

**Saturday, September 23, 2023 • Read Matthew 3:1–12**

*Questions from the Scripture text: To what days does v1 fast forward? Where was John the baptizer preaching? What did he command to do (v2)? Why? Who had talked about John (v3)? What had Isaiah called him? What would this voice command that they prepare? How was John dressed (v4)? What did he eat? From where were people coming to him in v5? What was he doing to them? Where? What were they doing as they were being baptized? Whom does John see in v7? What does he call them? What does he say is coming with the kingdom? What does he ask them? What does he tell them to do in v8? What mustn't they think can be a substitute for repentant works (v9)? How do children of Abraham arise? What picture does v10 use for the coming of the kingdom? How are the trees that are going to be burned identified? With what did John baptize (v11)? Unto what? Who else was coming—of what power? Of what worthiness? With Whom (!) would He baptize instead? What is the difference in source of power and likelihood of success? What else does the One Who baptizes with the Spirit have in His hand (v12)? What will He do with it? What does He gather? What does He burn? With what fire?*

**What has King Jesus come to do?** Matthew 3:1–12 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these twelve verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us **King Jesus has come to fit His people for glory with Him before pouring out His wrath in unquenchable fire.**

**Humility.** Hosea 11 (cf. 2:15) and Jeremiah 31 (cf. 2:18) had prophesied a return of the Jews from exile and a reunification not only of Israel and Judah but more importantly of God's people with God Himself. Now, Matthew takes us to another passage that had promised the same. John came preaching in a literal wilderness (v1) as the one prophesied about in Isaiah 40:3. There, YHWH Himself was coming to show His incomparable glory by gathering His people to Himself through His Word. He brings the "great" ones of the earth to nothing, but sustains His flock with enduring strength.

So, there is this building theme that whatever national expectations Israel might have had, what the Lord had actually promised and intended was not on a national scale but a cosmic scale. The sort of scale that makes us say, "God alone is glorious! No man is anything compared to Him!" (cp. Isa 40:12–26). John himself, YHWH's herald, is an example of this humility. Jesus Himself makes this point in 11:7–10. John's location and clothing (as well as his diet) are lowly in the eyes of men (v4), and this highlights (by contrast) the infinite greatness of the King and kingdom: what are fine clothes and a king's palace next to YHWH the King?

If we are going to heed John's message in v2, we are going to need humility. "Repent" is literally "be changed in the substance of your mind." He is not just saying "feel more correctly" about your sin, or even "do better." He is saying "be changed from the inside out!" Some have well-translated it, "Be converted!" This requires humility on two counts: the humility to admit that we ourselves need to be fundamentally changed to be saved, and then the further humility to realize that this is something that we cannot do for ourselves.

Of course, there is the danger of thinking that making public display of humility is a substitute for genuine internal transformation. This is the problem with the Pharisees and Sadducees—theological opponents who had in common that they loved appearances. But John compares them to snakes slithering out of Jerusalem (v7), and tells them that their lives must genuinely change (v8), for which external/visible covenant membership is not even a substitute (v9). Wanting to appear humble before men is no substitute for actually being humiliated before God!

John is announcing that conversion is necessary. In God's great mercy, crowds flock to him (v5), confessing the great necessity of their conversion (v6).

**Urgency.** The need for repentance has been occasioned by the nearness of the kingdom. When we come to 4:23, Matthew is going to tell us that Jesus preaches the "gospel" of the kingdom. But the kingdom is only good news for you if you have the favor of the King! John's message is not one of sweetness and comfort but alarm and terror! The nearness of the kingdom (v2), becomes the wrath that is coming (v7), and then an axe is already mid swing (v10a), and fire follows the death-blow (v10b). The King Who is coming separates those who are His (His winnowing, His hand, His threshing, His *wheat*), because He is ready to burn the rest with an unquenchable fire.

**Hope.** John pressed the urgent need of conversion, but he could not offer hope for that conversion from himself. He administers the sign, but we desperately need the One Who can apply the thing signified. And this One is the One in Whom John proclaims hope. Jesus is not a mere man. He is YHWH of Isaiah 40, before Whom the voice in the wilderness cries out. He is YHWH of Ezekiel 36, Who puts His own Spirit into people to change them (cf. Eze 36:26–27), something that He illustrated by the sprinkling of water (cf. Eze 36:25; Heb 10:22). *By His Spirit*, Jesus will change sinners' hearts, join them to Himself through faith, and make them the good grain that He is cleansing to gather to Himself.

