

Notes for Matthew –Chapter 3 (Page 1 of 6)

Introduction Part 1 – The necessity of conviction, prior to salvation.

1. The Christian concept of “conviction” means that one has to realize they are a “sinner” before they understand they need someone or something to deal with that sin problem.
 - a. You can’t accept Jesus as your sin-payment 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.
2. The central character of Chapter 3 is John the Baptist.
 - a. The main purpose of John the Baptist ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus.
 - b. That is not a whole lot different from what Jesus calls us to do.
 - c. It is helpful here to remember the “Great Commission” passage of the bible:
 - i. Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20a, NIV).
 - d. For people to accept Jesus as their Savior, they need to realize their need for a Savior.
 - e. That was the purpose of John the Baptist ministry and for our lives as well.

Introduction Part 2 – Who is John the Baptist?

1. John the Baptist is mentioned in all 4 gospels.
2. Josephus, a 1st century Jewish historian (non-Christian) wrote about John the Baptist.
3. 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.
 - a. That other John wrote the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, 3rd John, and Revelation.
4. John the Baptist was a relative of Jesus through Mary, probably a cousin (Luke 1:36).
5. Luke records several miracles around the birth of John the Baptist.
 - a. These include that John’s mother was barren until John was born. 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.
6. In Luke, an angel gives this prediction about the life of John the Baptist before his birth:
 - a. “And he (John) will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.” (Luke 1:16, NKJV)
7. For his service, John’s “earthly reward” was to be beheaded by King Herod (Ref.: Luke 9:9, et.al.)
8. 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. 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, that those who are saved in the “Christian era” get more “heavenly status” than those who are saved prior to Jesus coming.

Introduction Part 3 – What we do have in common with John the Baptist?

1. John the Baptist and us are specifically called to “point people” to Jesus.
2. God expects us to be witnesses where we are, or where God calls us to be.
3. I like the expression, “plant where you bloom and bloom where you are planted”.
4. Like John, our lives should have a convicting effect upon people.
5. Nonbelievers 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.

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Chapter 3 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.' "

1. Verse 1 starts with "in those days". It is a bridge from the last part of Chapter 2.
2. Chapter 2 ends with the events surrounding Jesus birth and very early years.
 - a. There is a view that "where the bible is silent, we should be silent". I agree with this view. Therefore, we shouldn't speculate as to the "silent years" of Jesus' life.
3. Nothing is said of John's life between his birth and his ministry that started about 30 years later.
4. 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. The first spoken word when Jesus began his 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.
5. Matthew quotes Isaiah 40:3 in Verse 3.
 - a. Matthew spends a lot of time quoting the Old Testament to prove Jesus is the Messiah.
 - b. Remember Matthew is written primarily to a Jewish audience.
 - c. It can help to find common ground as a starting point to tell others about Jesus.
6. Let's talk about the phrase "'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"
 - a. The idea behind this passage is often compared to a king coming to town.
 - b. When a big time dignitary is coming to town, you often want to prepare the way and "straighten up the mess" around the area.
 - c. The application is to change your life because Jesus is coming.
7. On a similar note, Jesus calls us to prepare because Jesus is coming back again.
 - a. Paul said, 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:11-12, NIV)
 - b. For a nonbeliever, it means explaining what information you did know about Jesus and how you reacted to that information.
 - c. For a believer, it means being accountable for the information you were given and what you did with that information.
 - d. Both Paul's and John the Baptist have 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.
8. Let's talk about the expression "The kingdom of heaven".
 - a. Most commentators believe the expression "kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven can be used interchangeably." They mean the same thing. It refers to Christian believers.
 - b. When John said, "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.
 - c. On earth, the "saved" are mixed with "unsaved" until we are called away to heaven.
 - d. Therefore the "kingdom of heaven" includes all saved people currently living as those who have died who believed in Jesus. It refers to "New Testament" believers only.
 - i. I believe there will be many in heaven that are not New Testament believers. God will judge all people fairly.
 - e. 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.

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Verses 4-6: 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.

