

## Matthew 3:1-17

**“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias [Isaiah], saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost [Holy Spirit], and *with* fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be* so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

*‘Israel, Judea, You Need To Go Backwards!’*

I’d like to start with a story, it’s about the clipper ship the Dreadnaught, 1862. This ship actually sailed backwards for

280 miles, and it is a technical feat that is unique in maritime history. But a clipper ship sailing backwards. That hasn't happened too many times, let alone 280 miles. But this ship got itself into a difficult situation, left Liverpool, was in the Atlantic, encountered a pretty big storm, so much so that the storm killed the ships' carpenter, broke the rudder and disabled the vessel. So for three days it was just going back and forth in the waves, drifting along. And then, desperate situations require desperate measures, the captain tried something unique. He at first rolled up and secured all the lead sails that were on the foremasts, and he went back to the third mast, which is called the mizzenmast, and set all the square-sails there and threw back every sail that was set, thus by steering over the bow with an improvised rudder thrown over the bow, which was now used as the stern---complicated maneuver to say the least, this captain sailed this ship backwards to the nearest harbour, which was in the Azores, 280 miles away. So you get the visual, out there in the Atlantic, pretty strange to be out there in your little boat, watching a big old clipper ship, which is designed, it's got the flat stern, the pointy nose, it's going backwards, sailing backwards through the waters. And I start with that illustration, kind of a strange sight, but I think it gives a good picture for us as we go now through this chapter of Matthew chapter 3. [see <http://currierandives.net/ClipperShipDreadnought/> and [http://www.bruzelius.info/Nautica/Ships/Clippers/Dreadnought\(1853\).html](http://www.bruzelius.info/Nautica/Ships/Clippers/Dreadnought(1853).html)]

Because that picture to me is what that nation of Israel is presently in need of, as the Word says here, they're in need of a certain work, it's like that clipper ship going backwards. You know the nation of Israel was in a spiritually difficult place. For 400 years there hasn't been a spoken word from a prophet. So without the enriched Word of God, there's been a drought of the Word of God, and with that drought there's been a dulling of the hearts of the people of Israel, and with a dulling of the hearts, there's been a drifting away from God. So they're not in a good place. But now God's Word comes, God's Word speaks from the quiet. And it's a word, the message is **'You need to change your ways, O nation of Israel, you need to change your ways.'** In a sense, they need to go backwards, they need to leave from where they are, the point in time spiritually where they are at this point, and then to go back to their old ways when they were a nation that sought the face of God. So, **'Go back, change your ways.'** Maybe that's you, you've been tossed to and fro, morally, spiritually, gotten off course, gotten away from where you used to be. Of course, that is the word "repent," you need to repent,

that's what it means. It means you find yourself in the wrong place, you need to set your sails and return, go another way, take that U-turn, go back to the Lord with all your heart, mind and soul. And he comes in an encouraging way and he says **'Repent, from where you are, it's not a good place, and come back, come back to the harbour, come back to be with me so you'll be in that sense of blessing and peace and hope and the good life.'** Now maybe you're here today, and you're not even born-again, you're not a Christian. And the Bible says **"Unless a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, read verses 3-8 for context)** [Comment: Really, in the new covenant, it starts with a desire to repent, becoming "poor in spirit," recognizing where you are spiritually, and then a mourning takes place, and then you come into having a meek attitude, and then you cry out for the righteousness of God, hungering and thirsting for it (all this is explained in Matthew 5:1-6, the Beatitudes, which we'll come to in a couple of chapters. But we as humans without God inside of us cannot truly repent of anything. The endless cycle of addictions and/or sins, with no way of coming out of them is our lot in life without God inside of us by way of his indwelling Holy Spirit. But **when** you ask and accept Jesus into your life, the Holy Spirit is placed inside of you, and you receive power to overcome and truly repent of your sins (which btw, is a lifetime process of sanctification). Real repentance comes from the Lord working his good pleasure inside of us by way of the indwelling Holy Spirit (cf. John 14 & 16). Log onto [http://www.washedred.com/changed\\_lives/](http://www.washedred.com/changed_lives/) and check out the fascinating testimonies given about this process called repentance and asking God into your life.]

