

Matthew 3:1–12

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Preacher: Milton Taylor

[0:00] 1 to 12, sorry. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord and make his path straight. Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he 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? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you,

God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 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 and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. Amen. Amen. Can you all hear me? Well, let me first say welcome and happy new year.

You all are sitting in the midst of history. You can say that you're the, you was here on the first Sunday of 2023. We're documenting it. My name is Milton Taylor. I have the privilege to serve here as director of youth and facility and what a privilege it has been. I thank you all for your kind words. When you see me walking by, those of you who pull me to the side and say, hey, you do a lot. And we just want to say we're grateful. And so thank you for that encouragement.

[2:32] Here we are again at the beginning of a new year. And there's been this thought on my mind. It may seem like a simple thought, but it's a powerful truth. New year, same God. That brief statement reminds me of the beautiful scripture in Hebrews 13 and eight, where it says Jesus Christ is the same today or the same yesterday, today and forever more. With so many changes coming at us so quickly, it's good to know that we serve a God that never changes. God doesn't adapt or adopt to the times.

The word doesn't conform to or according to the culture. I just wanted to say that. Let me pray for us and we'll get right into it. Lord, we thank you for your word. Your word have we hidden in our heart that we may not sin against you. Your word accomplishes that what you sent it out to do.

It will not return unto you void. Help me to communicate your truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help me God. In Jesus name. Amen. It's very fitting that as we leave the Christmas season, we also leave baby Jesus. Oh, we love to hear about and sing about the birth of our savior, but now it's time for a transition. No more a baby in a manger, no more infant in need of protection. Jesus is just about to burst on the scene or on the stage of human history. But we have one introductory figure that we have to meet before we get to meet grown up Jesus and hear him preach. His name is John the Baptist.

John the Baptist and Jesus are cousins. Close in age, you may remember him in Luke chapter one, verses 39 through 44. It reads, in those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, a town in Judah, and into the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth. These are the parents of

John the Baptist. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud cry, blessed are you among women. And why is this granted to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Now, Jesus and John are beginning their ministry, as preachers. John the Baptist is a messenger, a forerunner of Christ. He's the one who is preparing the people by preaching a message of repentance of sin.

[5:47] His preaching consisted of two basic elements. He preached repentance from sin, and he preached that repentance was essential because the kingdom of the Lord was at hand.

I'm going to divide this passage in two parts. Verses one through six, we're going to look at the quality of John and his impact. And in verses seven through 12, we'll see that John was a witness to Christ, but we'll see that that witness was primarily a warning. I want to argue from this text that repentance should bear fruit.

Repentance should bear fruit. Let's look at verse one. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Repent, for the kingdom of the Lord is at hand.

This chapter begins with a phrase, in those days. Here we jump about 25 plus years from chapter two into the ministry of Jesus. But before we hear from Jesus, Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist and his ministry and his impact. John the Baptist had, he reminds me of an artist as a one-hit wonder.

He has like this one-hit song, and the name of that song is called Repentance. And he focuses on just the hook of that song. Repent, repent, repent, repent, repent, repent, repent, repent, repent. That's all John is saying. Repent, repent, repent. And since he plays this song so much, I want to unpack repentance just for a little before we talk about John the Baptist. I think there's this misunderstanding of what repentance actually is. Some people think that repentance is just being sorry for your sin. Others think that repentance is feeling sorry or something that you do at the beginning of salvation. Once. But repentance is not a feeling word. It's an action word. It's not about how you feel about what you're doing, but what you do about what you're doing. Repentance simply mean a change of mind followed by action. Paul said it like this in 2 Corinthians 7 and 10, for godly grief or sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

[8:32] Whereas worldly grief or sorrow produces death. Think about this. If sorrow or repentance is sorrow and repentance if so if repentance is sorrow and sorrow is repentance, then this verse wouldn't make sense.

