

Gospel of Matthew Chapter 3 -- John Karmelich

1. There is an old Christian joke that goes as follows:
 - a) A pastor travels out of town to go to a pastor's conference. He is running late.
 - b) He finally gets there, and the place is crowded.
 - c) He scans the rows and spots an empty seat near an aisle.
 - d) He looks at the person next to the empty seat and says, "Is this seat saved?"
 - e) The person next to the seat, looks at the seat, then looks at the pastor and replies, "I don't think it's even under conviction".
 - f) Now if you don't get that joke, don't worry, you will if you read on. ☺
2. There is a Christian concept of "conviction", which means that one has realize they are a "sinner" before they understand they need someone to deal with that sin problem.
 - a) You can't accept Jesus crucifixion as payment for your sins if you don't believe you have a sin problem.
 - b) If I had to state Satan's greatest lie, it would be that "God will accept you just as you are."
 - i) It is the false idea that one can get into heaven just because your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds.
 - ii) If you did a survey of most Americans and asked them if they believe in God and heaven, they will say yes. If you then ask them are you going to heaven, they will say yes "because they are a good person".
 - iii) That is not the Christian message.
3. This ties in very well to Chapter 3 of the Gospel of Matthew.
 - a) The central character of Chapter 3 is John the Baptist.
 - b) The application to you and me is not to learn history and learn about the historical facts about John the Baptist.
 - i) It is about understanding the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry and how it applies to our lives.
 - ii) John the Baptist is mentioned in all four gospels.
 - iii) You can find outside historical references to John the Baptist that he really existed.
 - c) Matthew emphasizes John the Baptist came as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
 - i) That is all well and good, and we'll discuss that today.
 - ii) What I want you to see today is the necessity of John the Baptist's ministry.
 - iii) Like the joke about the "saved" chair requiring conviction, so do all people.
 - iv) The purpose of John the Baptist ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus.
 - v) That is not a whole lot different from what Jesus calls us to do.
 - a) That is to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). That means to tell people about Jesus and live our lives as witnesses for Jesus.
 - b) In order for people to accept Jesus as their Savior, first they have to realize their need for a Savior.
 - c) Too often, when giving people the gospel message, we focus directly on telling them about Jesus without people understanding the need for Jesus in the first place.
 - vi) There is a street evangelist in Southern California named Ray Comfort.
 - a) Ray loves to show people copies of the 10 commandments.
 - b) He asks, "Have you ever broken one these, ever, even once?"
 - c) If you have, what does that make you? (Answer, a sinner)
 - d) He then goes into the "remedy" for sin, which is Jesus.
 - e) Ray understands, like John the Baptist understood, that there must be a sense of personal conviction, before one can accept Jesus as the remedy.

4. Let's get back to Chapter 3. Chapter 3 is mostly about John the Baptist.
- a) It is a brief description of his life and purpose.
 - b) You have to read Luke's gospel to get more information about his background.
 - c) First of all, let's clear up who is not John the Baptist. John the Baptist did not write any of the books of the bible. There was a different "John" who was one of the 12 apostles. That John wrote the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, 3rd John, and Revelation.
 - d) John the Baptist was a relative of Jesus through Mary, probably a cousin (Luke 1:36).
 - i) Luke records several miracles around the birth of John the Baptist.
 - ii) These include the fact that John the Baptist's mother was barren until John and his birth was a miracle itself. An angel made his father mute until after he was born. That angel told his parents to name him "John" even though there was no one born with that name in his family. (Source: Luke Chapter 1)
 - e) All of this information about John's background is all fine and well.
 - f) What I want you to think about is how to apply John the Baptist's work to our lives.
 - i) John the Baptist's purpose in life was to point people to Jesus.
 - ii) He was born for this purpose: "And he (John) will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God." (Luke 1:16, NKJV)
 - a) John's purpose in life was to point people to Jesus.
 - iii) For this service, John's "earthly reward" was to be beheaded by King Herod (see Luke 9:9, et.al.)
 - iv) Yet here is what Jesus said about John the Baptist before his death:
 - a) "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. (Luke 7:28, NIV)
 - b) This is a strange statement. Jesus said John the Baptist is greater than Moses, Abraham, King David, Daniel, etc., but whoever is "least" in the "kingdom of God" (i.e., Christians) is greater than John!
 - c) This implies that God decided, for whatever reason, that those who are saved in the "Christian era" get more "heavenly status" than those who are saved prior to Jesus coming.
 - d) The prophets and leaders of the Old Testament were all part of God's plan to bring Jesus into the world. John was given the status of the "greatest of all these men" for his role as leading the way to Jesus.
 - v) The application I want you to see, and think about is "What *should* we have in common with John the Baptist?"
 - a) How much different is that from what John the Baptist is called to do?
 - b) John the Baptist and us are specifically called to "point people" to Jesus.
 - (1) Now God does not expect us to eat locusts and wear camel hair clothing like John. ☺
 - (2) He expects us to be witnesses where we are, or where God calls us to be. I like the expression, "plant where you bloom and bloom where you are planted".
 - (3) Like John, our lives should have a convicting effect upon people.
 - (a) They should look at us, and realize that salvation requires accepting Jesus, a changed lifestyle based on that belief in order to have eternal life. We are here to combat the false notion that being a "good person" cannot save you.
5. With all that said, let's jump into Verse 1.

