

This is the John who was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth...John whose miraculous birth to this couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth who were well-advanced in years, was announced by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:5-17) who proclaimed that John would serve as the herald of the Messiah...

BUT WAIT – Zacharias was of the tribe of Levi...what’s his son doing in the wilderness? Shouldn’t his son, John, be following in his father’s footsteps – training for the priesthood in the Temple in Jerusalem?

Let’s return to Matthew 3...

*In those days John the Baptist – in the Greek, *bap TEES tace* – one who administers the rite of baptism. The root word means to cleanse by dipping, immersing, or submerging. John the Baptist came (came forth; make ones appearance) *preaching in the wilderness of Judea* - WHY? He was preaching! To whom??? John is in the wilderness! Who’s in the wilderness? Wilderness means an uninhabited place, a desolate area. The wilderness of Judea was west of the Dead Sea but to the north near the Jordan River – on the east side of the Jordan River. How do we know that? Cross reference to... John 1:28 tells us that *These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan* (east of the Jordan). (See attached map)*

Had John been in seclusion prior to preaching in this desolate area?

Luke 3:2b-3 - ...*the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness*. ³ *And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*. We’re further told...earlier in John’s life...

Luke 1:80 - *So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel*. It appears that John didn’t follow his father’s lineage – within the priestly tribe of Levi. God called John to a unique ministry that began outside the religious center of the land.

Luke 1:15 – the angel Gabriel told Zacharias about his son, John, that - *He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb*.

At John’s circumcision and naming ceremony, God inspired Zacharias to speak these words about his son, John...Luke 1:76-79 - *you, child, will be called the prophet of the*

Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, (you, John, will be the herald for the One Who will come – the Messiah) ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission (forgiveness) of their sins, ⁷⁸ through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring (lit “dawn;” Messiah) from on high has visited us; ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

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John came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent....’ In the Bible, the word *repent* means “to change one’s mind.” The Bible also tells us that true repentance will result in a change of actions. In Matthew we read both John and Jesus’ message - a call to repentance to the Jewish people in their day:

- *Repent* was the first word of John’s message (Matt. 3:1-2)
- *Repent* was the first word of Jesus’ message (Matt. 4:17)

WHY was John calling upon the Jewish people to repent?

Matt. 3:2b-3 – *‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’*

The first word we hear from *the voice of one crying in the wilderness* – as told in Isa. 40:3 - is “REPENT.” Why did John tell the people to repent? What was God’s message to Israel throughout the OT? RETURN TO ME, ISRAEL (Isa. 55:7)

What was God’s message to Israel throughout the OT?

RETURN TO ME, ISRAEL (Isa. 55:7)

Deuteronomy 6:5 – *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”*

Deuteronomy 5:29 – *“Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me. . . .”*

Deuteronomy 30:1-6 - *“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”*

Jeremiah 24:7 - *"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."*

Jeremiah 31:31-34 – provisions of the New Covenant – a new heart, God's Spirit within them, removal of sin.

Hosea 5:15 – *"I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."*

Micah 7:18-19 - *"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."*

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Why did John tell Israel to repent at this time? BECAUSE THE KING WAS COMING! Isa. 40:3 - *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'* This prophetic message from Isaiah 700 years before John tells Israel to prepare for the LORD. John is noted as the "voice" in Matt. 3:3. John is the voice following the 430 years of "silence." John's proclamation for them to repent in Jesus' day is followed by the "WHY" - the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The kingdom of heaven was coming/was approaching. The long-awaited Davidic King had drawn near to earth in the person of Jesus the Messiah.

What kingdom?

Firstly, notice that the kingdom of heaven is left undefined by John. John does not explain the kingdom. Why? The kingdom had been presented in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Jewish people knew what the OT promised. The Kingdom of God was Israel's hope for the establishment of the promised rule of the Messiah in His physical/material kingdom on this earth. And, John announced a literal kingdom on the earth under the personal rule of the Messiah. John's baptism was in preparation for the kingdom. Think of Jesus' words to Nicodemus – *Unless you are born again you will not see the kingdom of God!*

Secondly, did that kingdom arrive on earth during Jesus' first coming? NO!

Thirdly, how will the kingdom of God arrive? Dan. 2:31-35, 44; Dan. 7:13-14, 27; Zech. 14. Jesus is not yet ruling from Jerusalem with a rod of iron (Psa. 2:8-9).

During the kingdom, Satan is bound in a pit. Now we're told...*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (I Pet. 5:8).

NOTE: Matthew was telling the Jewish people that, because the expected King was at hand/in their midst, they would have the opportunity to enthrone the King!

Let's travel to the Jordan River...the entrance to the land of promise in Joshua's day. It appears that approximately 30 years following John's birth, he emerged from seclusion and began to proclaim what was about to happen.

Matt. 3:4-5 - *Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.* ⁵ *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him* ⁶ *and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias in the Temple, Gabriel told Zacharias that he and Elizabeth would have a son, John. Gabriel likened John to Elijah. II Kings 1:2-8 gives us a description of Elijah...*A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist.* John's clothing and food are described. He wore a homespun camel's hair shirt, a wide leather belt, and ate locusts and honey. This description had special meaning for the people looking for the Messiah. WHY? Malachi told the people that the Messiah's arrival would be preceded by the appearance of Elijah. And here comes John looking just like Elijah! Would that cause you to WONDER...to PAUSE...to PONDER?