*The Ministry Of John the Baptist---The Last Of The Prophets*

**Verses 1-12, "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 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.' Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locust and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan went out to meet him, and were 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, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy 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 even now the axe 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. I indeed baptize 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. 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.'** "Few preachers ever produced such effects as John the Baptist: **"People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan."** (verse 5)...Jesus called him **"a lamp that burned and gave light"** (John 5:35); the great Bishop of souls himself declared that **"among women there has not been anyone greater than John the Baptist"** (Matthew 11:11). (excerpted from J.C. Ryle, Matthew, p.13) J. Vernon McGee comments that John the Baptist is the last of the Old Testament prophets. He says, "He's really an Old Testament character, walking out of the Old Testament. He is the last of the Old Testament Prophets." So Matthew begins this section **"In those days"**. Now we have these ministry years, **"In those days,"** Jesus is thirty years of age.

*"Prepare The Way Of The Lord, Make His Paths Straight"*

Now, Jesus is coming on the scene, as far as his ministry, so in order to prepare for that time, God sent one ahead of him, and that is as you see there in verses 1 and 2, beginning there, it's John the Baptist. Matthew, as he introduces us to John the Baptist, then quotes from the prophet Isaiah. He says **"This fulfills prophecy, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."** So, as the ministry time begins for Jesus, God sends this one in fulfillment of prophecy to prepare his way. Now what does it mean when it says **"to make his paths straight"**? What does that mean? Well, it's a picture. In those civilizations and cultures of the time, a king coming into your territory was a big deal, and people prepared for it. You'd prepare the roads, you'd

prepare the countryside. You'd make sure his travel there was smooth, his travel was nice. [I sincerely hope no royalty has to be driven over Massachusetts roads, poor bloke would have his limo swallowed up by a pot-hole.] I remember when I went to Israel the last time [this Calvary Chapel pastor relating], the year 2000, it just happened to be a couple weeks before the pope was coming to Israel. But the place was packed. Not only that, there was a lot of road construction, they were preparing for the pope. He was going to be there in two or three weeks, so everywhere you went, just delays and constructions, *'Big deal, he's coming, prepare, make the paths straight.'* And that's the essence of what that means, **'John the Baptist preparing for the Messiah,'** now he's not worried about physical roads and anything like that. But ***he's coming to prepare the hearts of the people,*** you know, to make the paths straight in that sense---the mountains of pride in the hearts, they need to be made low, they need to repent, and people that are discouraged, they need to be encouraged---***'Here comes the Messiah, the Christ is coming!'*** As you remember the story of John the Baptist's father, the angel Gabriel, Luke chapter 1, verses 14 to 17, and what the angel says, he says that this isn't going to be an ordinary man, he says he'll be a joy and delight to his parents, one who would cause many to rejoice because of his birth, as he would bring back many to the Lord their God. He would be great in the sight of the Lord, never to touch any fermented drink, any wine or alcohol. But from his birth he was be filled with the Holy Spirit, from his very birth, ***'One then who would go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.'*** (Malachi 4:5-6) ***Luke chapter 1, verse 76, 'That he would be the prophet of the Most High'*** so he's a prophet, ***'to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.'*** So, a prophet. Luke chapter 16, verse 16, we learn there that he is the last of the Old Testament prophets. There hasn't been one for four hundred or so years, and now we have this man John the Baptist. And Jesus said, ***'He is the Elijah that was to come,'*** you know, as far as the prophecy in Malachi 4, verses 5-6. Yet John, and we even see this, John the Baptist, we see these truths too, this man is a man of humility. Great man, I mean he's great in also that he's very humble. [In a Horizon Christian Fellowship ministerial huddle out in San Diego, that pastor related this observation the pastors came to] "and in one room we were to talk about the three greatest lessons in ministry, the other room we were talking about the

three greatest blessings in ministry, and the other room we were to talk about the three greatest difficulties in ministry. Interestingly, the greatest difficulties and the greatest blessings were the same answer, it was people, people are the greatest difficulties and people are the greatest blessings, **and one of the greatest things needed in ministry that came out consistently...was the need for humility [by those pastoring over people].**

