

He Who Is Coming After Me

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[0 : 00] Well, the next four Sundays we'll be making our way through Matthew chapter 3 and Matthew chapter 4. And there are four sermons coming up. And if there was going to be a banner that kind of flown over these four sermons, there would be a phrase over it.

And you can find that phrase at the end of Matthew chapter 4 verse 16. A light has dawned. And so over the next four weeks, we're going to work our way through Matthew chapters 3 and 4, and we're going to see the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

And so this morning we're going to look at John the Baptist, and the next week we're going to look at the baptism of Jesus, and then we're going to look at the temptation of Jesus, and then we're going to look at the start of the ministry of Jesus at the end of January.

It's all about Jesus. It's all about King Jesus. Who He is, what He's done, what He's doing, it's all about Him.

It's all about His grace. So would you turn with me now to Matthew chapter 3, verses 1 through 12. And this passage you can just sum up by saying, John the Baptist is preparing the way for King Jesus.

[1 : 19] He's preparing the way. And we're going to see a few ways in which He prepares the way. But first, have you ever seen a royal procession before?

Maybe you've seen it in person. Maybe you've seen it in a movie. Usually what happens, there's a king royalty in some kind of cart. And usually, if your mind works like me, it's kind of you imagine this king in a cart, and he's being kind of carried by these kind of burly slaves.

You know, they're a cart with poles on it, and they're kind of walking through a city. And so in front of this cart, there is someone announcing to all in the city who's coming behind him.

And usually this one who's making the announcement is not just informing people, but he's calling people to respond. Bow down, the king is coming.

The king approaches. The king is in your midst. Make way. Make way. The king has come.

[2 : 35] And so that man who's preparing the way of the king, he's not drawing attention to himself. He's drawing attention to the one that's coming after him. Because the king that follows him is mightier than he.

And so Matthew 3, 1 through 12, is all about John the Baptist proclaiming and making way for this one who's coming after him. Up until this point in Matthew, Matthew has been seeking to convince us that this baby Jesus is Emmanuel, the only one who has a rightful claim to the throne of David.

This is the long-anticipated one, the king, King Jesus. And so what you need to realize about Matthew 3, verse 1, is something happens between Matthew 2, 23 and Matthew 3, 1.

And so if you look back in your Bibles to Matthew 2, 23, we're talking about Jesus, Joseph, Mary, heading back to Nazareth when Jesus was just a little boy, maybe two.

And then in chapter 3, verse 1, all of a sudden we're transported forward a couple decades. And so what we'll see in verse 13 of chapter 3 is that Jesus comes on the scene as a man.

[3 : 56] And so what you need to know from the get-go is there's been a couple decades that have already elapsed between chapter 2 and chapter 3. And John the Baptist seems to come out of nowhere to announce the coming of the long-awaited king.

And not just to announce, but to call for a response. 2,000 years ago and now. And so he comes to prepare the way of King Jesus, and he's going to call us to respond in three ways.

He's going to call us to repent. And then he's going to confront presumption in us. And then he's going to point us to the one mightier than any of us.

He's going to point us to Jesus. And so let's just jump right in. Verses 1 through 6. I'm going to walk through kind of three scenes. And then we'll land this plane at the end.

What you need to notice first in chapter 3, verse 1, is that John the Baptist came, and he came preaching. He came declaring. He came announcing. He came speaking.

[5 : 14] The focus is on his voice. Announcing something. And if you look down at verse 4, you quickly realize this is a unique dude based upon what he was wearing.

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. You just don't see that too often nowadays. I like ponchos.

And I know how to find a cheap poncho. Anybody else use a 30-gallon trash bag as a poncho? It's really simple. I see that hand back there. Cut out the, you know, neck, little holes in the arm.

You can bring it down. Looks great. Cheap. Water repellent. John the Baptist is basically wearing a poncho of camel hair. That's what he's doing.

It was cheap and available. Camel hair. Wrapped around his waist with a big belt. He's eating locusts, which were a big grasshopper.

[6 : 17] People still eat them in the region today? Dip them in wild honey? They're delicious, I guess. I would not know. But what you understand is, why is this guy dressed in camel hair?

Why is he eating grasshoppers and wild honey? Well, he's living a very basic life, a very simple life, a minimalistic life, because he's all in for the calling on his life.

He's declaring. He's announcing. He's preparing the way of the Lord. And what you need to see is, if you flip back in your Bibles to 2 Kings 1.8, do you know who else was wearing a poncho of kind of camel hair?