1. Personally, if I were to have a public relations representative for Jesus, 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.
 - a. Instead, we find John the Baptist out in the middle of "nowhere", the desert area on the south end of Israel along the river.
 - b. You will find throughout the bible that God goes out of his way to do things in a strange fashion in order to validate that the bible is not fiction.
2. 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.
3. John the Baptist's father was named Zechariah (no relation to prophet/book of Zechariah)
 - a. Zechariah probably told John when was growing up how an angel told him that John was going to be a forerunner for the Messiah. Zechariah also knew that Joseph and Mary, who were relatives through his wife Elizabeth, were to be the parents of the Messiah.
 - 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.
4. It is important at this point to understand the relationship of Elijah and John the Baptist.
 - a. In 1st Kings, there was a prophet named Elijah.
 - b. He did not die, but was taken up into heaven. (See 2nd Kings 2:11)
 - c. Centuries later, the Old Testament prophet Malachi predicted that Elijah would return prior to Jesus coming:
 - i. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. (Malachi 4:5)
 - ii. 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)
 1. 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.
 - iii. In John's Gospel, John the Baptist flatly denied he was Elijah (John 1:20)
 - d. So John the Baptist is not Elijah, but he was given the "spirit and power" of Elijah.
 - i. Here's the supporting verse ""He (John) will go on before Him (Jesus) in the spirit and power of Elijah," (Luke 1:17a, NIV)
 - ii. In Matthew 17, Elijah himself does appear, and we'll discuss that in Chapter 17.
 - e. The point to see is simply that when Matthew mentions John the Baptist wearing camel hair and a leather belt, it was meant to show the comparison of John to Elijah.
5. There are lots of Christian books out there on how to have a big successful 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. ☺
 - a. Yet Matthew tells us that people from all over Judea came to hear John's message.
 - b. Did a handful of people spot John out there in the middle of nowhere, and with "word of mouth" people just start traveling to see this guy?
 - c. I suspect many people just went for the curiosity factor.
 - d. They heard John preach and got convicted.
 - e. 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.

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Verses 4-6 (cont.)

6. You also have to remember that the Jews desperately wanted the Messiah. They were living under bondage to the Roman Empire and they went to go see if John was the Messiah.
 - a. 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.
7. Let's discuss what "baptism" means to a Jew and to a Christian.
 - a. Baptism for a Jew was a ritual for the conversion of non-Jews (Gentiles) to Judaism.
 - b. For someone born a Jew to be baptized was unheard of.
 - c. I suspect most of the people who were baptized were "common Jews". They understood Jewish rituals, but didn't care for that moment. They were convicted by John's speech(es) and thought, "If the Messiah is coming, I need to confess my sins and repent of my sins".
 - d. The modern Baptists like to point out that the word "baptism" means emersion in water, and not just sprinkling. I don't believe you "failed" your baptism if you are sprinkled. ☺
8. 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.
 - b. The Essenes were separatists. They were roughly the Jewish equivalent of "monks", who separated themselves from society.
 1. 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 Old Testament books.
 - c. With all that said, I don't believe John the Baptist was an Essene. Essenes believed in continual baptism on a regular basis. That is not what John preached.

Verses 7-8: 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.

1. 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 (Ref.: 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.
2. Let's talk a little about Pharisees and Sadducees and then give modern-examples.
 - a. The Pharisees were zealous. Modern Orthodox Judaism is based on their views. They believed the bible is the Word of God. They counted every commandment that God given in the five books of Moses (613 of them) and lived in the strictest observance of all 613.
 - i. They also have an "official" set of rules based on their interpretations of those laws called the "Mishna" and the "Talmud".
 - 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.
 - iii. A modern comparison might be pious religious Christians, who think they are above the non-saved person because of their "holy habits".
 - b. Pharisee's did believe in sin confession, but it was the "holier-than-thou" attitude that turns people off then, as well as today! Beware of Christians with that attitude.
 - c. The Saducee's were the aristocrats. (The Pharisee's were among the common people).
 - i. They believed the Bible is to be taken "spiritually, but not literally".
 - ii. They didn't believe in angels, or in the resurrection. They took it all allegorically.
 - iii. Today we call them "the liberals" of our religion. They are college professors. ☺

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Verses 9-10: 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.