*John Is Preaching In The Wilderness Of Judea, Probably Near Ancient Gilgal*

Now, he appears on the scene preaching in the wilderness. The wilderness of Judea, the desert of Judea, it's a barren area, it's a desert area. There's rock, there's stone, it's not a very nice area. It's not a place where large crowds would naturally gather, where you're cutting out and saying 'Let's just go and gather,' in large numbers, the wilderness of Judea, that's not the place for it. Yet this man has such a powerful way to him, filled with the Holy Spirit since he was conceived. There's such a powerful way to him, when he teaches, and his message, so much so that this stirs the hearts of the people and they come in great multitudes, they come from all around. Now, as you see there too, his appearance is a bit unusual, clothed in camel's hair, he's got a garment on, a robe of some sort that's made of camel's hair. That is a bit unusual, leather belt around his waist. Now that clothing, if people understood the Bible, they would understand that this was the clothing of a prophet, see 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings chapter 1, verse 8, he's got these unusual clothes, he's got this powerful way to him, but not only that, he does have a bit of an unusual diet too. Now locust is something that the Jew could eat, it was the only flying bug that you could eat [as spelled out in the Law of God's dietary health code, in Leviticus 11]. This guy's got a diet of locusts and wild honey. But in all of his life, this man's been set apart. Now he's been in the wilderness for a period of time, it's possible, his parents were very old when he was born, so maybe they weren't alive for very long, and when he was at a young age they died. So he's been in the wilderness for some time.

### ***Sin and Repentance***

**"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (verses 1-2) John the Baptist**

taught the absolute necessity of repentance (verse 2)...he preached that repentance must be proven by its “fruit” (verse 8); he warned his hearers not to rest on outward privileges, or outward union with the church...We are naturally dead, and blind, and asleep in spiritual things; we are ready to content ourselves with a mere formal religion, and to flatter ourselves that if we go to church we shall be saved: we need to be told that unless we “repent...and turn to God” (Acts 3:19), “we shall all perish.” (excerpted from J.C. Ryle, Matthew, p. 13). But God is using John, there’s a beautiful picture here, because the nation of Israel, Judah has been quiet for 400 years, and suddenly there’s this voice crying out in the wilderness. If you were on the hills of Judea, you would have heard this voice out there crying out in the wilderness, powerfully this message. But this stinging message, directed right to the heart of the people, people who had departed from the ways of God. And so the very first word that breaks the silence since Malachi, after hundreds of years is **“Repent.”** Now that’s our English word, that’s not the Greek word, it’s our English word. It really, this English word, misses the true intent, and that is because our English word comes from the Latin which means “to be sorry again.” But John is not calling the people to just be sorry about their state, but he’s calling them to change their very attitude and their way of life as a result. [Strongs #3340, Repent: *metanoeo, to think differently, to reconsider.* 3341, repentance: *reversal.*] The word for the Greek word *metanoeo* that we have here for “repent” literally mean “*to change one’s mind, and act upon that change.*” So that’s what he’s saying. The first word that comes out from God after this 400 years of silence, is **‘Repent, think differently, and then act differently.’** We as Christians with the indwelling Holy Spirit have the ability, that as soon as I realize I’m in the wrong place, to say *‘Lord, I realize I’m in the wrong place, and Lord I ask that you’d forgive me, cleanse me and heal me right now, I just don’t want to do that anymore.’* And praying that, you’ll see the change in your life. *‘If I need to, I’m going to cut the cable, if I need to I’m going to stop going to that place, I’m maybe going to change some relationships,’* there’s a change in direction in my life, whatever it is. That’s what the word “repent” means. It’s very beautiful, and it’s very powerful (cf. Jeremiah 6:16). God is saying to the nation of Israel, Judah, **‘You’re at a crossroad, choose which way you’re going to go, but choose the good paths. Choose the old way, the ancient paths that lead to life, you know, put it in reverse, get back to the safe harbour.’**

## *Pastor Mike Believes...One Last Revival*

Pastor Mike McIntosh, senior pastor of the Horizon Christian Fellowship denomination, believes in his heart, he's believed since he became a Christian, that God is going to do one final work in America, a revival. Although he says, "*I believe, it's not going to change the course of this nation.*" Because nationally, the nation isn't going to repent. You know, repentance is powerful, because there's change. So the nation isn't going to repent, but there's going to be a work of God in the Church [greater Body of Christ]. And then he says, "*I believe, right after that, the Rapture's going to happen.*" [Comment: that denomination believes in the pre-tribulation rapture of the saints to heaven, whereas the vast majority of pre-millennial 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ Christians believe we go to a place of safety during the Tribulation (World War III). Whichever way it works out is not important. But Jesus did promise protection for the Philadelphia era of his Church, and you can take that one to the bank (cf. Revelation 3:10). And the pastor giving this sermon whose notes are excerpted here said, "If there's revival, there will be prayer, because the two go hand-in-hand."

