

## **Text— Matthew 3:1-12**

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

By the grace of God, we've entered a New Year. Thus, we've been given yet more time to use in wise and beneficial ways, the most important of which is to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," as 2 Peter 3:18 states. Yes, clinging to God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in sincere heart-deep, growing, fruitful faith is an absolute necessity because John 3:36 declares in no uncertain terms: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Indeed, where we will spend eternity is the most important thing to consider every new year, yea every new day.

The necessity of knowing and trusting in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord cannot be over emphasized since Holy Writ clearly states: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [and] the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

Therefore, it will surely benefit us to carefully consider our Scripture selection which informs us regarding:

**"THE PREACHER JOHN THE BAPTIST"**

With that as our theme may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) What was his special calling
- 2) What he preached

-1-

Prior to our Scripture selection we learn about Joseph being instructed by an angel of the Lord to flee into Egypt with the young child Jesus and His mother Mary since wicked King Herod sought to destroy the child. Then, in Matthew 2:19-23 we

read: "But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." Hence, Jesus grew up in Nazareth of Galilee.

Now, while Jesus was growing up, so was another young man who was named John. Recall that Jesus' mother Mary had an older cousin named Elisabeth who gave birth to John in her old age, and when John was eight days old and was circumcised, we are informed in Luke 1:67-80, "his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel."

Accordingly, John's father Zacharias, being filled with the Holy Ghost, spoke of the Savior Jesus being sent as Redeemer; and, Zacharias spoke of his own son John being the Lord's prophet who would prepare people to receive the Savior and the forgiveness of sins He provides. Subsequently, John grew up in the deserts until his showing unto Israel, of which we read as we enter our text.

Verses 1-3, -----. (Matthew 3:1-3)

Jesus had grown up and so had John, and *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Observe that John was a country preacher; John did not hang out in the big cities and towns; John preached out in the wilderness of Judaea, the desert areas surrounding the city of Jerusalem, and it was in fulfilment of Scripture prophecy, for our text says: *this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.* Yes, John's special calling was from God; John's special calling was to urge folks to repentance because the kingdom of heaven was coming to them on earth since Jesus the Savior was on earth in the flesh and about to publically appear on the scene.

Isaiah prophesied, chapter 40:3-8, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Thus it was foretold

concerning the forerunner of the Lord on earth.

Indeed, the forerunner would prepare the way of the Lord in people's hearts by bringing down their mountains of self-righteousness and raising up those who felt utterly hopeless. The forerunner would straighten out lives crooked with sin by directing folks' gaze toward the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ who is the glory of the Lord personified. The forerunner would cry out the message that people's own works and supposed goodness does not and cannot earn God's favor, for every naturally conceived human being dwells in sinful flesh. The forerunner would point people to the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, it was John's special calling to ready folks to receive the Redeemer, Christ the Lord.

Verse 4, -----. (Matthew 3:4)

Luke 1:13-17 informs us that before John was conceived, an angel of the Lord said to John's father Zacharias, "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Elias is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Elijah, a prophet of the Old Testament who dwelt in desert regions. Interestingly, Malachi 4:5-6 declares: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Hence, John the Baptist's special calling included the fact that he

would be a staunch preacher of repentance as was Elijah of old.

Our text tells us that *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.* So, John even dressed as did Elijah of old. John was NO fancy-pants self-serving guy out to make big bucks and a reputation for himself; NO, John was NOT interested in worldly wealth and fame; John was interested in folks spiritual health. John's special calling was to prepare the way of the Lord since the Lord Jesus was then soon to appear on the scene as the one true Savior of the world— the Savior ALL people need, for Acts 4:12 plainly states: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

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As we continue to ponder our text, let us see what John preached.

Look again at verses 1 & 2, -----. (Matthew 3:1-2)

Note well what John preached, for *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Hence, John preached to people that they needed to turn from their sins and needed to turn to the Lord whose kingdom was at hand.