By right, Jesus the King destroys His enemies. But by His pleasure, and by His plan, He gives His Spirit to redeem us, so that we are indeed changed by the time the kingdom itself has come.

What do you need, in order for the kingdom to be good news for you? How does this conversion happen?

*Sample prayer: Father, thank You for giving Your Son to be our King, who first subdues us to Himself by His Spirit, before destroying His enemies. Grant that by the Spirit, we would believe in Christ, we ask in His Name, AMEN!*

**Suggested songs: ARP98 "O Sing a New Song" or TPH391 "Come, O Come, Thou Quickening Spirit"**

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Matthew chapter 3 verses 1 through 12. These are God's words and those days, John, the baptist came preaching in the wilderness of judea. And saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is a hand. For this is he who has 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 Now, john himself was clothed in camel's hair. With a leather belt around his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then jerusalem mold judea and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and we're baptized by him in the Jordan.

Confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, He said to them ruda vipers who warned you to flee. From the Roth to come. Therefore bear, fruits were the of repentance. 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, And now, even now the ax is laid to the row to the trees.

Therefore every tree which does not bear. Good fruit, just cut down. And thrown into the far. I indeed, baptized you with water under repentance But he who is coming, after me is mightier than i This sandals, i am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you. Who the holy spirit?

Because winter wing 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.

So far the reading of god's inspired and And there are twerk.

Jesus is. Your way, who has come to Comfort and save his people. We heard. And the collection. Of events. Following his birth, the end of chapter 2. That the lord has everlasting electing love. For the elect israel for. Uh, the israel of promise. Um, which is to be distinguished from the israel of the flesh.

According to Romans chapter 9. And following. But the israel of The flesh are the ones to whom and through whom. The promise came. And so they are beloved of god in his saving purposes in the world and his love for them is expressed in the language that belongs to the Israel of promise.

And so we heard from Hosea 11. Which begins with out of egypt. I called my son and continues throughout the rest of that chapter. With gods everlasting love. For Ephraim, for israel. The love that refuses. To let him go. The love that insists to bring him back. That god will not give up those upon him.

He has set this everlasting love. We heard from jeremiah 31. That in the same everlasting adopting love. God intended. To bring his people back from captivity, not just from a Babylonian captivity, but from spiritual captivity to their sins that having chastened the nation for the nation since He would bring an age in the life of the church.

In which he did something new. There would be a new covenant, not something that replaces. Um, the covenant of grace. Uh, but a new era, a new iteration a progression. In the covenant of grace. And it would be marked by new hearts. And now, Uh, as john the baptist comes and he preaches.

Uh, matthew quotes from isaiah 40, another chapter But as talking about this love for his elect throughout at the age of that is expressed in this new era. In the lord's, dealing with his church on earth. Uh, a new era that goes from dealing with national israel as a church.

To dealing with the church on earth whose head is not a king on a throne in jerusalem. But whose head is a king on a throne in heaven. And y'all hear himself comes as that king and he sends a messenger before him. And that's who matthew identifies, john as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Prepare the way of Yahweh make his paths straight And in that chapter, it talks about mountains being laid, low and valleys being raised up. So that Um, In this picture of the Church generally end of a sinner's heart specifically. Uh, god changes the nature of the very thing. As the king comes to take off his residence.

And that is what john comes preaching. Verse two, it says repent for the kingdom of heaven. Is that hand and what we'll hear john preaching then. Is. The necessity of humility. And the necessity of urgency. And the reality of hope. First, the necessity of humility. And he says, repent here.

The word is change. Your thinking. And not just, Change. Or make a altar the manner in which you think? But, Uh, exchange. The. The nature of your mind. It's better translated. I think be converted. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is a necessity of humility. Uh, to say.

For the king coming to be good news for me. I need to be fundamentally changed. Uh, i need to go from mountains and valleys. To a plane. Uh, the I need a new heart. In order. To. Receive the king. In blessing. And salvation. Similar to What jesus is talking to nicodemus about Than john chapter 3.

Uh, when jesus knows that nicodemus has come with questions about the kingdom, And he tells him. Why are you asking about the kingdom? You couldn't enter it if it came. You know, unless a man is born again. He cannot see the kingdom of god. And we have to come to that point before god where we know That we need to be fundamentally different beings.