Elijah. Later in Matthew chapter 11, Jesus says that John is the second Elijah who has come. And so what you need to know from the get-go is, John is the baptizer, but what you need to realize is, John is a prophet.

And he's declaring a message of repentance, calling God's people back to himself. So he's a prophet. And the next thing you need to see here is that this John the Baptist, he fulfills prophecy.

[7 : 40] He's a prophet who fulfills prophecy. His ministry is a fulfillment ministry. And so if you look at chapter 3, verse 3, it says, For this is he, John the Baptist, 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 voice of one calling in the wilderness. John is proclaiming the kingdom. And he's in the wilderness, 20 miles east of Jerusalem, along the Jordan, in the wilderness of Judea.

And so what Matthew is pointing out here is, it's no coincidence that this guy in the camel poncho is preaching what he's preaching. This was God's plan. He is the forerunner of the Christ.

This was all according to the will of God. And his ministry is one of preparation. We see it in the message itself.

And so if you look back at verse 2, you see the message of John the Baptist, what he's declaring. He's saying, Repent! Repent! Repent! Do you know what the word repentance means?

[8 : 54] The Greek mind would take the word repentance as simple like change of mind. It would have been very just kind of common. It would be like, alright, I pull out my drawer, oh, I'm thinking about wearing my striped socks.

Oh no, I repent. I change my mind. I'm going to wear my polka dotted socks. And so for the Greek mind, it was just kind of changing your mind. But for the biblical authors, for the Jewish mind, oh, repentance meant so much more.

Repentance, biblically speaking, is a radical reorientation of one's entire life. It's turning away from living life with me at the middle of my life, and it's a turning from that and turning and reorienting all of who I am to living for God and to others.

That's what repentance is. John the Baptist is calling people to turn from their sin and turn to living to God and all of who they are. It was a message of repentance.

And then notice, he gives the reason why. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He gives the reason.

[10 : 18] Now, the kingdom of heaven is a phrase unique to Matthew. And we show, it's basically the same idea as the other gospel writers who talk about the kingdom of God.

And so, what Matthew is saying, that John is saying, is he's repent, for the kingdom of heaven is here.

It's arrived. It's present now. There's some speculation of why Matthew uses the phrase kingdom of heaven. He's writing to a Jewish audience, and so, a good idea is that he didn't want to use the

name of God in order to offend the Jewish audience.

So, he's talking about the kingdom of heaven. What you need to be thinking, though, when you hear that phrase, kingdom of heaven, don't be thinking blocks and gates.

Don't be thinking that way. Here's what you need to be thinking. When you hear the phrase kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God, you need to be thinking about the active reign of King Jesus.

[11 : 27] The active, dynamic, reign of King Jesus. His present rule. And so, the king of the kingdom of heaven is King Jesus.

And so, the inbreaking of the kingdom, the presence of the kingdom, is the arrival of Jesus. And so, what John is saying is, repent, because God is now reigning on earth in Jesus, and that reign is going to spread.

The Messiah has arrived. Another way to say it is, change your living because the king has come. And he's brought with him his rule, his gracious rule, his holy rule.

Live in light of who he is. And then in verses 5 and 6, we see the response. All sorts of people are coming out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding areas, and they're going out to him.

And the question is, why are they going out to him? Did they hear about his camel poncho? Did they want to see the latest fashion and prophetic wardrobe? Is that what they wanted to do? No. They got wind that a prophet's in town.

[12 : 45] There's a prophet in the wilderness declaring repentance. There's been 400 years of silence, and now God is speaking again, calling his people to come back to him.

And the people respond to this call to repentance. Those who go out to him, they respond. And they respond by being baptized. They respond by confessing their sins.

Real repentance shows up in the real confession of real sin. The recognition that yes, I am a sinner, and I have committed sins, and I confess them, and I'm repenting of them.

I'm turning from them. And baptism was simply this demonstration that they were, yes, repenting.

Demonstrating publicly that yes, I am saying, no more to that lifestyle.

That was what I used to be. This is a tremendous step of humility. One other thing you've got to realize about this baptism going on. John was baptizing Jews.

[13 : 55] Back in the day, baptism would be something Jews would do to Gentiles in order for them to become Jewish converts. And so, for a Jew to baptize a Jew was unheard of.

This is something unique going on. So, it appears that God, we come to the end of this passage or this section in verse 6, it appears God is on the move again. We've had a prophet sighting on the outskirts of the Judean wilderness on the Jordan River.

You know, one of the questions we could ask is if you were in Jerusalem, you heard about this guy, what would you have done? Would you have gone to see him? So, John the Baptist was creating quite a stir and the people in Jerusalem were flocking to him and it would have aroused the interest and suspicion of the religious establishment.

