

Title: **Preach the Gospel - AND USE WORDS!**

Text: **Matthew 3.1-12**

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Aim: John's message is a picture of Jesus' ministry - The reality of God's Kingdom is both a serious warning against sin and a glorious promise of the conquering King.

Introduction

There's a TV show that seems to have taken this country by storm - Duck Dynasty. The show is about a family -

- lives in Louisiana
- hunters (of anything)
- who became known for their Duck Commander business (making duck calls)

But you don't have to like hunting to like the show - it's not about hunting. The premise of the show is really about how this family relates together in all these different situations - work, home.

One of the members of the family is Uncle Si - who has a bit of an honesty problem. He tells these crazy stories that the family says are based on real events but all the details aren't necessarily true - he doctors them up a bit. In fact, Si has been asked about his stories and he's said - "All the stories I tell start out as 95% truth. Look, so the last 5% I have to kick it up a notch. You have to give the story a good "umph" at the end.

So he tells this story about getting chased by wolves. He claims that he was running so fast that he looked down and his shoes were on "literally" on fire. Now, he recently was on a talk show where he said the only part of that story that wasn't true was that his shoes were on fire.

The problem (and when you watch and listen to this guy it becomes funny) is that when you say "literally" it means that it really happened. You can't describe something as "literally" if it's not factual - because then it's not literal. I heard someone say one time - "I literally died." No you didn't - because then you wouldn't be here.

Often times we can make a statement or tell a story that we want to be taken one way - but is taken another way. But we don't run into that problem here in Matthew 3.1-12. Of all the things said about John, being ambiguous is not one of them.

Matthew seems burdened with emphasizing -

1. description of John (1-6) - person, message of repentance, ministry of baptism
2. message of John (7-12) - the drive of the message, its key figure, implications

It's on the message that we are going to spend most of our time focusing this morning. But first it is important for us to talk about the man -

1. Matthew, inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, talks about the man - and gives some key details about John.

2. What Matthew says - in helping us understand the when and who of John the Baptist - will go a long way in helping us understand the significance of John's baptism - his anointing - of Jesus in the very next passage.

3.1 In those days... It would immediately appear as though these words are referring to a period during Jesus' childhood because ch.2 closes with -

- Herod dying
- Joseph, Mary, and Jesus leaving Egypt
- and settling in Galilee (Nazareth)

But Matthew isn't talking about a time during Jesus' childhood. In fact, Matthew spends no time writing about Jesus the boy.

There are some commentators who don't find much significance in the use of this phrase - if they address it all. They take it to just be a general period of time. I have a hard time with that understanding because -

1. Matthew has just skipped a whole portion of Jesus' life - from the end of ch.2 to the beginning of ch.3 he moves from Jesus the boy (little boy) to Jesus the man.
2. And this isn't just a general time in Jesus' adult life - or in Israel's history God has been silent for 400 years. There's been no prophet in the land of Israel. The people have been waiting.

And now Matthew introduces us to this Man - **In those days John the Baptist came...** - who is setting the stage for the One whom they've been waiting. John - in these days - is going to anoint the King and thrust Him into His Kingdom ministry.

This opening phrase of ch.3 is actually very consistent with John's whole ministry because it's introducing to type of "new beginning" in the plot line of the Bible. As they are about to find out, this is not just a general period of time for the Jewish people. John came to prepare the people for the Messiah. John came as the forerunner to Jesus. And in using this phrase, Matthew is opening the can - "This is it. These are the days when the Lord is going to change the world."

Now there's a connection between v.2 and v.7-12 in that it would appear that what John says in v.7-12 can easily flow out of the thrust of his message (his thesis statement) in v.2. I mention that because it seems as though Matthew takes a detour from John's message to give us a bit of a physical description - **4**Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5**Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, **6**and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Matthew's description of John's wardrobe and diet should pop off the page - and that people are going to him to be baptized should startle you - because this was not the norm. John wasn't the attractive "upper class" with which people would naturally want to be associated. In fact - at face value - he probably looked a little crazy. But this is where it is vital to read the passage in connection to the overall storyline of the Bible - because Matthew is making the connection with John the Baptist to Elijah - one of the great prophets in Israel's history who also lived and

prophesied during a severe spiritual drought in Israel. In 2 Kings 1.8 Elijah's wardrobe is described as a garment of hair and a belt of leather. The prophet Malachi (in addition to Isaiah) prophesies about John - and he makes the connection to John with Elijah. You read in some of the last verses of the OT - **Malachi 3.1** "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me." **4.5** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Jesus, Himself, identifies John as this Elijah type figure (Mt. 17.10-13).