6. Verse 1: In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "
- a) Verse 1 starts with "in those days". It is a bridge from the last part of Chapter 2.
 - i) Chapter 2 ends with the events surrounding Jesus birth and very early years.
 - ii) There is nothing said about Jesus until this period, which is about 30 years later.
 - a) We know nothing about Jesus' childhood, except a brief story in Luke.
 - b) We know nothing about his teenage years or his twenties.
 - c) It is as if Jesus' life is irrelevant until he started his ministry.
 - d) There is a view that "where the bible is silent, we should be silent". I tend to agree with this view. Therefore, we shouldn't speculate as to the "silent years" of Jesus' life. I will focus on what is written, and the "silent years" we'll just ask God about when we get to heaven.
 - e) If God wanted us to know about those years, he would have said so! ☺
 - b) So here we have John the Baptist preaching in the desert.
 - i) Notice that nothing is said about how John got there.
 - ii) The first word that Matthew chose to quote from John is "repent".
 - a) "Repent" means to change your ways for the better. It means to realize some aspect of your lifestyle is wrong and you need to change for the better.
 - b) By the way, the first recorded word when Jesus began his public ministry was also "repent". (Matthew 4:17).
 - c) Christianity is not just about saying, "I believe in Jesus", although, it's a good start. ☺ Christianity is about reacting based on that belief. Repenting has the idea that if you believe Jesus is God and paid the price for your sins, you will be eternally grateful for that payment and change your lifestyle based on that belief. That is the idea behind "repenting".
 - iii) Remember the purpose of Matthew's gospel is to show the Jewish audience that Jesus is the promised Messiah.
 - a) Matthew spends a lot of time quoting the Old Testament.
 - b) Here, he quotes Isaiah 40:3, with John the Baptist as the fulfillment of that prophecy.
 - c) This is a good model for us as witnesses for Jesus.
 - d) Sometimes when we start to tell people about our faith, we have to begin with "common ground".
 - (1) Religious Jews accept that the Old Testament as the Word of God.
 - (2) Therefore, Matthew uses that as a launching point to show that the events surrounding Jesus time on earth fulfills prophecy.
 - (3) When we talk about Jesus, it is often good to find common ground as a starting point.
 - (a) If you find someone who does believe there is a God, but not in Jesus, you may use that as a starting point.
 - (b) With Matthew, the common ground is the Old Testament, and thus, the emphasis on fulfillment of prophecy.