### *Who Is Repentance For, The Believer or Non-believer?*

**"Repent, repent...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** J. Vernon McGee comments about repentance in these verses, "Repent' is an expression that always has been given to God's people as a challenge to turn around. "Repent" in the original Greek is *metanoeo*, meaning "to change your mind." You are going in one direction; turn around and go in another direction. Repentance is primarily, I think, for saved people, that is, for God's people of any age. They are the ones who, when they become cold and indifferent, are to turn. That was the message to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3, and it was the message of the Lord Jesus Himself. Someone might ask whether the unsaved man is supposed to repent? The unsaved man is told that he is to *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the message of Paul to the jailor at Philippi (see Acts 16:31). That old rascal needed to do some repenting; but when an unsaved man believes in Jesus, he is repenting. Faith means to turn to Christ, and when you turn to Christ, you must also turn from something. If you don't turn from something, then you aren't really turning to Christ. So repentance is really a part of believing, but the primary message

that should be given to the lost today [i.e. the “unsaved world”] is that they should *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ. [Comment: what J. Vernon McGee is trying to say, is that the “unsaved” person is powerless to repent, until he has the indwelling Holy Spirit, which comes upon accepting and asking Jesus into one’s life and receiving the Holy Spirit. Real repentance is a part of the life of the believer, and it is a life-long part, it never really ends until the death of the believer.] The important thing is to *trust* Christ as your saviour, and if you really turn to Him, you turn *from* something else [i.e. you turn from sin, which is repenting].”

### *What Does It Mean “For The Kingdom Of Heaven Is At Hand”?*

“The kingdom of heaven is near” is another translation. “The kingdom of heaven,” what does that mean---“the kingdom of God is at hand”? Now the Jewish person at the time (1<sup>st</sup> century AD), a Jewish person that loved the Word of God, would be thinking more than likely that they’ve been waiting for the Messiah, and they understood God’s promises to David and the Prophets, so they believed the Messiah was going to come, and establish an earthly kingdom, and rule and reign, which he will, next time, when Jesus returns. [log onto <http://www.unityinchrist.com/kingdomofgod/mkg1.htm> to see prophetically what the Jews were waiting for and expecting at the Messiah’s first coming. When Jesus, Yeshua didn’t come and set up this future coming Kingdom of God, they naturally no longer thought he was the promised Messiah. This Kingdom will come, but at Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.] You see, Jesus is here, the Saviour of the world, and he’s come to bring man into a relationship with God. And through Christ, this ministry where he’s going to go and die on the cross and be raised to life, I can now have an intimate walk with God, and can have the Spirit of God in my life. And where the Spirit of God is, you can be sure that the kingdom of heaven is there...Now if I have the Holy Spirit in me, the kingdom of heaven is right here---**Colossians 1:13, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son...”** Jesus said, and Paul said to the Romans, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of Christ, his kingdom is one of peace and joy. Because you can be sure, regardless of your temperament and personality, the kingdom of heaven is one of peace, and it’s one of joy. So is there peace? It’s sad, there are a lot of Christians that don’t have that peace and joy, and it’s not

peaceful there in their lives. [Comment: King and kingdom are synonymous with each other Biblically. You can't have a king without a kingdom. Presently, Satan is the unseen 'ruler of this world,' and of this present evil age of mankind. At Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming Satan will literally be dethroned and locked up (along with all the other demons), and Jesus will take over as the King of the whole world (cf. Zechariah 14:9).] J. Vernon McGee asks "*Is there a present reality of the kingdom of heaven on earth?*" Then he answers, "*Yes, there is. Those who come to Him [Jesus] as Saviour and acknowledge Him are translated into the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13). They [believers in Jesus] belong to Him now. And they have a much more intimate relationship than that of a subject with a king. Christ is the Bridegroom and believers are part of his Bride! Christ is not reigning in any form, shape or fashion--except in the hearts of those who have received Him. However, He is coming someday to establish His kingdom on the earth. When He does, He will put down rebellion. Believe me, He is really going to put it down. The kingdom of heaven was at hand, or was present [when John the Baptist was preaching here] in the Person of the King. That was the only way in which it was present.*" [J. Vernon McGee, Matthew 3, Thru The Bible Series]