Because it will say that godly sorrow actually brings sorry. Repentance is not sorry. Repentance is the action that results from a godly sorrow before the Lord that you're sorry for the things you've done. It leads to repentance, which is a change of mind that follows with actions that confirm that repentance. Paul also said that there's a such thing as a worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow is just you being sorry you got caught. I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. I'm sorry I can't do this anymore. I'm sorry you're so sensitive. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry but never making a change.

Godly sorrow leads to or comes from a repentant heart that understands that it's my sin that breaks the heart of God. Let's continue in verse 3. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said the voice of one crying in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord make his path straight.

The significant thing about John to me is that he was a prophet that was prophesied. I don't think we see that with any other prophet. Jesus even calls him the last of the great prophets.

John is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy but what does it mean to prepare the way of the Lord and make his path straight? We'll have to go to Isaiah 40 to see that because Matthew shortchanges us. He wants us to actually do the work. You don't have to go there. I did the work for you.

[10:43] Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level and the rough places plain. Verse 5a and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

Basically the idea is make it easy for him. Or a better way to say it is to desire the hastening of the Lord.

His coming. Because if you got to go through all these rough places and hills and valleys it's going to take a while. Right? But if we're smoothing those things out it's like we're saying we want this to happen now.

We're preparing the way of the Lord. Think about it. When you go to a conference the keynote speaker doesn't just come right up and speak. He has an introducer and he has an introduction. And the more important the speaker the greater the introduction. And even the one who is doing the introducing have an introduction like we see here with John.

[11:55] As he's Matthew introduces us to John and he will be the one to introduce us to Christ. Matthew also wants us to know how John was dressed.

Why? Because the clothing clues us in to the fulfillment of a prophecy. Remember in 2nd Kings we learn about the clothing of Elijah.

That he wore a garment of hair with a belt of leather. Sound familiar? Verse 4. John wore a garment of camel's hair and a belt around his waist of leather.

Jesus will call Elijah in Malachi 4 or John in Malachi 4 Elijah. He said behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord.

Not because John was Elijah. But because John was coming in the spirit and the power of Elijah. It makes sense that John is proclaiming repent.

[13:08] Repent. Repent. For the kingdom of the Lord is gaining on you. These are the last days. I will send Elijah in the great and awesome day of the Lord.

The text even said that everyone who heard this message was coming. Jerusalem and all of Judea and all the regions about the Jordan and being baptized and confessing their sins.

This wasn't a private confession. This wasn't people walking up to John whispering in his ear like hey this is what I'm going through. Pray for me. Like we will see when the elders come up and you come and maybe confess to them and they lay hands and pray.

And this was different. Confession in the Greek. The word I'm about to mess up. That's a malageo. As malageo. Meaning to confess, acknowledge openly and joyfully. The quality and impact of John's message was preparatory.

[14:14] It was preparation for the coming of the king. But John wasn't only preparing the way for the coming of the king.

He was a witness to Christ. And that witness was primarily a warning. Feast your eyes on verse 7. We see here that John sees the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

And let me just say this. You don't want to be a Pharisee or a Sadducee. You don't want to be fair or sad. The interesting thing to me though is that these two were even coming.

These two people groups were coming to see John. But what's more interesting than that is that they're mentioned here in the scripture together.

Because the Sadducees and the Pharisees was enemies. They didn't like each other. But you know the saying. A friend, an enemy of my enemy is my friend.

[15:13] Here, there's this clarifying call from JB. He asked him. He said, who warned you to flee? We can unpack this in a lot of ways.

To start off fleeing is repentance. That's beautiful in and of itself. To flee or fleeing from the wrath to come. But why did John accept other people but didn't accept these people group?

Because although they were okay with listening to John's message. They didn't want their lives to be bothered.

They wanted their lives left alone. Just like some of us today. We're here. We're okay with coming to church service.

As long as how we handle our affairs remain the same. As long as the preacher and the word of God is not bucking up against your lifestyle.

[16:15] We want information but not transformation. This is why instead John challenges them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Genuine repentance is confirmed with action. When I travel, I tell the airline agent, how you doing? My name is Milton Taylor and I have a reservation.

And they say, that's good. Can I see proof of identification, please? They don't want mere communication that I am who I claim to be.