- c) Let's talk about John the Baptist's quote from Isaiah. John said, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."
 - i) The idea behind this passage is often compared to a word-picture of the king coming to town.
 - ii) When a big time dignitary is coming to town, you often want to prepare the way and "straighten up the mess" around the area.
 - iii) If you knew someone famous is coming over to your house for dinner, you would spend the day cleaning and cooking.
 - a) On a related note, I have often found the best motivation to clean up the house is to invite company for dinner. ☺
 - iv) This is the idea behind John the Baptist's preaching.
 - v) The application is to change your life because Jesus is coming.
 - vi) Here is a related set of Bible verses to make all of us nervous: ☺
 - a) "It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹²So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:11-12, NIV)
 - b) Paul, in quoting Isaiah 45:23, says we will all give an account of our actions to God the Father.
 - c) For a nonbeliever, it means explaining what information you did know about Jesus and how you reacted to that information.
 - d) For a believer, it means being accountable for the information you were given and what you did with that information.
 - e) So here is John the Baptist saying, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him"
 - (1) Both Paul's quote and John the Baptist quote has the same implication for us. We are to repent, i.e., change our lifestyle based on the fact that Jesus 1) did come and 2) will come again to judge us based on our knowledge of Him.
- d) One last thing before I move on. John said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near".
 - i) A lot of commentators make a big deal about the expression "kingdom of heaven".
 - ii) There are other places in the Gospels where Jesus uses the expression "the kingdom of God". Most people believe the two terms are used interchangeably.
 - a) Scholars debate if the two expressions "kingdom of God" vs. "kingdom of heaven" each have a different meaning.
 - b) First of all, when John the Baptist says "the kingdom of heaven is near", he simply means that eternal salvation is not hundreds or thousands of miles away, but is as close as your lips confessing Jesus. On earth, the "saved" are mixed in with the "unsaved" until we are called away to heaven. Therefore the "kingdom of heaven" includes all saved people currently living as those who have died.
 - c) As to the "kingdom of God" vs. "the kingdom of heaven", I am convinced the terms are meant to be used interchangeably. To a Jewish mind, the "kingdom of God" can mean things other than salvation, and Matthew specifically used the term "kingdom of heaven" for that reason.
 - d) It's not a big deal, but you'll see those two terms used, it seems, interchangeably and I thought I'd address the issue.

7. Verse 4: John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.
- a) In Verse 4 we have the only physical description of John the Baptist.
 - i) The rest of the chapter focuses on his ministry and his purpose.
 - ii) We need to keep that in perspective when applying this chapter to our lives!
 - b) Personally, if I were to have a public relations representative for Jesus, I would have done it differently. I would have someone who was a known high official, dressed well, and he would be standing on the main stairwell of the temple announcing it to the thousands of religious Jews that Jesus is coming.
 - i) Instead, we find John the Baptist out in the middle of "nowhere", the desert area on the south end of Israel along the river.
 - ii) John's father was a priest (See Luke 1:8). He was part a division of priests, who regularly worked in the temple. Yet, John choose to live an isolated lifestyle with uncomfortable clothes and an uncomfortable diet.
 - iii) I'm sure John's father (Zechariah, no relation to book of Zechariah) told John as he was growing up of the information the angel told him how John's role was to be a messenger for the Messiah. Zechariah also knew that Joseph and Mary, who were relatives through his wife Elizabeth, were to be parents of the Messiah.
 - a) Just when John left his parents to go live in the desert is another mystery of which we have to wait to find out.
 - b) It makes you wonder if John recognized Jesus when he first walked up to him or did God somehow prompt him to say "This is the guy" prior to Jesus' baptism by John (coming up later in the chapter).
 - c) I should probably give a brief discussion of the comparison of Elijah and John the Baptist.
 - i) In 1st Kings, there was a prophet named Elijah.
 - ii) He did not die, but was taken up into heaven. (See 2nd Kings 2:11)
 - iii) Centuries later, the Old Testament prophet Malachi predicted that Elijah would return prior to Jesus coming:
 - a) "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. (Malachi 4:5)
 - b) The only description we have of Elijah is that "A man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." (2nd Kings 1:8b, NIV)
 - c) Therefore, to a religious Jew, a description of John the Baptist with camel's hair and a leather belt is a direct comparison to Elijah.
 - d) Yet, in John's Gospel, John the Baptist denied he was Elijah (John 1:20)
 - e) Here's the key: "He (John) will go on before Him (Jesus) in the spirit and power of Elijah," (Luke 1:17a, NIV)
 - f) So John the Baptist is not Elijah, but he was given his spirit and power.
 - g) In Matthew 17, we do have an appearance of Elijah, and we'll discuss that when we get there.
 - h) The main point to see from this section is simply that when Matthew mentions John the Baptist camel hair and belt, it was meant to show the direct comparison of John to Elijah. We can now move on. ☺
 - d) The interesting thing about John the Baptist's ministry is that it is not a good example (by modern standards) of how to have a successful ministry.
 - i) There are lots of Christian books out there on how to have a big ministry. I've yet to see one that says we are to go to the middle of nowhere, eat locusts, wear itchy camel clothes, yell "repent" and wait for people to show up. ☺