### *John's Baptism, An Acknowledgement Of Acceptance*

**Verses 5-6, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."** Now in verse 6 we learn, John comes with his message of repentance, for the kingdom heaven is at hand, but there's also a baptism that goes with it. Why is this baptism? Well the baptism is to those that receive the message. It's an acknowledgement that they've accepted the message. It's a baptism of repentance, in that sense. Now it says that when they were baptized by him in the Jordan, **verse 6, "and confessing their sins,"** of course, initially there's a confession. And that happens in revival too in the Church, there's a transparency, in how people are willing to say what they've been guilty of, whatever that may have been. When there's humility and transparency, man, there's a wonderful work going on in the life of an individual, in a family, and in a church. So they would confess. A confession isn't repentance. Confession is acknowledging that something in one's life is sin, '*I acknowledge, God, you say that this is wrong in my life, and right now I confess, yes, this is wrong.*' But repentance is then the change of heart, a change of mind, a

change of attitude, and then a change of actions, turning around and going in the other direction. God's calling these people to this baptism, those that have come before John the Baptist, and it's a baptism indicating they've accepted the message.

### *What Water Baptism Was To The Jew In John's Day*

Baptism here to the Jew at this point in time, there was baptism, but baptism to the Jew was for the Gentile, for the Gentile neighbouring nations, people around Israel that had come to recognize that Jehovah is God, *'and I want to come underneath him, and so I am going to be baptized, and in the sense become a Jew in that sense.'* [Comment: the "God-fearers" spoken of in the Books of Acts, were Gentiles attending in Jewish synagogues in Asia Minor and the Diaspora who had come almost that far, or had been baptized, but not circumcised. Most, if not all the Gentiles God called through the apostle Paul were called alongside Jews in Jewish synagogues Paul preached in. They weren't ordinary pagan Gentiles who had no knowledge of the LORD God of Israel. See <http://www.unityinchrist.com/history2/earlychurch1.htm>] So baptism to the Jew was for the "converts", i.e. those Gentiles who were converting to Judaism. Now you have all these Jews coming out to hear John the Baptist, people from all over Judea, sons of Abraham, and they're being baptized. There is a statement there, in that. And that is, it was for the Gentile initially to become a Jew, but *'You guys have been in such a place, you've been in a dangerous place, drifting far away from God.'* So in a sense it's like a conversion. *'You've been in a place no different from a Gentile as far as being apart from God,'* is what this baptism is saying. So John is calling the nation to a new life, to a new life, preparing them, of course for their Messiah, the suffering Messiah, their Saviour. Now, this message, you know the message going out **"Repent,"** the cry going out from the wilderness ***'Repent, repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*** I tell you, that's the message that many in the Church, the Body of Christ, need to hear. It's time for God's people to repent and to stand, and to pray. So, that message going out, may we continue to herald it. But all the churches are in need of repentance and turning to the Lord, making God central in our lives, it's so needed in the Church, Body of Christ.

### *John Teaches About The Lord Jesus Christ*

*“O Brood Of Vipers, Who Warned You To Flee From The Wrath To Come?”*

**Verses 7-8, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance...”** As John is doing this, he sees many religious leaders coming. And they come out. Now these guys are pious, they’re traditionalists, the Pharisees. They’ve got the traditions, they’ve developed traditions. They believe the Law, but they also believe there was the Oral Law, and from that they developed the Mishna. And the Mishna was an interpretation of the Old Testament Law of God. But they began to put a lot more weight on that, their tradition. Of course there’s churches like that today, which put much more weight on the tradition of ‘*the church experience*,’ rather than the Word of God itself. The Sadducees didn’t want the Mishna, they believed in the Old Testament as the written Word of God, but yet somehow they got kind of liberal in their interpretations. [Comment: there are denominations out there today like this too, dead or dying revivals-turned-denominations, hundreds of years old, who haven’t thrown out the Bible per se, but have watered it down with their own liberal interpretations of God’s Word (see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/history/IntroChurchHistory.htm>).] So they no longer believed in the resurrection of the dead, they no longer believed in the afterlife or believed in angels (the Sadducees), kind of a hopeless deal. So they were fairly liberal, into wealth and money, financially they controlled the Temple. But these guys still, same attitude toward themselves as far as ‘*We’re the religious elite*.’ They came walking out, and what does John do? **‘You brood of vipers! Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath that’s to come!’**