So, now we move to the second scene in verses 7-10 where we see John the Baptist having called people to repentance, now he's going to confront presumption.

He's preparing the way of King Jesus and he says some hard things. In verse 7 we read, but when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism and what you need to realize is that these Pharisees and Sadducees, they were a delegation sent from the Sanhedrin which was kind of the religious establishment leadership in Jerusalem, they were sent to go check what's going on on the Jordan with John the Baptist out.

[15 : 32] And so, what you need to realize is they're not going to be baptized. They're going to check out what's going on. And so, they're being sent and what you also need to know is Pharisees and Sadducees were two very different theological groups.

Pharisees, they believed all of the Old Testament, they were committed to the oral law, they were known for making rules upon rules upon rules to apply the oral law to everyday life and they were just known for making so many rules that nobody could fulfill them all, nobody could obey them all. They believed in the resurrection, the Sadducees, good way I learned this, they were sad, you see, because they didn't believe in the resurrection, they maintained, they were committed just to the authority of the first five books of the Bible, they were an aristocratic group, they were a priestly group, so they were tied to the temple and they were just well connected and so you have two very different theological groups but they share a common political mission and that is to stay in power.

And so the Sanhedrin sends them out to the Jordan to check out what's going on with John the Baptist. And so they weren't there to repent, they were there to do some recon. And John confronts it. Look at verse seven. I just wouldn't recommend this approach. If you're going to kind of like a family gathering, I just wouldn't recommend this approach.

[17:15] He starts off by saying, you brood of vipers. A brood is an offspring of vipers.

Snakes. You offspring of snakes. Snakes! You snakes! And then sarcastically he asks this, John the Baptist, who warned you to flee the wrath to come?

What are you doing here? Because we know you're not here to repent. What are you doing here, you brood of vipers? And then he says, hey, bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

He calls them to change their ways. True repentance of one sin results in a changed life, a bearing of a new kind of fruit, of good fruit, godliness, a life lived to God and for the good of others.

And we all know that can only happen through Jesus. But what I want you to key in here is in verse nine. In the ESV, he says, and do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father.

[18:31] For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Do not presume. What John is saying to these Pharisees and Sadducees is that you're not saved from the wrath to come because of your genetic relationship to Abraham.

Don't presume you're saved when you're not. Don't base your salvation on your relationship to this guy or how well you know your Bibles.

That's not how a sinner is saved from the wrath of God. He's basically saying, don't think that you are something when you're not.

Don't think that you're saved when actually you're not. It's a hard thing to say to someone. He brings up Abraham. And we can ask the question, well, how did Abraham get saved?

I mean, back in Genesis 15, was God so impressed with Abraham's righteous living that God essentially said Abraham, man, you live such a godly life.

[19:47] I don't need to do anything to save you. Let me just kind of rubber stamp it. You're in, buddy. You're in. Impressive life. Very impressive. That's not what saved Abraham.

In Genesis 15, 6, we read this. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. God accepted Abraham, not on the basis of his works, but on the basis of his faith in God.

On the basis of God's kindness and grace to him. It's all about God's grace.

It's always been about God's grace. Trusting in him. God's grace is his undeserved favor. I learned early on an acronym.

God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace. You don't deserve it. You don't earn it. You can't. God loves us, not because we're lovable, but because God is loving.

[20:57] It's who he is. he loves us even as we are, sinners.

And what we see here is at least some people are willing to admit that they're sinners. Not everybody does. The Pharisees and Sadducees were not willing to admit that.

They thought God accepted them because of their linkage to Abraham or how clean and separate they were from the sinful rabble. That's not how God's grace works.

We see God's amazing grace. We just get a hint of it in verse 9. We read it. We have Abraham as our father.

Do not presume to say to yourself, hey, we're saved because Abraham is our father. For I tell you, God is able, from these lifeless stones, and John the Baptist is pointing to the stones in the Jordan, God is able, from these lifeless stones, to raise up children for Abraham.

[22:14] It's all about God's grace. God's power to save is not limited to DNA or man-made religious traditions. Christians. It's all by His grace.

And so what we see in these Pharisees and Sadducees, this delegation that's come out to do some recon, there is a presumption. There is arrogance that they're in good standing with God because they're related to Abraham.

It's like they carry an Abraham card and they pull it out and there's this unfolding of the Abrahamic family tree and they're like, there's Abraham, there's me, I'm in.

Hey, everything's cool. I couldn't be further from the truth. We're not saved based upon our relationship to other people, humans.