- ii) Yet Matthew tells us that people from all over Judea came to hear John's message.
 - a) It makes you wonder how it spread.
 - b) Did a handful of people spot John out there, and with "word of mouth", people just start traveling to see this guy?
 - c) I suspect many people just went out for the curiosity factor. Once they heard John preach, they got convicted.
 - (1) That is how God expects to work with us. It is the Holy Spirit's job to do the convicting; our job is just to preach the message.
 - d) You also have to remember that the Jews desperately wanted the Messiah.
 - (1) They were living under bondage to Rome and they were looking for someone to overthrow Rome.
 - (2) Therefore, under messianic expectations, they went to go check the guy out and see if John the Baptist was the Messiah.
 - (3) The application for us is that in the same way people need air, food, clothing, etc. they also need to worship something. It is inherent. People can suppress that need or fill it with a substitute. Our job is to show people how to correctly fill that need. God does the rest.
- e) Verse 6 says that people were "confessing their sins, they were baptized by him (John) in the Jordan River".
 - i) Baptism for a Jew, was a ritual for the conversion of non-Jews (Gentiles) Judaism.
 - a) For a Jew to be baptized was unheard of.
 - b) Personally, I suspect most of the people who went were the "common folk". They understood the rituals of Judaism, but didn't care for the moment. They were simply convicted by John's speeches and thought, "If the Messiah is coming, I need to confess my sins and change".
 - c) All my Baptist friends want me to point out that the word "baptism" means emersion in water, and not just sprinkling. I don't believe you are not baptized if you are sprinkled, I just believe the proper method is emersion. I'll get off my soapbox now on that point. ☺
 - ii) I should also discuss a group of religious Jews during that time called the Essenes.
 - a) When you read of the religious leaders in the Gospels, you often read of the Pharisee's and the Sadducee's. There was also a third prominent group called the Essenes. The 1st century historian Josephus talks about all three.
 - b) Many people think John the Baptist was part of the Essenes.
 - (1) The Essenes were separatists. They were roughly the Jewish equivalent of "monks", who separated themselves from society.
 - (2) The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in the 1940's were the collections of writings by the Essenes of that day. The Dead Sea Scrolls included copies of Old Testament books and personal writings.
 - (3) With all that said, I don't believe John the Baptist was an Essene.
 - (a) Essenes believed in continual baptism on a regular basis.
 - (b) John was a once-and-for-all baptism kind of guy. ☺

8. Verse 7: But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

 - a) Personally, I find this kind of comical.
 - i) You can picture people going back and forth, sometimes over a 10-20 mile journey to go check out John the Baptist out in the desert.

- a) Let's say one of them says to a Pharisee friend, "Hey, you have to come see this guy". He says the Messiah is coming soon. People are confessing their sins to him and he's baptizing them." So off they go. The religious leader, thinking, "ok, here's another kook. People are following him. Let's go check him out".
 - (1) The first thing out of John's mouth to these guys is "brood of vipers". You can almost hear the voice of the guys who brought them to the river say, "Hey John, keep it down, this is one of the religious leaders. Do you have to be so rough on him?" ☺
- ii) You have to understand that "brood of vipers" was a terrible insult.
 - a) A viper is a type of snake. It looks a dead branch lying on the desert floor. You examine it and it bites you. This is type of snake that bit Paul in the book of Acts (28:4)
 - b) To compare Pharisees and Sadducees with a low-life desert snake waiting to put their venom in someone is a terrible insult.
- b) Let's talk a little about Pharisees and Sadducees and then give modern-examples.
 - i) The Pharisees were the strict "religionists". Modern Orthodox Judaism is based on the Pharisee's. They believed the bible is the Word of God. They counted every commandment of God given in the five books of Moses (613 of them) and lived in the strictest observance of all 613 rules and regulations.
 - a) They also have a set of rules based on their interpretations of those laws. They strictly lived by their interpretations as well.
 - ii) The danger of the Pharisee's is not their obedience to God's commandments, but in their trusting in that obedience for their salvation.
 - a) A modern comparison might be pious religious Christians, who think they are above the non-saved person because of their "holy habits".
 - b) We are saved by the grace of God, and nothing more. Yes we are to be obedient to God's commands, but out of gratitude, not obligation.
 - c) John the Baptist condemned the Pharisee's because they did not believe they needed repentance, because "they were already saved".
 - (1) The application to you and I is "Gee, I'm already saved, I don't need any more God-stuff. I believe in Jesus, I go to church on Sunday, why should I concern myself with maturity as a believer?"
 - (2) Pharisee's did believe in sin confession, but it was the "holier-than-thou" attitude that turns people off then, as well as today!
 - (3) Christianity is a fine balance between being obedient to God and making people see that we are not better than them, but we are simply saved by trusting in Jesus, and not our actions.
 - iii) Let's move on to the Saducee's.
 - a) The Saducee's were the aristocrats.
 - b) They believed the Bible is to be taken "spiritually, but not literally".
 - c) Today we call them "the liberals" of our religion.
 - d) They believe the bible stories are there for our learning, but they are neither real people nor real characters. They are just lessons to be learned.
 - e) "We as sophisticated, modern, intellectual Saducee's" know that they are good stories to learn, but we are above such actual nonsense as God, the devil or angels. We should live a good moral life because it is the intelligent thing to do" (I'm being sarcastic here if you can't tell. ☺).
 - f) Saducees's exist today. Many are college professors.
 - (1) Unfortunately, many are also ordained pastors, priests and rabbis.