*“Bear Fruit Worthy Of Repentance”*

**Verses 9-10, “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”** Well John the Baptist goes a little further, and then he goes right for their religious

pride. He says, ***'Don't think to say to yourselves, you've got a false sense of security dudes. You're thinking you're OK for the wrong reasons. You say, 'Hey, we've got Abraham, I'm a descendant of Abraham, I'm a Hebrew,' and of course God made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I mean, they were so blessed, God said 'Your descendants, blessed, my people.'*** And so this false sense of security, they could just have their own religious system and be hard-hearted and brutal with other people and far from God in reality, and he says, ***'Don't you think because you can say you have Abraham as your father, let me tell you,'*** and he points to some rocks and stones, and it's possible if they're in the Jordan River area at this point outside Jerusalem, because that is the area near Jericho where Israel originally crossed into the Promised Land, and you remember when they originally crossed, Joshua, you know they selected the twelve stones there in the river where the water was dried up temporarily, and the twelve stones were placed there, stacked up in a heap on the side of the river as a memorial (this was near ancient Gilgal then, if those 12 stones were there). Maybe they're there and he points to the 12 stones representing the nation of Israel, the twelve tribes of Israel, and the grace of God toward them, and he says, ***'Don't you think just because you're a descendant of Abraham, let me tell you, from these very stones God can raise up descendants, it's not that big a deal for God to do. That's the way you're thinking anyway. What you need is to change your heart. You have a false sense of security. But here's the deal, the ax is laid right now at the very root of the tree. It's there.'*** And the tree is representing the nation of Israel, Judah, and this confidence that they're in God. ***'Let me tell you, the ax is right there, and if that tree does not bear good fruit...'*** In fact, Jesus even gives a parable of this later, ***'if that tree does not bear good fruit, it will be cut down and thrown into the fire.'*** [Comment: And it was, historically. See

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/history2/earlychurch1a.htm>

to see how that "house of Judah tree" was cut right down by the Roman Empire, first in 70AD and then again, permanently in 135AD. Scroll near the end of that history research article to the heading ***Bar Kochba Revolt*** and read from there on to the end. After the Jews kept rejecting the Gospel being presented to them by the Early Church, *the Nazarenes*, God had had enough.] John is saying, to them, and to us too, ***'You think you've got this religious background, you've got this baptism when you were little, you have this inheritance, you have this 'church family,' you have all these things***

**around you, and you think that that is it. You have a false sense of security.** [And every part of the Body of Christ ought to examine itself in the light of what John is saying here.] So, no change, then no repentance. Religious pride, they've got a false sense of security. Man, there's a lot of people like that, all sorts of people. Man, you go around this community, all kinds of people you talk to, they have this religious structure around them, and that is their security. But the Word of God comes out boldly, John the Baptist steps forward from the page and says **'False sense of security!'** I tell you, it doesn't mean anything if there is not a life. Because when the kingdom of heaven moves in (via God's indwelling Holy Spirit, coming into a life), it moves in, and the fruit comes out. If you've got Jesus in your heart ruling and reigning, it'll bear fruit, and the fruit will last. And so, your own life, is there spiritual fruit? I mean, would your spouse say *'Yes! There is change, continual change in your life.'* Or your children, do they say the same thing about you? But you know, your children, your spouse, your friends, is there fruit in your life, spiritual fruit? You know, we in our society, because of this political correctness manure, *'Don't judge, don't judge,'* and somebody goes *'That's sin,' 'Oh don't judge me, you're judging me!'* It's not judging, it's just telling the truth, it's the truth, there's no fruit, something's wrong. Or, *'That fruit, it shouldn't be on your tree. That's not good fruit to be hanging there. In fact that's stuff that grows on bad trees. So why is it on your tree, if you're really a good tree?'* [i.e. there is nothing wrong with being a "fruit-examiner."] So, John the Baptist, calling the nation to a new life. Oh man, is that ever needed in our country, ever so needed in our own lives. The danger of fruitlessness. So to remain in that state, and not to change, is to be judged. That's the picture here, right, to be judged. To never change from that state, that's a dangerous state, all sides agree, forget your theology, everybody agrees, if you're a fruitless tree, you're in a dangerous place. [Just look at what happened to the nation of Judah in both 70AD and 135AD, judged, gone as a nation until God restored them miraculously in 1948.] Well as he goes on, John then says **"I baptize you with water unto repentance."** This is being done as a preparation, John's saying ***'I'm here to prepare a people for God, for the coming of the Messiah. But there is one coming after me who is much mightier than I, whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry.'*** But he's got such a view, and it's the right view of Christ, of Jesus, Yeshua. ***'I'm not even worthy to carry his sandals. Not even worthy to have that role. You're thinking that I'm somebody special,***

***listen, I'm just preparing, I'm just pointing to him.***' When God is working through your life, man, we should just be pointing right back to Jesus.