They want authentication. Therefore, they want to see something that verifies what I affirm. Similar to shouting.

Hallelujah. Thank you, Jesus. Praise God. It's fine, but it's not sufficient.

[17:18] Repentance shows up in your hands and in your feet. Not just on your lips. Without the fruit of the spirit. What fruit you ask?

Galatians 5, 22, 23. But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

In contrast to the works of the flesh, we have the fruit of the spirit. Works is something that you do motivated by your flesh. But fruit is something that's produced through you by the spirit as you respond to its urging.

The sources are different and the outcomes are different. But just as the works of the flesh are visible to us all, so also is the fruit of the spirit.

You won't miss it. And make no mistake that every fruit always bears the character of the tree that's producing it. We know apple trees don't grow oranges, right?

[18:30] You don't display the fruit of the spirit without the Holy Spirit. I said it looks like something. How do we flesh this out? Okay, Milton, I hear you.

My repentance must produce fruit, and that fruit is the fruits of the spirit. But what does that look like in my life? The first thing we need to know is that the fruit of the spirit primarily manifests itself through our relationships.

There's your opportunity. Love and action is to seek another person's good, especially when that person can do nothing for you in return.

To exercise patience is to be long-suffering rather than short-tempered. We demonstrate kindness when we help rather than hurt.

Goodness summarizes the virtuous acts of an attitude that advances the kingdom and benefits others. The fruit of faithfulness brings consistency, dependability.

[19:47] People can depend on you. You're consistent in what you do and what you say. Gentleness is seen in the one who practices tenderness and submission to the Father.

When we say no to sin in the midst of temptation, we are exhibiting self-control. This is how it looks in our life.

This is how the fruit of the spirit stemming from repentance should look. Repentance should bear fruit. Without the visible proof of true heart repentance, judgment is coming.

And judgment is eternal separation from the Lord. That's what John is saying to them here in verse 10, that if you do not bear fruit, you will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Look at verse 10. Even now, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

[21:00] You may be saying, like, all right, wait. If I'm a bad tree that produced bad fruit, how do I become a good tree that produced good fruit?

The answer is you can't. The Bible says in Luke that for no good tree bears bad fruit. And again, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

Each tree is known by its fruit. But it's a new year, so that's hope. That's hope. The very thing that you're concerned about is the working and doing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn't that dope? That you're like, how can I? And the answer is you can't. And he's like, well, I can and I will and I did.

That if you believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, that he died and was buried, raised from the dead, that you can be like Psalms 1 says, like a tree planted by living water that produces its fruit in its season never to wither.

[22:13] Jesus said in John 15 that I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, it is he who produces much fruit from for apart from me, you can do nothing.

That's how. That's how you become a tree that bears fruit. Not just any fruit, but good fruit.

You believe in the Savior Jesus Christ by first confessing your bad fruit and allowing him to plant you by living waters. John goes on and he makes a distinction between him and Christ.

Here comes the separation. Verse 11 back. 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 and fire.

In light of people's repentance, John baptized them with water. But the one who was coming after him will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. John's declaration corresponds to the promises of the prophets.

[23:29] Ezekiel 36, 27. And I will put my spirit in you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Joel 2, 28. And it shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Jesus also confirms John's declaration.

John 14, 16 through 17. And I will add the father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Even the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him or knows him.

You know him. For he dwells with you and will be with you. Acts 1, 4, 5. And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await for the promise of the father, which he said, You heard from me, for John baptized you with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Which moves us to the fulfillment of the early church. Acts 2, 1 through 4. The triune God is God.

[25:09] In three persons. The person that works today is the Holy Spirit. Without a relationship to God the Holy Spirit, in fact, there's no relationship to God the Son.

And without a relationship to God the Son, there is no relationship with God the Father. It is your relationship. It is our relationship with the Holy Spirit that determines how much Jesus, the Son, and God the Father we experience here on earth today.

In verse 12, John describes the Messiah as having this threshing fork in his hand.

Now, I didn't know what this was when I first looked at it, but I found out that such an implement was used to separate wheat from chaff.

