

John the Baptist

Matthew 3:1-12

Introduction

- A. Prior to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, we read of the work of John the Baptizer
 - 1. Who preached in the wilderness of Judea - **Matthew 3:1**
 - 2. Who at first had a very successful ministry - **Matthew 3:5-6**
 - 3. Which was later cut short by his imprisonment - **Matthew 4:12**
- B. Though John's work was short-lived, it was clearly important...
 - 1. Each of the four gospels preface Jesus' ministry with that of John's
 - 2. His ministry prepared people for what was to come
- C. If we seek to understand the message and ministry of Jesus Christ, we must start with the one who was sent to "prepare the way of the Lord"

I. The Ministry Of John The Baptist

- A. His Message
 - 1. A call to repentance - **Matthew 3:1-2**
 - a. Literally, "a changing of the mind"
 - b. Which change prompts one to turn from sin and turn to God
 - c. Prompted by sorrow for one's sins, manifested by a zealous desire to do what is right – **2 Corinthians 7:10-11**
 - 2. A proclamation of the coming "kingdom of heaven" – **Matthew 3:2**
 - a. The term "kingdom" in Jewish thought meant "rule, reign"
 - b. The phrase "of heaven" implies the source of such rule; other gospel writers use "of God" – **Mark 1:14-15**
 - c. The rule or reign of God was about to be manifested in a special way; it was "at hand"
- B. His Purpose
 - 1. To fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah - **Matthew 3:3**
 - a. Which was to "prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" - **Isaiah 40:3**
 - b. I.e., to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah
 - 2. To fulfill the prophecy of Malachi - **Matthew 3:4**
 - a. Concerning the sending of Elijah - **Malachi 4:5-6**
 - b. John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah", not that he actually was Elijah - **John 1:19-23**
 - c. As the angel told Zacharias, his son John was to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" – **Luke 1:16-17**
- C. His Success
 - 1. People from Jerusalem, all Judea, etc., went to him - **Matthew 3:5**
 - 2. They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins - **Matthew 3:6**
 - a. For he preached a baptism of repentance - **Mark 1:4a**
 - b. A baptism for the remission of sins - **Mark 1:4b**
- D. His Challenge
 - 1. When people came to be baptized, he expected to see fruits in keeping with true repentance – **Matthew 3:7-8**
 - a. He expected compassion for the poor - **Luke 3:10-11**

- b. He expected honest business dealings - **Luke 3:12-13**
 - c. He expected fair treatment, contentment with one's wages - **Luke 3:14**
 - 2. He told them not to trust in their heritage or ancestry - **Matthew 3:9**
 - a. It was not enough to be Jews, descendants of Abraham
 - b. God could just as easily raise up children to Abraham out of stones
 - 3. He warned them that the time of judgment was near - **Matthew 3:10**
 - a. The "ax" (God's judgment) was at the root of the trees
 - b. That which did not bear good fruit would be cut off
- E. His Promise
- 1. One mightier than he is coming - **Matthew 3:11**
 - a. Yes, John did indeed baptize with water with repentance
 - b. But one (Jesus) was coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire!
 - 2. Whose work would be to separate the wheat from the chaff - **Matthew 3:12**
- F. We can learn more of the ministry of John the Baptist by studying the other gospels, but what Matthew records is sufficient to make several observations about how he was "Preparing The Way Of The Lord"

II. Observations Concerning The Ministry Of John

A. John Prepared People For Jesus' Message

- 1. John preached a call to repent - **Matthew 3:2,8**
 - a. Jesus did the same during His earthly ministry
 - b. Jesus expected the call to repentance to be proclaimed in His name to all nations
 - c. And so His apostles proclaimed the need to repent
 - d. Unless we heed to the call to repent, we have not begun to understand nor act upon what it means to be true disciples of Jesus Christ!
- 2. John proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, that it was near - **Matthew 3:2**
 - a. This was the same message proclaimed by Jesus
 - b. By His disciples, in the Limited Commission
 - c. The theme of the kingdom was an important part of the gospel following the Great Commission
- 3. What came to be taught concerning the kingdom, we shall consider in another lesson; but it was "at hand" during Jesus' earthly ministry, and in existence following His ascension to heaven

B. John Prepared The People For Jesus' Work

- 1. He spoke of Jesus as One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit - **Matthew 3:11**
 - a. This did not rule out Jesus baptizing in water, or that His disciples would
 - 1) Indeed, Jesus did baptize in water, via His disciples
 - 2) He later commanded water baptism in the Great Commission, which His disciples carried out
 - b. But Jesus would also baptize with the Holy Spirit, as promised
 - 1) Which occurred at Pentecost
 - 2) The result of which affects all who are saved
 - c. Yes, John "indeed" baptized with water (as would Jesus), but John prepared the people for a work Jesus would do that went far beyond what he was doing!

2. He spoke of Jesus as One who would separate the "wheat" from the "chaff" - **Matthew 3:12**
 - a. Jesus' work would divide the good from the bad
 - b. His work would even cause division within one's family
 - c. From what John said, we can expect that the effect of Jesus' work would sometimes cause division, not peace!

3. He spoke of Jesus as administering judgment - **Matthew 3:12**
 - a. Jesus later depicted Himself as judge
 - b. He spoke of how His words would judge us in the last day
 - c. It is true that Jesus came the first time to save the world, but He is coming again, this time to judge the world!

Conclusion

- A. The ministry of John the Baptist was an important one...
 1. To "prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight"
 2. This he did by preaching the same themes, letting people know what to expect

- B. But when Jesus began preaching, people were more likely to:
 1. Repent of their sins
 2. Answer the call to be baptized
 3. Accept the good news concerning the kingdom - For John had been preaching such themes in the wilderness of Judea!

- C. In a sense, John's message is still needed today
 1. There are many who turn the message of Jesus Christ into some sort of "easy-believism"
 2. But John reminds us of the need to bear fruits in keeping with true repentance