- g) If you get these groups mixed up, remember the Saducee's didn't believe in the resurrection. Remember, "they were sad, you see (Saducee)". Yes that's a terrible pun, but it will help you to keep the two groups straight.
 - iv) Remember that John the Baptist grew up as the son of a priest. He probably had some familiarity with both the Pharisee's and Saducee's.
- 9. Meanwhile, John the Baptist is still cursing these guys out. ☺ Verse 9: And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
 - a) Let me try to paraphrase John for you. "Don't think that just because you are religious Jews that you are automatically saved? God is God and He can do whatever he wants. God could take these stones right in front of you and make them into Jews. Who cares if you are Jewish? (Sons of Abraham). If you want salvation, then admit you have faults and repent of them.
 - i) The last sentence is saying that fruit trees that don't produce fruit are cut down. They are not given "one more chance".
 - ii) In the introduction to this lesson, I stated that Satan's greatest lie is that "we can get into heaven by being a good person". Nonsense! This is the point John the Baptist is trying to make to these guys. They were smug that their good works were enough. They were trusting in their own accomplishments and not of God paying the price himself for their sins.
 - b) Jesus himself gave the same principal in one of his parables:
 - i) "But those enemies of mine who did not want me (Jesus) to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.' (Luke 19:27, NIV).
 - c) I should also add that this is strictly a salvation issue being discussed here.
 - i) There are "works" to be done as Christians, both for maturity and for our rewards in heaven. The danger is trusting in those works for our salvation.
- 10. Verse 11: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
 - a) John had thousands of people coming to hear him, but notice he didn't let that go to his head. He focused on glorifying Jesus and not himself.
 - b) Remember that when you are preaching. People aren't coming for the messenger, they are coming to hear the message!
 - c) The last sentence of this verse is full of controversy. John says Jesus will baptize you "with the Holy Spirit and fire".
 - i) The first thing to notice is that there is more than one baptism.
 - ii) John's baptism was using a Jewish ritual to symbolize repentance of your sins. It is not about salvation.
 - iii) Christians are baptized based on the "great commission" when Jesus says we are to "go into all nations and baptize them in the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).
 - a) When you accept Jesus, you get all the Holy Spirit coming upon you at that point. (John 14:23).
 - b) Some Pentecostal denominations believe there are two baptisms. One is when you first publicly accept Jesus and get baptized, and there is a separate event where the Holy Spirit "anoints" you. I respectfully disagree with this view.
 - (1) They see this phrase by John of "baptism by Holy Spirit and fire" as describing 1) when you first believe and 2) when the Holy Spirit anoints you.