This is all very, very significant because it explains why these people were out to him in the wilderness. And it gives weight - it makes his message viable to Matthew's Jewish audience. The Jewish people would've known the OT and made out John the Baptist as a prophet which is so significant because it means the Lord is not longer silent. These people finally seem so desperate to hear from the Lord that they will go to His prophet in a remote part of the land.

But all of these connections and fulfilled prophecies should also give this man spiritual credibility to us so that we incline ourselves to the seriousness of his message and the glory of his ministry - setting the stage for the King.

John preaches - **3.2** "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He's preaching the gospel. The gospel is - The good news that God has come to us in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. We were born in sin - unable, ever, to do anything deserving heaven. We were born and consistently show by the way we live our lives that we are enemies of God. But through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection - He has made a way for us to be children of God. Jesus Christ has satisfied God's wrath against our sin on on the cross so that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Listen, there are no two ways about it. And John makes that perfectly clear. We see -

The gospel is a DIRECT message... (2)

We live in a world of rumors, hearsay - where people will chase anything that'll tickle their ears. They'll listen to nearly anything that gives them opportunity to express their thoughts, opinions. That's why relativism is so appealing - because what is true for you doesn't have to be true for me. We can both have our beliefs - express our opinions - and be happy (at least pretend to be). But that's not truth. Truth -

- teaches
- enlightens
- directs
- is not a facade
- is not make-believe

Truth is what's real. And John addresses the reality of these people's lives - individually and as a nation.

- **of warning**

He tells them - "**Repent...**" This is a warning. It involves a change of mind and literally means to change direction - to take your person and go the other way. It infers that one is misguided - misled. Understand, it has to come from the conclusion there is something wrong.

And I don't miss what's happening here - We see (7-10) that other religious leaders have come out to see what's going on. And what they're going to find is that John (like Jesus) is unlike any of them (the other religious leaders). The authority that he commands here is unrivaled in the day. He is coming out with a booming message that has nothing to do with traditions or following a set of rules. He is confronting people with the heart of their problem.

Ill. - The other day Cooper hit one of his sisters.

If we aren't willing to talk directly to each other - what are we doing? How are we growing - individually and as a church family? How can we even say we treasure the gospel - because any message that fails to address the truth about our hearts is no gospel.

John takes sin seriously and speaks about it plainly. And this is the kind of talk we all need because we are naturally blind and dead - specifically to spiritual truths. We are eager to flatter ourselves by just being satisfied with being better than the next person (like that's any competition).

John preaches - "**Repent...**"

- **of hope**

Why? "**...for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" I cannot overstate the hope this brought to the Jewish people. Throughout Israel's history, they understood the Messiah and His kingdom to be things that were coming - to be a future realization. So for John to say - "...the kingdom of heaven is at hand." - created real excitement among the people because the Messiah was coming to rescue His people. But He wasn't necessarily going to bring the kind of rescue they had in mind. The Jewish people were looking for political and social redemption. They wanted -

- their territory returned
- their culture established
- autonomous rule (not under the Romans)

But they did not understand the depth and breadth of their rebellion against the Lord (Yahweh). And so, what was suppose to be a message of hope ends up - later in Jesus' life - becoming a threat.

And depending on where you are with John's demand to repent depends on whether "the kingdom of heaven" is a threat to you or offers you hope.

- World - it's a threat because they think they're better than God. The world thinks it is its own god and can solve its problems with better systems (government, economic, education, etc.) The system isn't the problem. It's the heart.