### *The Holy Spirit*

**Verses 11-12, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire. Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."** John the Baptist spoke plainly about the Holy Spirit. He preached that there was such a thing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We need to be told that forgiveness of sin [by Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice] is not the only thing necessary for salvation. There is another thing, and that is the baptizing of our hearts by the Holy Spirit *in* us...(excerpted from J.C. Ryle, Matthew p. 14). Now we'll focus on **"he will baptize you with his Spirit, and fire."** John says, ***'Now I have the baptism of water, but there's a greater baptism, it's the baptism of the Spirit.'*** And then he goes on and adds those words **"and fire."** And you don't experience the baptism of the Spirit in your life unless Christ is ruling and reigning. Right? But here, "fire" is not a good thing. It's not a good deal, **because "fire" here in this sense is a statement of judgment, of purifying.** As you see, the context of this verse with these religious leaders, he's talking about a judgment, **verse 12, "whose winnowing fan"** He says, **"Whose winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, he'll gather up his wheat into his barn, but he'll burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."** **(verse 12)** It's scary when he's speaking of different groups of people like this, calling them chaff. Psalm chapter 1, he speaks of the wicked, that they'll just blow away in the wind like chaff. Charles Spurgeon put it this way, *"Thus the forerunner, pointing to the Coming One, and they the people look for one who in the power of the Spirit would scatter to the winds all the vainglory of the learned Sadducees and the boastful Pharisees..."* Just scatter them to the wind, all their vainglory. *"...by proclaiming the spirit of religion in which repentance and faith would far outweigh any external religiousness or exercise."* J. Vernon McGee comments, **"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize**

**you with the Holy Ghost [Spirit], and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11)** John is saying, **‘I baptize you with water. But He is coming, and when He comes, He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire’**---that final “and” is already over nineteen hundred years long. You and I are living in the age of the Holy Spirit. Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit in this present age (i.e. the Church Age, 30AD right up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus Christ). He will baptize with fire when He comes the second time, and fire means judgment. This distinction needs to be made...Let me repeat that, the baptism of fire will take place at the **second** coming of Christ. In the present age of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit comes upon every believer. Not just *some*, but *every* believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit, which means that the believer is identified with the Body of Christ; that is, he becomes part of the Body of Christ. John continues to speak of Christ’s second coming---“**whose winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner [barn]; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (verse 12)**” That was excerpts from J. Vernon McGee’s comments about these two verses, 11 and 12 of Matthew 3.

### *The Baptism of Christ*

**Verses 13-17, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed him. When he had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”** We have here the account of our Lord Jesus Christ’s baptism. This was his first step when he entered into his ministry. When the Jewish priests, the Levitical priests, took up their office they were washed with water (Exodus 29:4), and when our great High Priest begins the great work he came into the world to accomplish he is publicly baptized. 1. *The Honour of baptism.* An ordinance which the Lord Jesus himself took part in is not to be thought of lightly. An ordinance to which the great head of the Church submitted should always be held in honor in the eyes of professing Christians. 2. *The solemnity of Jesus’*