A farmer would know the grain, and by tossing it in the air, the wind would blow away the chaff, the chaff being that which was useless.

[26:15] And while the wheat would fall to the threshing floor, the wheat was then gathered up, and the chaff was burnt.

Now, John is saying that those who will not repent, that you will experience the eternal wrath of God for your sins with an unquenchable fire, a fire that never goes out.

My question is, which one are you? Are you the chaff or the wheat? Will you be gathered together going into the barn, into the storehouse of God, or will you be going into the unquenchable fire?

This is the first day of the new year, so you probably will hear a lot of people say or see a lot of people post on their social media.

New year, new me. I can't even say that. You all are probably up here like, yo, who is that? This is Milton without his hat. New year, new me.

[27:33] Thank you. This can be true for us all today, though.

New year, new me. If you don't know the Lord, this message is for you. John gives us a step by step on what to do.

Repent. Turn from your sin. Not just turn away from your sin, but turn away from your sin and turn to Christ. And from that repentance, bear fruit.

Repent for the kingdom of the Lord is gaining on you. Repent because the kingdom of the Lord is here. Time is running out.

You may think you get time after you walk out the door, but he has you right here. This is your chance.

[28:35] You're sitting in front of a message, hearing a song of John that says, repent, repent, repent, for the kingdom of the Lord is at hand.

The kingdom of the Lord is right now. I've already made way for him. He's here. He's here. Repent. Turn.

Believe. Bear fruit. Maybe. You're a believer. And you're like, I'm good. I repented the first time.

I might like miss me with that three. Yeah. But maybe it's some things you need refined.

Maybe it's some things you need burnt off. Maybe it's some things you don't want to bring into 2023 that you were dealing with in 2022.

[29:32] Two. I can't tell you what those are. You know what you've been doing. You know what you struggle with. You know what you deal with. You

know how often you come to the Lord in prayer concerning it.

This is your time. This is your moment. To say, Lord, I am sorry. I know that my sin breaks your heart.

But I am making a choice to turn. To change my mind. And trust in you. He's willing and he's ready to do that for us all today.

Repent. Change your mind about it. Turn away from your sins. So is God. Turn around. That's the title of this message.

Turn around. You ever been going south on a highway? And realize you should actually be going north? Don't worry about my direction.

[30:35] South. North. Repentance isn't just thinking about changing your direction. Repentance isn't looking on to the side. Watching other people drive. Wondering if they're going the wrong way.

As well. Repentance is looking for the next exit. Getting off. Crossing over. Getting back on to the other road.

That's repentance. It's turning around and going the other way. If you are 20 miles out of the way. And decide to change directions. You must take the exit ramp. This is the ramp of confession where you agreed that you were going the wrong way. Then you have to cross over to the grace overpass where God gives you the opportunity and the privilege to turn around.

Confession gets you to the place where you can make that U-turn. Grace crosses you over. Now there's another ramp that you have to take to get back on the highway headed in the right direction.

[31:43] That the confession ramp leads to the grace overpass which carries you right over and puts you in front of the restoration on ramp. So that you can begin heading in the right direction.

Once the turn has been made and repentance has been accomplished, you may still be 20 miles out of the way. Or maybe even 20 years out of the way.

And you might be discouraged because you have gone 20 miles wrong. And a lot of people get stuck here. Thinking that since I've already gone 20 miles wrong or 20 years wrong, I might as well continue to go the right wrong way.

The thing is, and I want you to remember, and that you already know, is that when you're taking a trip, it's something about coming home that seems shorter.

Even if the distance is the same. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word.

[33:00] Thank you. For removing stony hearts. And replacing it with flesh. That you may penetrate it.

Lord, I pray that we heard you. And only you. I come against fear. Of just being embarrassed or. Feeling as though we know what we're doing and where we're at, Lord. But would you have your way in our life? Would you prick our hearts to the point that we can come crying to you for forgiveness?

That we will repent, turn, and believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross? Would you do that for us, Lord God? We thank you. We honor you.

We give you praise and glory. In Jesus' name. Thank you.