Ill. - I can't even begin to understand the foolishness and poison of the "prosperity gospel." It's driven by a love and interest for self. I listen to Joel Osteen spew stupidity like - "God wants you on top." I have two problems with that statement (more than two but we'll just stick with these) -

1. Look at the people in our world who are on top - You're telling me that's what the Lord wants for me.
2. What does he define as "on top"? Where is he getting his definition? **Proverbs 1.7** says - **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...** People who preach that message don't preach the fear the Lord - they preach self.

So you can follow the world and its messages and the gospel will only and ever be a threat to you - because it will confront your "kingdom of self."

Or you can repent.

- Church (brothers and sisters) - it gives us hope. Why? Because we know -
 - the King has come
 - and though He's gone away He's left us a Helper and is building His Kingdom
 - and He's going to come again

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand" - means God reigns! Not -

- us/others
- our desires
- bank accounts/possessions
- successes/failures
- circumstances
- suffering
- world
- sin
- evil
- Satan

The gospel blows the victory sound that - God, the Lord reigns!

If you put your faith in Jesus Christ and proclaim your love and allegiance to Him as King Jesus, the gospel is a direct message of hope...

...that saves us to a DISTINCT Kingdom (7-10)

One unlike this world has ever known.

And you can hope and overcome in this broken, your life is in under the control of the One who reigns.

In the last several months I've been burdened about whether we really understand (or are even seeking to understand) that to which we are saved. And I want us to understand - from what John says - what we are saved to. We talk so much about what we are saved from - namely, our sins

and death - and we should. But I think where we (church) are weak is in unpacking to what we are saved and discovering what that means for our lives.

Remember, that what John says in v.7-12 flow out of his demand and proclamation in v.2 - **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** It's easy to forget that because of Matthew's description of John in v.3-6 - but it's important you remember this is all one message and see the connections consistent threads running through his message.

There's a dynamic to this kingdom in which it has already come - but the King is away. He's gone, building His Kingdom, and He will come again.

- **that impacts the present**

And that future return of the King has a tremendous bearing on our present. John confronts the religious leaders - **7" You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"** John is saying - "I don't know where you learned the things you are teaching. You have set up a system of formal religion that is poisoning people to death."

And then he says - **8" Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."**

III. - Have you ever heard someone pray and it seems like they're trying to preach a message while they pray? That's like what's going on in this verse. John is confronting the religious leaders but he knows everyone around can hear him. And this statement is the antithesis to what the Jewish people believed and lived. They knew they couldn't keep the law but they still thought they were right as long as they made their ritual offerings and sacrifices. Essentially they thought - "I'll be alright as long as I play God's game and follow tradition." They used and abused their Jewish heritage as God's covenant people - that's why John says what he does to them in v.9-10.

But while John's command is totally inconsistent with the life of OT Israel - it is completely consistent with what all the Bible teaches about a life truly given to the Lord. Remember the word repent means to change direction - and that has significant ongoing ramifications. Notice the word - **fruit** - is singular. The point is the same as when you turn to Galatians 5 and read the "**Fruit** of the Spirit." A lot of people look at Galatians 5.22-23 and see a list of characteristics - and call them the **Fruits** of the Spirit. It's singular - **Fruit**.

Why? Because the Lord's concern is not for us to build this resume of good works. When one gives their lives to the Lord there is a change in the whole being - the Lord redeems the whole person. John's point here - and the Bible's elsewhere - is simply to live a life that is consistent with the gospel.

We - the church - are kingdom people. We are to do life in a way that shows the world (though in a dim way) what life is going to be like in the kingdom -

- the way we relate - Do we gossip, lie, betray?
- the way we work - Are we lazy? Do we have integrity?
- what we value - Are we trying to get comfortable in this world?
- with what we concern ourselves - Power or service?
- how we handle conflict - Do we get all bent out of shape?

- how we handle success and accept blessing - Do we become arrogant and use it as a means to promote self?

And brothers and sisters, we drink the same poison Israel drank when we -

- depend on a prayer that "asked Jesus into our hearts" instead of pursuing the mediator, object, and affection of our prayers - King Jesus.
- think we have to doctor Christianity up and make Jesus look cool instead of just living the way He wants and trusting He can take care of Himself
- make the church this formal religious institution I have to drag to myself to every week.
 - I'll stand but I won't sing.
 - And I'll put a check in the plate but I won't serve.
 - I'll listen but I won't do.