It's all about God and His grace and reconciling us to Himself. And you've got to ask the question, why was John so ticked?

[23 : 27] Because he's not pulling any punches either. Not only are these Pharisees and Sadducees, are they believing something wrong, they're actually teaching other people to believe the same thing.

You can see why he would be so confrontational. Jesus will later call the Pharisees whitewashed tombs. who tie up burdens on people that they can't carry.

Later in Matthew 23, Jesus drops some woe, W-O-E bombs on the Pharisees. Woe to you, you hypocrites.

So John is confronting these arrogant religious leaders. You think you're safe when you're really not. You need to repent. You need to confront your presumption and you need to turn from it. And in verses 10 and 11, he goes on to provide a very stern warning of imminent judgment. The axe is at the root of the tree. God is lining it up to cut it down.

[24 : 36] If you don't repent, it's going to be cut down and thrown into the fire. It's a reference to hell. Strong, strong words. Strong, strong words. Presumption comes with serious consequences.

So in this section, we see John the Baptist calling these people snakes, saying you are presuming you're saved when you're not, and then warning them of the judgment and impending punishment to gum.

Judgment is real. The stakes are high. And so we have a confrontation of presumption. He's preparing the way.

The last scene is in verses 11 and 12. John continues to prepare the way, and now he moves from a call to repentance, a confrontation of presumption, and now he moves to pointing to the one mightier than him.

pointing to the one who follows, preparing us for Jesus. When we repent, we're called to turn from sin and turn to God, and John the Baptist has called us from sin, from presumption, and he's now going to aim us at Jesus.

[26 : 04] And he does so with a few contrasts. The first contrast is this. It's between John himself, and the coming one. He says in verse 11, I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I.

John is recognizing this one coming after him is mightier than I. of course he's talking about Jesus. Jesus comes on the scene, verse 13, he's preparing the way. I need to make a connection for you. It's a Christological connection.

It's about Jesus. Would you look back up to verse 3? That's where John the Baptist is, Matthew's saying John the Baptist fulfills Isaiah 43.

He is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. And then it goes on to say prepare the way of the Lord. The Lord, in Isaiah 43, is a reference to God himself, Yahweh.

[27 : 18] This prophet in the wilderness, this voice, is preparing for God's coming. Do you know what that means? If we were to run the logic through rightly?

What Matthew is saying is this, John the Baptist is the voice in the wilderness. Jesus is the God, is God who has come. He's Emmanuel, God with us.

And so the connection you need to see here is John the Baptist is preparing the way for God himself who's come, setting up kingdom, setting up his reign. It's subtle but powerful.

Matthew is saying that Jesus is our Emmanuel and that the reign of Jesus is the reign of God in our midst. That's why John is saying the one coming after him is mightier than I.

It's God. God in the flesh, Emmanuel. And what we're going to see throughout the Gospel of Matthew is that Jesus does something that only God in the flesh can do.

[28 : 26] He forgives sin, he raises the dead, he casts out demons, he speaks authoritatively like God speaking because he's God in the flesh. I can't wait to get to the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus is like, let me clarify some things for you because I'm God. And so the contrast is the one mightier than I and then John, look what he says about himself.

In verse 11, he's mightier than I whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry. The lowliest of all servants in this culture had to deal with feet.

It was the nastiest job. Sandals, dust, gross stuff. It was left for the lowliest of servants.

And what John is saying is I'm unworthy. I'm unworthy to even carry his sandals. You see the contrast? The one mightier than I, Jesus, Emmanuel, God in the flesh, and John, an unworthy servant.

[29 : 36] It points to Jesus, how awesome he is, how glorious he is. The second contrast that comes out in this little section is the contrast of baptisms.

John, baptism is a baptism of water, and the baptism that Jesus will bring is a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. With the coming of Jesus, he brings with him the messianic age, a new age for God's people, a new way of relating to God.

It's the fulfillment of what was predicted in Ezekiel 36 and Joel chapter 2, a new era in which God will dwell within his people by his Spirit in order to enliven them and empower them to live for God. The Spirit of God makes us new. He gives us new hearts, Ezekiel 36. The Holy Spirit enlivens and empowers Christians to live obediently under the reign of King Jesus.

John says, I baptize you with water for repentance, but he is coming after me, the one mightier than me, whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry. He's going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

[31 : 00] Very different ministry, folks. John is basically saying, hey, I'm calling you to repent of your sin and I baptize you as a sign of your repentance, but the one who's coming after me, he's going to pour out his Spirit on you.

And he's going to pour out his Spirit upon his people in a new and glorious way so that they can walk in obedience to him. Acts 2, Pentecost, the Spirit pours out on the early church.

