

The King's Herald

Matthew 3:1-6

Introduction

In the third chapter of Matthew we are introduced to the King's Herald. A herald in ancient times announced arrivals of important dignitaries or sovereigns. Whenever a King went out among the people, the herald announced his arrival and urged the people to prepare for the royal visit. If changes need to be made, if security issues arose, the herald would help the people make the necessary arrangements. Eastern rulers traveled roads that offered safety and security. When heads of State or important dignitaries visit the front range of Colorado they make arrangements with local law enforcement to determine potential threats.

Right before Jesus began His public ministry, John the Baptist announced the fact that the King was about to make his entry. The long awaited Messiah had at last come. John knew that God had appointed him to a very special ministry: to announce the King and His Kingdom. People born outside the United States who wish to become citizens, in the process of citizenship must renounce old loyalties and embrace new loyalties—to the Constitution of the United States and the United States Government. People who want to be a part of God's Kingdom must renounce the kingdom of darkness, and the rule of sin and self. They must repent.

The Man (v.1)

Matthew 3:1-6 (NKJV) In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

John the Baptist is one of the most interesting characters in the Bible. Matt. 11:11; "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he". Greater than Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David. The Bible has long and distinguished list of important characters. The Lord Jesus assigns none greater than John; and yet intimates the least citizen of the Kingdom a greater status!?

John was the last and greatest OT prophets. Matthew 3:3 indicates he fulfills Isaiah's prophecy (40:3-5). Like Jesus the angel Gabriel announced his birth (Luke 1:11-20). The Bible indicates that his mother Elizabeth was a near relative (kinsmen) of Mary the mother of Jesus and his father Zacharias was a priest (Luke 1:5). He was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb (Luke 1:13-15). John was destined for greatness before he was born, and his being filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb is the first mention in the NT of this type of filling of the Holy Spirit. That a "fetus" can be filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb gives great support to the idea that children in the womb are in fact human—and rightly deserve the designation person.

Acts 19:4; "Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

The King's Herald

Matthew 3:1-6

“he came preaching” kerusso the primary meaning. . .is to herald” (MacArthur p. 52).

In the wilderness—this is John’s Alma Mater—this is the place where John earns his advanced degree in theology. This is the place of profound separation from the world. John is a man who lives in the wilderness, away from the world. John does not choose them—they choose him. The people are willing to leave the comforts of civilization—leave the city and go into the wilderness because of the spiritual famine of their own heart.

Craig Keener wrote; “In times of severe national apostasy in the Old Testament, some prophets (like Elijah) found it necessary to live outside society’s boundaries (p.51).

The wilderness area of Judea was a desert—but a settled desert. There were several settlements were the Jordan river empties into the Dead Sea—including the ancient city of Jericho.

At that time there was a heightened expectation among the people for Messiah’s return. There seems to be periods of time where the expectations about God and for God seem to ebb and flow. In Jesus’ day there was a great expectation that a great leader would lead Israel out of its bondage to Rome and create an independent sovereign political state.

The Man’s Message (v.2)

2and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

John broke the comfortable silence of humanism (Myron Augsburger). John is a real prophet. After 400 years of silence God was speaking to Israel again. The message can be summed up in one word, “repent”.

The Greek word used by Matthew is *metanoeo*. The word means to change your mind. The idea incorporates not only regret or sorrow, but a change of thinking and will. This results in a changed life (see verse 8; “fruits”). The Hebrew word is **shuv or suv**. The Hebrew term literally means ‘come back’ or turn around. The implication being a person is going in the wrong direction. Sin will always lead us away from God. Repentance leads us back to God.

Perhaps some of you grew up in a religious tradition that stressed penance—instead of repentance. Penance were acts you performed to prove sincerity in sorrow; to somehow demonstrate to God that you really meant business. Yet they had the opposite effect. For sins of lying or stealing or vulgar language you lit a candle or said a prayer. You may have prayed a prayer like; “ I am heartily sorry for all my sins” but wasn’t really true. The proof was a return to the wicked behavior. A Sunday School teacher once asked a class what was meant by the word “repentance”. A little boy put up his hand and said, “It is being sorry for your sins.” A little girl also raised her hand and said, “It is being sorry enough to quit.”

The King's Herald

Matthew 3:1-6

What is repentance? It is a change of mind, a change of heart and a change of action. In the NT it always refers to a change from sin to holiness. Away from self and movement towards God. It is a recognition of the horror of sin and the holiness of God.

“Repentance involves sorrow for sin, but sorrow that leads to a change of thinking, desire and conduct of life” (John MacArthur p. 53).

Repentance always involves a change of mind, a change of heart, and a willingness to forsake sin. Not simply being sorry—but a sorrow that leads to change.

When we sin, God requires repentance. If you are secretly planning your next opportunity to sin you have not really repented.

John's message of repentance includes a motive for his listeners. The motive; “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”.

This phrase is found only in Matthew's gospel; and almost certainly is a reference to the Kingdom promised in Daniel (2:44) and meant God's reign over the earth. Scholars debate if the Kingdom could have been established if the Jews had recognized and crowned Jesus King.

Whatever else it means—the Kingdom is the place where God rules supreme, it is God's reign over the Universe, both Heaven and earth—it is God's rule—in the past and present and future. It is God's rule in those places now marred by sin and rebellion.