The church is the community of people that should be showing the world how to live. But we don't because we've created this dichotomy of -

- church life - what I do on Sunday's, Wednesday's, and the occasional activity
- "real" life - home, work, etc.

When we live that way we aren't showing the world there's a King for whose return we are eagerly waiting. We are giving them any hope the Lord is actively ruling - when in fact, He is.

And His Kingdom -

- **that has no bounds**

John says - **9**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. **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.

This is judgment because the Israelites assumed God would accept them based on their national status - their ethnicity. John tells them the Lord can make the rocks at their feet - that lack any significance - children of Abraham. He tells them - "Your heritage means nothing." What a kick in the gut.

And again, John's message is driving back to the heart of spiritual life - Israel's then and our's now. Look, the kingdom isn't just something that exists (although it does). You don't just gain rights to the Kingdom by -

- praying a prayer
- going to a building every Sunday
- writing a check
- going on a mission trip

The way of salvation is repentance and faith in Christ - not ethnic identity or birth to Christian parents. God calls us today - no matter who your were parents were and no matter what ritual you received as a baby. God calls you today to repent and believe on Christ alone for salvation and to receive the new sign of the new covenant people of God - the sign of repentance and faith - baptism.

You are given citizenship to the Kingdom when the King receives your love and loyalty - evidenced in a life of repentance that is now directed on Him. Baptism is a sign that the Kingdom is also something that happens - to a life.

There's a dynamic to it because -

...whose hero is a DISTINGUISHED King. (11-12)

John is speaking of two baptisms here and in doing so he is distinguishing Jesus from himself - or any other person for that matter.

- Person

John says - **11**"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."

John is speaking of the One who has been identified and will live out as -

- King of kings
- Lord of lords
- Almighty God

Our thoughts should move to the infinite worthiness and supremacy of Jesus Christ.

There are amazing things said about John the Baptist - **Matt. 11.11**"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

But Jesus transcends John in every way. In fact, John says - "I'm not worthy to be His slave." The feet were dirty - the sandals nasty. Washing one's feet and carrying their sandals was a job for a slave. John unashamedly and unapologetically demeans himself in the eyes of the Jewish people for sake of making much of Christ. In fact - in the Gospel of John - John the Baptist is using the metaphor of a wedding. And He calls Jesus the bridegroom and refers to himself as the best man. And He says - **John 3.30**"He must increase, but I must decrease." In other words - No one cares about the best man. This is not about me (because John had great popularity - and disciples himself). You need to look completely to Christ.

- Work

What I do is only glimmer of what He does - **11b**"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **12**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."

John's ministry (of baptism) could only picture on the outside what Jesus' ministry does on the inside (heart). John's baptism was a sign of personal, individual repentance - not a sign of birth into a covenant family. It is hard to overstate how radical this was in John's day. The Jews already had a sign of the covenant - circumcision. John's baptism is the beginning of the radical, individual Christian ordinance of baptizing those who believe. It's a stunning picture for us of dying (with Christ) to our old nature - slavery to sin - and rising again as a new person in Christ.

Baptism was a necessary part of John's ministry - and is a necessary step in our lives with Jesus - because it's proclaiming

- our repentance
- the radical transformation of our whole person
- Faith in, love for, and allegiance to King Jesus

We need to be sent directly to Jesus because it is the special work of Jesus Christ to give us the Spirit. The Holy Spirit refines us and provides evidence of repentance in us. He opens our hearts to the glories of Jesus Christ and empowers us to live out our identity in Christ. He is our Helper in this life and our guarantee for the next.

The work of the Holy Spirit in us is the continued work of Jesus Christ for us.

COMMUNION

I want to those who are serving communion to prepare in the back.

Communion confronts us in a visible way with the work Jesus has accomplished for us. It invites us show the gospel to each other as we serve the elements to each other.

Bread - his body broken

Cup - his blood spilled

He has provided you with means to repent and believe. If you haven't you need the Savior not the elements.

1 Corinthians 11.23-26