- iv) Now let's talk about being "baptized with fire".
 - a) One view compares this to the events in Acts Chapter 2 where "tongues of fire" come down on believers and they speak in tongues (See Acts 2:3).
 - b) This is another reason why some Pentecostal denominations see a separate anointing of the Holy Spirit for believers. Those tongues of fire came upon those who already believed in Jesus. Thus, they see "two anointings".
 - c) I take a different view. There is a good bible rule to remember that "a text taken out of context becomes a pretext". Remember the subject of John the Baptist's speech has to do with salvation.
 - (1) Remember that baptism means emersion. It is about a public declaration of association.
 - (2) When Jesus says (through John here) he is giving the Holy Spirit to believers, that is Jesus proclamation that "you are one of his".
 - (3) When Jesus says (through John here) that there is a "baptism of fire", I see this as an either/or decision by believers.
 - (a) Those who accept Jesus get the Holy Spirit.
 - (b) Those who don't, get fire. It is a reference to damnation.
 - (c) "Fire" in the bible is often associated with judgment.
 - (d) Jesus describes hell as an eternal fire (Mark 9:43).
 - (4) For what it is worth, this view happens to be the majority view among the commentators. As always, I encourage you to study the bible for yourself and see if you agree.
- 11. Verse 12: His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."
 - a) John the Baptist is now back to discussing how Jesus will judge the world.
 - i) Thus, I see this as more support that "baptism of fire" is about eternal judgment.
 - b) John is giving a word picture that a 1st Century Jew would understand.
 - i) Wheat is protected by an outer shell, called chaff.
 - ii) The wheat is sold in the marketplace; the chaff has no value.
 - iii) As the wheat buds, the chaff starts to fall out.
 - iv) A farmer, at harvest time, puts the wheat in a narrow pit called a threshing floor.
 - v) The farmer then takes a pronged form ("winnowing fork") and hoists piles of wheat in the air. The air blows away the chaff and wheat falls to the ground. Eventually, all the chaff is separated and the wheat is "saved".
 - vi) Now re-read Verse 12 and you can see the word-picture about salvation. Jesus is the one hoisting the wheat in the air saving the wheat and the chaff is burned!
- 12. Verse 13: Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.
 - a) The scene now changes in Verse 13.
 - b) Here is John lecturing the crowd on what the Messiah will do for those who refuse to believe upon him.
 - i) Remember the necessity of John's preaching. John understood the role of the Messiah, as to come to pay the price for sins. John the Baptist calls Jesus "The Lamb of God", (John 1:29). That is a reference to a sacrificial lamb, not a ruling Messiah as the people expected.
 - ii) John was trying to change people's image of what the Messiah was there to do.
 - c) Now comes the big moment when Jesus shows up.
 - i) One has to wonder how John the Baptist recognized Jesus.
 - a) Again, they were relatives from childhood. The other possibility was some sort of miraculous effort by God to tell John that "this was the guy".

- d) Notice also how John the Baptist is, for the moment, arguing with Jesus.
 - i) John the Baptist, who understood Jesus to be greater than him, tried to stop Jesus from being baptized by John.
 - ii) It has to remind you of Peter, who occasionally (temporarily) disobeyed Jesus because, logically, it seemed like the wrong thing to do.
 - iii) Occasionally, God works that way in our lives as well. Some things God asks us to do defy “common logic”.
 - a) Be careful on this principal. God will never ask you to violate anything stated in the Bible. It is best compared to following biblical principals when the “world” tells you to take shortcuts and do it a different way.
 - iv) The argument by John the Baptist is not rebuked, but understood. Jesus did not say to John, “Listen bud, who’s in charge here anyway?” ☺ Jesus was sympathetic to the fact that John did not understand why Jesus needed to be baptized by John.
- e) Let’s move on to the great theological discussion of why did Jesus have to be baptized?
 - i) First of all, let’s establish once and for all that Jesus was sinless.
 - a) “God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2nd Corinthians 5:21, NIV)
 - ii) John’s baptism was to associate oneself with the repentance of sin.
 - a) The emersion in water was a word-picture of cleansing.
 - iii) Jesus was not baptized for his sins, but for the world’s sins.
 - a) Read 2nd Corinthians 5:21 again. Jesus came to *be sin for us*.
 - b) In John’s baptism it is about announcing repentance for those sins so Jesus could pay the price for those sins.
 - iv) Remember my opening argument that conviction is necessary as the first step.
 - a) Then comes repentance, then comes the need for a solution, which was Jesus’ payment on the cross.
 - v) I should also state at this point that a “double-baptism” is not necessary for us.
 - a) We don’t have to be baptized once to repent of our sins, and then be baptized again to accept Jesus. A one-time payment is acceptable. ☺
 - (1) Jesus paid the price so we don’t need a double-baptism.
 - vi) Jesus was baptized to associate his life with the payment of those sins.
 - a) The cross, about three years later, was the actual payment.
 - b) In some ways, you can think of Jesus’ baptism here as a “promissory note”. Jesus is saying “by this baptism, I associate myself with the need of all people to repent of sins.”. The actual payment comes a few years later.