Then we came into this world. Than the ones as which we came into this world. And so there's necessary. Humility, that's why. Uh, john when he sees the pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism to add one more spiritual action, one more display of their religiosity, Uh, one more Ritual washing, although they had plenty.

Uh from the bible and they had plenty that they had added to the bible, but now john was doing one and all of jerusalem and judeo were coming out to him. And so they didn't want to be left out of another spiritual washing. And yet, they did not think that they themselves needed to be fundamentally changed.

Which is why. Um, Why john tells them to bear fruit? Worthy or in keeping with That is appropriate to repentance. In verse 8. They, they thought that they were doing pretty good, and In their, Religious life and their moral life. Uh, they certainly thought that since they were children of Of abraham, they did not need Um, To be changed.

They thought their church membership was enough. That it meant that they were saved to be part of the covenant. Um, Externally. As, as members of the visible church, And he says, no. Uh, you have to bear fruit, that proves you're a different kind of tree. Uh, you have to Uh, bear.

The resemblance. To abraham, not just be descended. From abraham. God is able to make children of abraham out of stones. Which of course, was The promise in jeremiah 31. And is equal 26. Um, that god takes those who are stones and makes them flesh. He takes those who are dead and makes them alive those who Care.

Nothing for god and makes them into those who love God. And so there is the humility. To to say, i apart from grace, And my spiritual stone. I need to be converted. And that's what john's baptism was saying. John's baptism was Uh, with water. Onto repentance. It was people.

Who felt the need. To be. Convert it. And even converted people feel the need of their conversion. Because, Yes, they are converted and it only happens once, but we continually deal with our remaining sin, don't we? And we we continually deal with what's left of our original nature. And so we cling to god, for his mercy to give life and success and strength to our new nature that we may continue putting to death, what remains from the old.

And so just because we are converted doesn't mean, we lose our sense of the need for that conversion that we already have. Uh, we Uh, we let hold of god and disgrace and live independence upon him. Um, To continue. Sustaining that new life that is from him alone. So there's that humility that is needed and it's urgent.

It's urgent because jesus has come. And jesus coming. It means the end of the ages is upon us. But the end of the ages is always upon any child of adam. Because you're only going to be in this world for a little while and then you're going to be an eternity.

People are like, oh, i think the end is gonna come within my lifetime. Well, that's actually true for every single one of us because your end comes at the conclusion of your lifetime. And, Then, there is eternity. But jesus is a rival signifies The dawn of the last age of this world, And, The picture is very urgent and very pressing and acts mid.

Swing about to chop the tree down that it may be cast into the fire. Jesus. Coming yes to save. And we'll get to that in the third part hope. But as he is saving, he's also identifying those who are going to be burned, And so his separating, those who have the spiritual useless, Of the life that is from themselves, the chaff That lacks weight.

And so it, it doesn't fall to the ground of the threshing floor. It blows out and gets Piled up externally.

The chaff. That that blows out to the sides and and ends up in piles. And then there's the grain and in the slightly Um, in a slightly sloped floor. Uh, that that ends up in the bottom. And then he's gonna gather the grain for himself, but the chaff who's going to burn.

It becomes really good tender And that's what a man's spiritual life. Were spiritual worthiness is apart from god's grace. And then john's picture, god is getting ready

to burn up anyone and everyone who doesn't have this new converted life from god? And so it is very urgent, every one of you.

Every one of us. Is about to enter eternity. And if we enter eternity in ourselves, We will burn. We must enter eternity as those who have been converted. But we cannot convert ourselves. The water says, the water of john's baptism says be converted bear fruit. Don't just trust in your church membership.

You need to be a child of Abraham in the heart, not just in the dna. You need to be a child of abraham in your soul. With the faith of abraham and the god of abraham, and the new life And you that god had given to abraham. And so, we're grateful that this passage.

Holds before us, not just the necessity of humility and the urgency of Of conversion. But hope. John says, i indeed baptize you with water hunter repentance but he who is coming after me is my year than i His sandals. I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you.

With the holy spirit. The phrase and fire there, at the end of verse 11. Is um, Uh, something that is one of those. Peculiarities of the Greek New Testament. That they had in the 16th and 17th century in the west. That was built really off of the work of one man named Harasmus, it's not in the majority text.