John the Immerser emerged from the same desert where Elijah spent most of his life. He preached with the same boldness as Elijah. He dressed like Elijah. Elijah, when he was taken up to heaven bodily, he had crossed the Jordan from the west side to the east side.

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Elijah was translated bodily into heaven on the east side of the Jordan. John baptized on the east side of the Jordan – from where Elijah was last seen!!

Elijah ministered in a time of crisis in Israel, when the nation was far from God, and a time that immediately preceded a terrible judgment. The ministry of John signaled a spiritual crisis in Israel. Would the nation accept Jesus as their King? And, multitudes... Jerusalem, ALL Judea, and ALL the region around the Jordan went out to him. WHY? Isaiah spoke of John (Isa. 40:3) as did Malachi (Mal. 3:1). John was connected with the coming of the Messiah. There was expectation. And, Malachi had warned that they, as a NATION, must repent or else God would strike the earth with a curse. These multitudes were being immersed and they were confessing their sins!

Luke 3 - *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'* This voice was telling the people that the LORD was coming! It was the custom of some Eastern monarchs to send heralds before them to announce that they, the monarchs/royalty, were on their way. They would send an envoy to ensure that the roads were safe. So – obstacles had to be cleared away, causeways had to be built, and crooked roads straightened, and the land leveled. The verbiage concerning the valleys and the mountains points to hearts changed by God. The humble are lifted up and those who elevate themselves will be brought low.

John proclaimed a new government!!!! Did you ever consider... Isa. 9:6 - *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And*

His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

John did not proclaim this kingdom of God in Jerusalem, the nation's governmental center. Instead, John preached first to a handful of country folk living along the Jordan River, twenty miles to the east of the capital city.

Immersion was nothing new to the Jewish people. Purification rites are noted in the Torah. Priests were cleansed (Ex. 19:10-14; Lev. 8:6), and articles were also cleansed (Lev. 11:32). There was cleansing for bodily discharges. Leprous garments were cleansed as were leprous homes. The expression clean and unclean is one of the prominent themes in Leviticus. Cleanliness and uncleanness are related to holiness!

John told the people to believe in the coming One after him – Jesus. John's baptism was in view of the coming of the Messiah (Matt. 3:2). It was in view of the people's uncleanness (Mk. 1:5). It was based on confession and repentance (Mk. 1:4). It was with a view to receiving forgiveness of sins (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:4).

John's baptism brought the Jewish religious leadership to the shores of the Jordan – for a very different reason – to investigate John. If immersion was practiced by Jewish people, why were the Jewish religious leaders investigating John (John 1:19)? John was

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immersing the Jewish people! Jews accepting John's baptism were admitting that they had been as Gentiles and needed to become the people of God genuinely, inwardly. Jews immersed Gentiles when they, Gentiles, converted to Judaism. Jewish people immersed Gentiles who were seen by the Jews as being outside God's saving covenant. John immersed Jewish people who were seen as already clean! It was thought that Jewish people were already righteous because they were descendants of Abraham. Lineage doesn't assure salvation! Man, both Jew and Gentile, is declared righteous through faith alone in the Jewish Messiah alone!

Matt. 3:6-12 - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood (offspring) of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. ¹⁰ And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. The Pharisees (separatists; not espousing Greek philosophy) and the Sadducees (aristocrats; embraced Greek philosophy; didn't believe in the resurrection nor spirit beings/angels; ruled over the Temple) appeared on the scene. Both groups were self-

righteous and, as such, considered themselves acceptable to God. They denied having sin that needed to be confessed or unrighteousness that needed to be forgiven.

They saw themselves as acceptable to God because they were children of Abraham – they were Jewish.

John lashed out at the Jewish religious leadership. A viper was seen as unclean and unacceptable to God and would defile anything it touched. And John came against the teaching that ones relationship to Abraham was the basis for entrance into the Kingdom of God. John reminded them that God was able to give life to stones to make them the children of God. It has been suggested that John might have been pointing to the stones on the riverbank – the stones were possibly the memorial stones of Joshua (Joshua 4).

Matt. 3:10 - *even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.* John told the religious leadership that judgment was at hand. He exhorted them to escape this judgment through exhibiting lives that resulted from true repentance.

Matt. 3:11-12 - *“I indeed baptize you with water unto 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 and fire.* The One Who would give the Holy Spirit as an identifying sign of relationship would be the true Messiah. Messiah’s baptism would not be external but internal.

¹² His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Fire was associated with judgment just as the winnowing fork. The winnowing fork separates the wheat from the chaff. The chaff consists of the husks of grains and grasses that are worthless. The seed falls to the ground in the winnowing process and the chaff is scattered to the wind.

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Many thought that John was the Messiah. John replied with, “I am not the Messiah. I am sent ahead of Him. John was merely a “voice,” merely a messenger sent by God to proclaim the truth. John knew that once Jesus appeared at the Jordan, his work/John’s work would be all but finished. John willingly served the Messiah. John’s life was a total surrender to Jesus and to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God on earth!

John declared, *He must increase, I must decrease* (John 3:30).

QUESTIONS:

SO WHAT? What's the significance of this chapter?

What impacted you about John?

What impacted you about his message?

What impacted you about the Kingdom of God?

Any V8 moments?

What lessons are you taking away?

Can you see the connection between the OT and John?

Does it help you to reread the handout from the Tuesday lesson with the Biblical references?

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

Reread with the Biblical references.

Jot down observations and questions and begin to find answers in the Bible.

Share what you learned through this lesson with at least one person.