It's a game changer. The fulfillment of Joel 2, the indwelling, the enlivening, empowering, pouring out of the Spirit of God.

Inaugurating a new life, a new day. And so the contrast is between this baptism of water that leads to repentance and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, this outpouring of the Spirit of God that radically changes people.

It makes them new people. There's that little reference to fire, baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire.

[32 : 23] It's most likely a reference to the purifying work of the Spirit in the life of the believer from start to finish. church. It's a different baptism, different pouring out, a powerful pouring out.

The last contrast is Jesus as judge. It's in verse 12. Again, John the Baptist is pointing us to this one mightier than I.

He's God. He's going to pour out his Spirit on his people in a very unique and powerful way. In verse 12 he says essentially, he's the coming judge.

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. It's an agricultural picture that everybody would have been aware of.

It's a separating out the wheat from the chaff. It's a picture of judgment. It's a picture of separation. And it's a picture of punishment.

[33 : 30] What I want you to notice here is the word his. His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn.

It's his harvest. He's the Lord of the harvest. Jesus comes and he's establishing his kingdom and he's going to separate the wheat from the chaff.

The contrast emphasizes that Jesus, this one mightier than I, he's the judge who's come. And so be warned.

Be warned. There's another reference to the unquenchable fire. The chaff will be thrown into the unquenchable fire. The unrepentant will be thrown into the unquenchable fire.

It's a reference to hell. The stakes are high. And it all has to do with your relationship to Jesus. Jesus. So this coming one is God, Emmanuel.

[34 : 45] He ushers in the life and the spirit. He's the judge who's going to separate the wheat from the chaff. John the Baptist is pointing us to the only one who can save us.

Jesus. So here we are looking at some things that happened two millennia ago and John the Baptist is still preaching today. He's still calling us to respond to King Jesus.

And I just want to point to you four areas of how we respond. Repent of your sins. Turn away from a life lived opposed to God.

Your sin is real and it's against a real God. And let me just urge you not just to turn from some of your sins. Turn from all of your sins. Turn from a life lived for yourself and turn to the giver of life, the one mightier than you, the one and only one who can save you.

Jesus. So repent. Confess your sins to God. experience forgiveness that's only found in him.

Second thing is don't presume.

[35 : 59] Presumption will always minimize sin. And when sin is minimized, there's really not much need to repent of anything. Okay. Presumption keeps a sinner from thinking that they are in desperate need of a Savior.

you. So don't presume. If you're taking notes, write down Luke 18, 9-14. Jesus tells a parable. Parable between a presumptuous Pharisee and a sinful tax collector.

Let me just commend you to you to read. Don't presume. Ask God to show you your sin. Help Him to see your need for a Savior.

Don't presume. Third, trust in Jesus. He's God in the flesh. He pours out the Spirit. He's the judge. He alone is the one you can trust.

He is able to save you. He's able to bring children of Abraham out of lifeless stones.

[37 : 13] He's able to change your stony heart into a heart that believes. He's the only one that can do that. This is what's amazing about Jesus.

He already knows you can't save yourself. He already knows that. And so that's why He came. He came to give Himself as a ransom for many. He's the one mightier than I.

He's the one mightier than you. He's the only one that can rescue you from your sin. So trust Him. Cry out to Him. Confess your sins to Him. He is glad to forgive you based on the shedding of His blood.

The last thing is serve the King. When you're brought into the Kingdom of Heaven, you come under the act of reign of Jesus, you realize how unworthy you are.

I didn't deserve this. There's nothing I can bring to the table. There's nothing I can really give Him and impress Him with. It's all about Him. It's all about His power. It's all about His glory. It's all about His purposes.

[38 : 16] I'm just happy to be here. So you start to realize how unworthy you are. And you start to realize, I'm unworthy to carry His sandals. He is so glorious.

glorious. But we serve Him with gladness. We serve Him with the joy of salvation. Because we know it is only by His grace that we've been saved.

It's His kindness to us to include us in the Kingdom. And so we serve Him with gladness. So whatever Jesus has called you to do, serve Him with gladness.

We're all unworthy servants. We're all saved by grace. He is worthy. If you want a place to serve, come to the ministry fair, January 31st. Find a place where you can leverage your gift for the glory of Jesus.

John the Baptist is still speaking today. Still preparing the way of King Jesus. Let's respond in humility. Let's pray.

[39 : 27] Jesus, You are the one mightier than I, mightier than us. It's about Your reign and Your kingdom. God, would You have Your way in our lives? Would You save this morning?

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.