

The Gospel of the Kingdom Pt 5

This series is called the Gospel of the Kingdom because that is Matthew's focus in writing his account of Jesus' life. It is the beginning of all that God has promised, not only for the Jews, but for all mankind. The phrase, "Kingdom of Heaven" appears 33 times in the gospel of Matthew.

For him it all starts with John the Baptist, who is in the mold of Elijah, a prophet announcing the coming of a new King and by extension His Kingdom.

John the Baptist is the son of Elizabeth, who is Mary's cousin. Both of them are called from the womb.

Luke 1:41-42

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Today we focus on John's ministry in preparing the way for the ministry of Jesus.

1. Preparing the Way

Matt 3:1-2

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John is calling people to repentance in order to prepare their hearts to receive the One who is ushering in the kingdom of God. Now, Matthew does not use that language, because now that he has reformed from being a tax collector, he does not want to infringe on taking the name of the Lord in vain. So instead of saying the Kingdom of God, he says the Kingdom of Heaven, but he means the same thing. So why do other authors use Kingdom of God? That is because Matthew was writing primarily to Jews, while the other authors wrote to the Gentiles.

By calling them to repentance, he is calling them, to turn from their self-centered ways and remove the obstacles from their lives that might hinder them, so that they can turn to what God has for them.

3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

In keeping with his theme, Matthews ties everything back to the prophecies of the Old Testament. Not only was Jesus prophesied of, but also John was prophesied as one who would bring a message of repentance that draws people closer to God and prepares them to receive the message of the Kingdom.

2. Preparing our Hearts

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.

Even the way John dressed would evoke images of the prophecies about Elijah who was to return to prepare the way for God's wrathful appearance and the coming Kingdom.

In sharp contrast to today's prosperity preachers, Jesus and his Apostles were poor and were completely dependent on God's provision. John is the forerunner of this humble way of living. He did not own a home and was a nomad, his garments were not of fine linens, but instead of camel's hair, and he lived off what the land provided which were locust and honey.

This resonated with the people. Instead of being well off like the religious leaders and flaunting their authority through the priestly garments they wore, John was seen as a humble man with no agenda for power or wealth. This reminded the Jews of the prophets of old and they came out to see what he had to say. Not only that, but his message resonated with them, and in turn they took action and were baptized by him and confessed their sins. This baptism was a symbolic cleansing of the sin that stood between them and God.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 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.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the religious leaders of their time. They had power and influence. All of that was threatened by this man that the people saw as a prophet from God. Rather than fight him or denounce him, they decide to use him, by coming out and being baptized, which would further affirm their stance in the community.

Matthew saw it for what it was and denounced them. He in fact said, "I know what you're up to". You think if you get baptized that it will curry favor with not only the people, but also with God. Publicly confessing your sins and being baptized means nothing if it doesn't change your life and your relationship with God. A changed relationship with God will change the way you think. When you change the way you think, it will change the way you act, and when you change the way you act, it will change the fruit you bear.

In the Greek, repent is "**metakineo**". It means to change your mind, not only superficially, but changing your basic attitudes and lifestyles. It involves a change of masters: from sin and Satan as master, to Christ and His Word being master.

3. Preparing for His Lordship

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. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with 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."

Earlier I mentioned that John was a type of the prophet Elijah who taught on the coming wrath of God. This is a message that the religious leaders of the time would have been very familiar with. We tend to forget that while the Kingdom of God brings redemption and salvation for all those who call upon the name of Jesus, it also means that God's judgment and wrath will be poured out on all those who reject Him.

Matthew is serving notice that not only is he the forerunner of Jesus, he is also aware that with Jesus, the Holy Spirit is also coming to be poured out on all flesh. While John baptized with water, Jesus will baptize through the Holy Spirit with fire. Anyone who is not for Him will be separated from those who bear fruit and they will be cast into eternal damnation.

Fire for those who reject Him means eternal judgment and suffering. But even those who call upon His name do not escape the fire, but in their case the fire is meant to purify and refine, to cleanse of impurities, so that they may present themselves pure and holy to God.

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

In the midst of all of this, Jesus presents himself to be baptized.

Now think about it.

- He who is perfect and without sin is coming to be baptized.
- He who is the one we are preparing for through baptism and the confession of our sins is coming to be baptized.
- Even John the Baptist who has dedicated his life to serving God and living in the simplest of terms realizes that he is more in need of repentance and baptism than Jesus.
- But even He who was without sin, makes Himself humble and obedient to the will of God and submits to baptism.

Immediately, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit falls on Jesus, first to affirm Him as His Son and, second to empower Him for the ministry that He is about to embark on.

By the way, this passage is a perfect example of the trinity. While that word does not appear in the Bible, this passage mentions all three persons of the trinity. The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit descending upon the one whom God the Father calls His Son.

Conclusion

- All of us are called to "make straight the way for the Lord".

- All of us are called to have relationships with people that prepare them to hear the Gospel.
- All of us are to humble ourselves and confess our sins and our shortcomings.
- All of us are called to be baptized as the outward sign of that repentance and the inner change that has happened in our lives.
- All of us are called to bear fruit consistent with the baptism and repentance.
- All of us are called to be an example to the way by living our lives differently like John did. Back when we were JesusChurch our motto was "Live a Questionable Life". We are to live lives that cause people to ask themselves, "Why do they live that way" or "What do they know that I don't." "What do they have that I don't."