Ready or not you will have to deal with God. We live in a world where we post-pone thoughts of death or dying or meeting God. Sooner or later we must all deal with our mortality, and the certainty that we will face God. We will face God in the courtroom of heaven, or we will face God in the living room of heaven. We will embrace Jesus as King or we will kneel before Him as Lord. All people will face God. For some it will be very soon. For some it may seem far away—but our lives can end suddenly dramatically unexpectedly.

“People should repent because the King is coming. He deserves and requires no less. The unrepentant and the unconverted cannot give the heavenly king the glory he deserves” (John MacArthur p. 54).

Four hundred years of silence from God and now Israel receives the message; the King is coming! Are you ready? The message was a warning and a rebuke. It seemed *inconceivable* that they should do anything except wait for the king and accept him. To the Jew “messiah was their messiah, the king was their king, the savior was their savior, the promise was their promise. Every Jew destined for that kingdom, every Gentile was destined to be excluded, except for a handful of token proselytes” (MacArthur).

The King's Herald

Matthew 3:1-6

We Christians do not want to fall into sin. But sometimes we do. What is the solution? Repent! Falling into sin doesn't condemn anybody, but staying in it does. A visitor at a fishing dock asked an old fisherman who was sitting at the dock; "If I were to fall into this water, would I drown?" It was a strange way of asking just how deep the water was; but the fisherman had a good answer; "Naw," he said. "Fallin' into the water doesn't drown anybody. It's staying under the water that does the drownin'".

"Keep in mind that the kingdom is being offered to the Jews. As the forerunner of the King, John is asking the people to repent (change their minds) and prepare for the King. Jesus preached this message (4:17) and so did the disciples (10:7). When the nation rejected the King, the kingdom was taken from them (21:42-43)"(see Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament;

The Man's Ministry In The Wilderness (vv.3-6)

3For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' "

The mission and ministry of John in the wilderness was predicted in Isaiah 40:3. It is interesting in the verse that it says "Prepare the way (a highway) for our God." A herald cleared the roads. John's road were men's hearts. The obstacles on the road are the barriers of sin! The way of the Lord is the way of repentance. We turn away from sin and we turn to Jesus. We turn from our crooked paths to the straight and narrow way of the king.

The Lord will sometimes use wilderness places (quiet places) to prepare or launch the ministry of men and women. Recently I interviewed one of the star's of Duck Dynasty who wrote a book entitled "Keeping a Slow Profile". The Lord says "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Sometimes the Lord will put us in "time out" so we will pause and be willing to hear the Voice of God and the urgings of the Holy Spirit.

4Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

You can tell that John does not buy his clothes at the Men's Warehouse. Camel hair clothes with a leather belt spoke of his identification with Elijah and the poor. There is nothing soft about this man. In Zechariah's day (13:4) some false prophets dressed like prophets to deceive people" (D.A.Carson p. 102). The clothes he wore and the food he ate also preached a message. John practiced what he preached, and never allowed physical comfort to interfere with the message. In the first century there were domestic bee keepers but John only ate wild honey. In order to eat wild honey, you have to smoke the bees out and then crack open the honey comb.

The King's Herald

Matthew 3:1-6

Honey and locusts were the diet of the poorest of the poor, but it also insured that nothing unclean would ever be eaten (Craig Keener).

*5Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him
6and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

This is amazing. Gentile converts were baptized in a ceremony, but not Jews! John offered them a way to express that change of mind and heart. "Baptism is a kind of drowning and cleansing at once, which says in so many words, 'die sin'" (Bruner p. 73).

Here was a visible, tangible way of expressing the change of heart from within!

"The important thing to see in verse 6 is that the remedy for sin is not denying sin's presence or explaining it away or exculpating it (*that is laying fault outside one's self*); It is admitting it. We are free from sin only when we face it; we disown it by owning up to it. The first way to repent is to admit our sins openly. Repentance is not first of all a good work; it is freely admitting our bad work, our sin. God forgives only sinners. . . 'he who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy'(Prov. 28:13)"(Bruner p. 73).

The influence and effects of John's preaching were immediate and widespread (W.H. Griffith Thomas; *Outline Studies in Matthew*; p.43).

The response was overwhelming and life changing.

A school girl was saved and someone asked her, "What were you before?" She said, "A sinner." Then she was asked, "What are you now?" She answered, "A sinner." They asked, "What's the difference?" She answered, "I was a sinner running after sin. But now I'm a sinner running from sin."

Conclusion

The message of John the Baptist was a call to repentance (v.2); the motive—the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (v.2). John urged people to prepare for the coming of the Lord (v.3).

But John's message will include several more elements; flee from the wrath to come (v.7); bear fruit (v.8); don't be duped or deceived into thinking your religious roots or godly heritage will give you special treatment on the Day of Judgment (v.9). Recognize and acknowledge the power of God (v.10); fruit is demanded—now (v.10); everyone who bears bad fruit will be condemned (v.10) and once again the people will be urged to repent—and be baptized with water by man (v. 11); repent and be baptized with fire by the Holy Spirit (v.11); and in the end the Messiah will recognize the believer and the make believer; the wheat and the tares (v.12).

The King's Herald

Matthew 3:1-6

In the next few verses John will address the issues of excuses not to repent (v.7); after all the Jews were children of Abraham and recipients of the Law of Moses and a part of the covenant people (v.9). Some would argue that John's baptism was for the insecure, not necessary for the good and decent Jews who were safe from the wrath of God. Some religious Jews believed that they were safe, exempt, and believed their self-righteous commitment to the man made religious rules would preserve them in the Day of Judgment.