Verses 5 & 6, -----. (Matthew 3:5-6)

People responded to John's preaching of repentance, for our text reports: *Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.* Many people from Jerusalem and the entire surrounding area went out to John in the wilderness, where they subsequently confessed their sins and were baptized of him. Mark 1:4-5 informs us: "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there

went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."

Take it to heart that the repentance John preached was that folks needed to be truly contrite concerning their sins, and they needed to place their full trust and confidence – their faith – in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Savior who is Lord. My friends, we too need to repent of our sins and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord, because He is the only Way to God and heaven.

Note also the importance of baptism. If baptism were not important John would not have been called to preach and to baptize. Oh beloved, the baptism instituted and commanded by Jesus Christ superceded John's baptism and is quite important and beneficial, for we read in 1 Peter 3:21-22, "baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." Mark 16:16 adds: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Accordingly, baptism is NOT to be despised but highly prized.

Verses 7-9, -----. (Matthew 3:7-9)

John was not impressed by the outwardly pious appearance of high-churchmen who trusted in their own works and their bloodline, for John told them straight out what he thought of their feigned sanctimony, for our text reports: *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.*

Realize John was not being mean-spirited; rather, John knew those high-church big-shots were headed for hell if they did not sincerely repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. John labeled those self-righteous Pharisees and Sadducees “vipers” because they were snakes like their father the devil whom they followed. Those self-righteous high-churchmen needed to bring forth fruits suitable for repentance— fruits of real repentance rather than a mere outward show. The Pharisees and Sadducees needed to stop trusting in their Hebrew bloodline to save them, and instead they needed to have the faith that Abraham had in the Messiah, the Christ— the Lord Jesus. John did not preach what the Pharisees and Sadducees wanted to hear; John preached what they needed to hear.

Likewise people today need to stop trusting in their bloodline or their church affiliation and the like which cannot save anyone. Genuine living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior is vital!

It’s as we read in Galatians 3:7-11 & 26-29 “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Take it to heart that faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord is necessary if one would be saved; and, that very faith is

wrought in one’s heart by the Holy Ghost working through the Word of God – the Gospel of Christ in particular – when preached or attached to the waters of holy Baptism.

Verse 10, -----. (Matthew 3:10)

Think about the pictorial language John used when here speaking to the self-righteous, for John said: *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.*

Thus, a person who is like a fruitless tree, a person who brings forth no fruits of genuine faith in Jesus Christ, will be cut down and cast into hell-fire, for James 2:17 relates: “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” Take it to heart that a dead faith, a faith that is merely of the mouth and the head and NOT of the heart, brings forth NO fruits, NO works that are good in God’s sight; and, such a false faith leaves one headed for hell. Jesus says in John 15:5-6, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” Thus, a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a vital necessity of one would personally receive the forgiveness of sins and salvation.

Verses 11 & 12, -----. (Matthew 3:11-12)

Again we see in the closing verses of our text that John preached Jesus Christ: John pointed people to the mighty Savior who would then soon embark upon His own public ministry, and would later baptize people *with the Holy Ghost, and with fire*. Think about it. Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, was buried, bodily rose from the dead, and 40 days later visibly ascended into heaven. But, prior to Jesus’ ascension, we learn from Acts 1:4-5, that He, “being assembled together with them,” that is, with His apostles, “commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with

water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” Subsequently, Acts 2:1-4 reports: “when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Oh beloved, the same mighty Lord Jesus Christ who baptized His apostles with the Holy Ghost and with fire will also finally separate all those who reject Him in unbelief from all those who believe on Him, for Jesus Christ is He, *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.*

Jesus’ believers are like wheat in that they are His crop which He will care for and take to Himself in heaven. On the other hand, those who persist in rejecting Christ in unbelief are like chaff, the husks and dry worthless matter, that will be burned up in the never-ending fires of hell. Thus, John preached words of warning to all who persist in unbelief.

Let us never forget the preacher John the Baptist and what he preached. Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins; and, let us keep our full trust and confidence in God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as our personal Savior and Lord, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)  
Amen.

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