It's not in the The greek that was used throughout the ages throughout the centuries. That the lord preserved pure and entire, he will baptize you with The holy spirit. And so, john knows that his baptism is not christian baptism. In fact, it's kind of a surprise at the end of The book of matthew when john, when jesus commands that there be water baptisms on earth still because john here in this passage of sets water baptism over against christian baptisms.

I baptized with water Jesus is going to baptize with the spirit. And so the water of course, was a sign that i need to be converted. But even the sign that i need to be converted, it's self-testifies i cannot convert myself But jesus comes and he baptizes with the holy spirit and he is the one who gives conversion And Ezekiel 26, which is a parallel with jeremiah 31 germ, both of them both passages talk about the new heart.

That is that is necessary. Uh but an ezekiel 26. God is more specific about how that new heart comes had comes. By his spirit. And jesus then will baptize with the holy spirit. He will pour out as As we read and heard over, and over again, and acts his holy spirit.

And the holy spirit is the one Who gives you the new heart? He was always the one who gave new hearts. How did people get saved in the Old Testament? The holy spirit, gave them new hearts and they hoped in a christ. Who would come? How do people get saved in the new testament?

The holy spirit, gives them new hearts and they hope in a christ-tooth has come Uh, but part of the newness of the new testament is that the lord jesus has come. And so now we don't just hope in a salvation that will come, we know that we are united to our savior We have a life that is shared with him.

And so we know god as our father and we know jesus as our life. Um, And then there is a new relation even to the holy spirit for he does not just give life to us as he always did. But he dwells in our hearts. He dwells in our hearts.

As the spirit of the sun. So in the fullness of time, god sent Fourth his son born under the law, etc. And we're identified with him and when you believe in him as a christian, you have this experiential union with jesus christ. And, you know that your life is joined to his And when, you know the holy spirit as a christian, you know, him not just as the one who Helps you.

And is alongside you. And always with you. But, you know, him as the one who dwells in you. You live in fellowship. With god, the holy spirit. And so, The. The pouring out of the holy spirit by the lord jesus, as Indicates that the God, the spirit applies to us continually the life of god, the sun.

Conversion is not something new. But this indwelling of the holy spirit by a resurrected ascended enthroned, savior. That is something new. And it means that believers can have assurance of faith. Uh, believers can know that they are converted. By the fellowship that they have with the sun by the fellowship that they have.

Uh, with god the holy spirit who dwells in us. And so we claim our privilege. As new covenant christians. Uh, by taking that, which jesus has commanded just different than john's baptism. Right. Christian baptism is jesus pouring out his holy spirit? But he has commanded a baptism on earth that is now connected to his.

Baptism. And you can know by the pouring out of the water on earth. Every time you see another, Baptism. And you see the water port. And you remember that, he who commanded that the water be poured on earth as the one who pours his spirit from heaven? And that when he pours his spirit, his spirit just doesn't just end up on us.

But he ends up in us. God makes his spirit to. They're jesus. And particular who is god? Of course. Makes his spirit to dwell. Within us. And yes, i have my remaining sin. And i feel my need of conversion. But i feel something else even more greatly. That jesus my savior.

Has obeyed in my place. And he has died in my place. And he has risen with power. And it is he Who has made his spirit to come dwell in me. And god the father, son and holy spirit, will not fail to save me all the way to the end.

So that when all the access have fallen, And all the grain has been thrashed. I can know by what he has done. From heaven. And i've been assured of by his testimony in the sacrament on earth. I can know that i will be the grain. Among the grain. Who are gathered into the barn?

I can know that the king came not as my enemy. But as my savior, And so, the greatness of the lord jesus. And the greatness of his spirit. Him, he has given to me. Gives me hope. So, we feel the necessity of our conversion. We know the urgency of that conversion.

But we can also. Receive. And know, the hope. That we have. For conversion. From the lord jesus christ. Let's pray. We pray. Lord that you would give us. Humility about ourselves. But, A right opinion also of yourself and your glory. And the glory of your spirit. Whom you give to convert us and sanctify us and preserve us.

Lord blessed to us. Our water baptisms. That we would be all the more sure. Of our spirit baptism from you. And make us to know his fellowship as dwelling with us. In our hearts make us to know your fellowship. As the one. With whom we have a shared life now, We ask these things in your own name.

Lord, jesus. Amen.