1. Let me try to paraphrase what John is saying here: "Don't think that just because you are religious Jews that you are automatically saved! God could take the stones right in front of you and make them into Jews. Who cares if you are Jewish? (i.e., Sons of Abraham). If you want salvation, then admit you're religious efforts are not impressive to receive salvation.
 - a. As I personally like to say: "God is not impressed with your resume of good deeds".
2. John is teaching that if they don't repent and accept Jesus as payments for their sins (described here as "producing "good fruit"), they will go to hell.
 - a. Jesus said, "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).
3. I should also add that this is strictly a salvation issue being discussed here.
 - a. 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.

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.

1. 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.
2. John said "He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire".
 - a. John's baptism was using a Jewish ritual to symbolize the washing away of your sins.
 - b. Christians are baptized based on our identification with Jesus as payment for our sins.
 - c. When you accept Jesus, you get all the Holy Spirit's power upon you at that point.
 - i. Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:23, NIV)
 - d. Some Pentecostal denominations believe Christians get 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 with fire". I respectfully disagree with this view.
 - i. In Acts Chap. 2 there are "tongues of fire" come down on believers (See Acts 2:3).
 - ii. This is a reason why these 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".
 - e. The majority view among Evangelicals is when John the Baptist said "He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire"; it is an either/or decision to choose Jesus or go to hell.
 - i. Those who accept Jesus get the Holy Spirit. Those who don't get hell-fire.
 - ii. Consider this view in context of Verse 11 and Verse 12. It makes more sense.

Verses 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."

1. John is giving a word picture that a 1st Century Jew would understand.
 - a. When wheat is growing, there is a protective layer called "chaff".
 - i. The same way a peanut or other nuts have protective shells.
 - ii. When the wheat buds, the chaff breaks off. The chaff has no market value.
 - b. To separate the chaff, a farmer takes a pronged fork ("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". It is an illustration of salvation.

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Verses 13-15: 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.

1. 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.
2. Notice also how John the Baptist is, for the moment, arguing with Jesus.
 - a. "You can say "No" and "Lord", but you cannot say "No, Lord".
 - b. John the Baptist, who understood Jesus to be greater than him, tried to stop Jesus from being baptized by John.
 - c. Jesus did not rebuke John here. Jesus was sympathetic to the fact that John did not understand why Jesus needed to be baptized by John.
3. Why did Jesus have to be baptized?
 - a. First of all, let's establish once and for all that Jesus was sinless.
 - i. "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)
 - b. John's baptism was to associate oneself with the repentance of sin.
 - c. Jesus was not baptized for his sins, but for the world's sins.
 - d. I should also state at this point that a "double-baptism" is not necessary for us
 - e. We don't have to be baptized once to repent of our sins, and then be baptized again to accept Jesus. A one-time-only baptism is acceptable. ☺
 - f. 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 on the cross.

Verses 16-17: 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."

1. Remember the text says "like a dove", so it was not a literal dove.
 - a. Many churches and auto bumper stickers have an "upside down dove" as Christian symbols. The reason is because of this "dove" is descending upon Jesus.
2. Why was the "descending dove" necessary? What was its purpose?
 - a. 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.
 - b. A dove in the bible is a word-picture of purity (because they are all-white "clean" birds).
3. There is a classical Christian debate over how much Jesus understood of his purpose prior to the Holy Spirit falling upon Him.
 - a. 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.
 - b. We don't know the correct answer on this debate. It is just speculation.
4. The purpose of Matthew's gospel, which is to present Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel.
 - a. For the Messiah to be crowned, 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.
5. A lot of people like to point out that the "whole-trinity is present here"
 - a. Some cult groups deny the existence of the Trinity, as that word is never used in the bible.
 - b. Just because the word isn't there, doesn't mean the concept isn't there.