*baptism.* Such a baptism will never happen again as long as the world stands. God the Son, revealed in the body, is baptized; God the Spirit descends like a dove, and rests upon him; God the Father speaks from heaven with a voice. In a word we have the presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit revealed. It was the whole Triune God which, at the beginning of the creation [Elohim] which said, **“Let us make man” (Genesis 1:26)**; and it was the whole Triune God again which, at the beginning of the Gospel, seemed to say, **‘Let us save man.’** We read of no voice from heaven before this, except at the giving of the Law on Sinai. Jesus comes from far beyond the region, from the Galilee area, Nazareth area, to be baptized down there in that area of the Jordan. John seeing him, John, this is his cousin. John certainly knows Jesus, he tries to prevent him, saying, **‘Wait a minute, you want me to baptize you? Hold on, hold on. You should baptize me, I shouldn’t be baptizing you.’** Now what we should note, we may think, and it may be possible that he looks and he understands right from the beginning that this is the Messiah. Of course, Elizabeth had a certain understanding, it’s possible that he had that understanding. But when you look at the other Gospels, we find that John had said that God said to him, **‘I will show you who the Messiah is, he will be the one the Holy Spirit comes upon.’** And when he baptizes him, the Spirit of God comes upon Jesus. We know from the other Gospels that John actually sees the Spirit of God come upon him, and thus John knows that this is indeed the Messiah, the Christ. Now before the baptism, does he know he’s the Christ? He doesn’t know for sure. But yet he’s saying, **‘You should be baptizing me, hold on there...’** Now here is potentially a statement about the life that Christ lived, that even John knew that this man was, you know, maybe he hasn’t sorted out that he’s the Christ, but he certainly understood that he is unique, this man is a man sold out, this man has lived such an incredibly holy and powerful life. Well, Jesus says, **‘Hey, this is the right thing to do, it’s fitting to fulfill all righteousness.’** So then with that, John baptizes him. So, why is Jesus baptized? There’s a few reasons. For one, he’s showing complete submission to the Father. Of course, in doing that, he also identifies with us, all us sinners, sets an example for us. The Bible says, **“Believe and be baptized.”** [see <http://www.unityinchrist.com/baptism/What%20is%20Baptism.htm>] But we know too, that Jesus, he was faithful to the Law in the sense of all the religious ceremonies, the synagogue worship, Temple tax, the Feast observances and all that. [As a matter of fact, the early Church followed Jesus’ example, and

was Sabbath/Holy Day observing for the first 300 years of its existence. See

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/history2/earlychurch1.htm>

And now God's calling the people, the Jews, to this baptism of repentance, so he's faithful to all of what God requires for the people of Israel. But especially the purpose of the baptism is to point, it declares very clearly, **'This is where I'm going.'** And he's taken the call, he's accepting the cup. Because baptism says **'Dead, buried, raised to life.'** When I'm baptized, I identify with his burial, and his resurrection. It's the beginning of his ministry. So when Jesus here was being baptized, he is declaring where he's heading, he's heading to the cross. It's the beginning of his ministry. And so this statement, this picture, going to the cross to die for the sin of the world. Well then with that, it says in another Gospel, you know, it says **"he came up immediately from the water [total immersion], and behold the heavens were opened,"** and another Gospel throws in, **"and he prayed, and as he prayed, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God,"** Jesus sees the Spirit **"coming as"** as in one Gospel, in bodily form **"like a dove."** **"The Spirit of God descending upon him"**, and then this voice from heaven saying, **"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** So, I like the picture, it's a beautiful picture. Christ, he's my example, full of submission to the Father. He doesn't need to repent. He lives a sinless life. But, fully submissive, there's a sense of, a picture of humility. And with that full submission, you see the Spirit, so the Spirit of God is upon him, it's the power of God. And then the smile of God, the Father saying **'Awh, well pleased.'** "Baptism means identification, and I believe identification was the primary purpose for the baptism of the Lord Jesus. There was a second reason Jesus was baptized. Water baptism is symbolic of death. His death was a baptism. You remember that He said to James and John when they wanted to be seated on His right hand and on His left hand in the kingdom, **"Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22)** You see, Christ's death was a baptism. He entered into death for you and for me. There is a third reason for the baptism of Jesus. At this time he was set aside for His office as priest [i.e. our High Priest sitting at the right hand of God the Father]..." [J. Vernon McGee, THRU THE BIBLE commentary, MATTHEW through ROMANS, pp. 18-20]

related links:

To view the Millennial Kingdom of God the Jews were expecting at the Messiah's first coming, see

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/kingdomofgod/mkg1.htm>

The "God-fearers" weren't ordinary pagan Gentiles, they had been "baptized" into Judaism by their own voluntary choice, and attended synagogue with the Jews. see,

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/history2/earlychurch1.htm>

Jesus gathered the 1<sup>st</sup> century "wheat" into his barn, and burned the chaff with unquenchable fire, as a forerunner of the Great Tribulation and his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. see,

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/history2/earlychurch1a.htm>

There are Christian denominations out there that are like the Pharisees and Sadducees that showed up at John the Baptist's baptism. See,

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/history/IntroChurchHistory.htm>

What is baptism? See,

<http://www.unityinchrist.com/baptism/What%20is%20Baptism.htm>