13. Verse 16: As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

- a) I have to admit I spent a lot of time wondering about unanswerable questions:
 - i) Just exactly “how” did the heavens open up? Who saw it?
 - a) Did the clouds part ways, or was it some sort of beam of light like Paul got when he was first converted? (Acts 9:3)
 - b) What about the dove? Did everyone see it? The text focuses on Jesus seeing the dove and it landed on him. Did he try to duck? ☺
 - c) (I spend way too much time thinking about this stuff. ☺ Sorry.
 - d) Remember the text says “like a dove”, so it was not literal.
 - e) Many churches and auto bumper stickers have an “upside down dove” as symbols. The reason is because of this “dove” is descending upon Jesus.

- b) Why was the “descending dove” necessary? What was its purpose?
 - i) The answer is that it gave the viewing public, and the reader validation that God the Father is willing to accept Jesus baptism as payment of sins.
 - ii) With Jesus announcing his desire to be baptized for the sake of humanity, it is as if Jesus is saying, “I agree to do the Father’s will. I will pay the price for man’s sins.”
 - iii) The descending dove is the Spirit of God (Verse 16) descending upon him.
 - a) There is a classical debate over how much Jesus understood of his purpose prior to the Holy Spirit falling upon Him.
 - b) Surely his parents must have told him about his mission based on their angelic visits and dreams around the time of Jesus birth.
 - c) There is a brief episode told in Luke 2:49 where a child-Jesus told his mother “I must be about my (God) Father’s business”.
 - d) Many commentators contemplate that since this was the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, this is when he got “full knowledge” of his plan, ministry and his power. (I don’t agree with this view, but it exists.)
 - iv) Remember the purpose of Matthew’s gospel, which is to present Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel.
 - a) For an adult, ruling Messiah to have his crown, he has to be “ordained” by someone greater in authority. This is where Jesus is ordained for his purpose and mission, to pay the price for our sins.
 - b) For God the Father to say, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased is saying God the Father *accepts* Jesus for this mission.
 - v) Back to the dove itself, doves in the bible are a word-picture of purity.
 - a) For those who were with me in my Song of Songs study, you will remember that Solomon referred to his bride as having “dove’s eyes”, which is a picture of beauty. Doves mate for life. It is like saying “I only have eye’s for you.
 - b) Doves are used in Levitical (i.e., sin) sacrifices when families cannot afford more expensive animals.
- c) A lot of people like to point out that the “whole-trinity is present here”
 - i) God the Father is speaking, God the Holy Spirit is descending upon Jesus and God the Son is being ordained for his mission.
 - ii) Some cult groups deny the existence of the Trinity, as that word is never used in the bible.
 - a) Just because the word isn’t there, doesn’t mean the *concept* isn’t there.
 - b) There is evidence all through the bible for the concept of the Trinity
 - c) Although it is difficult to understand, the bible clearly teaches it.
- d) I want to end with a few thoughts about “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased”.
 - i) Every now and then we all go through lapses in faith where we wonder if we are getting “too carried away with this stuff”.
 - ii) To me, sentences like this one remind me of the reality of eternal life, the perfection of Jesus and the fact that God the Father *accepted* Jesus’ payment for our sins. Jesus’ baptism was not for his sake, but for our sake. For those willing to accept Jesus, he is announcing his willingness to repent of the world’s sins. Those who choose to accept that fact get the reward of eternal salvation.

14. With that, let’s close in prayer. Father, we are eternally grateful for what Jesus did for us. The conviction of our sins drives us to Jesus. We may not fully understand such concepts as the Trinity, or how Jesus *became* sin for us, but we are grateful for your plan for our destiny. Help us to live in gratitude for this payment. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.