

Matthew

John the Baptist

January 21, 2024

I. Introduction

A. **Matthew 3:1-10**, Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, [2] “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [3] For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’ ” [4] Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. [5] Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; [6] and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. [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] “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; [9] and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. [10] The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

B. Matthew references OT scriptures more than the writers of the other three gospels combined. In fact, approximately 55 references in Matthew are close enough in wording to call them Old Testament quotations, as compared to a combined total of 65 for the other three Gospels.

1. Twelve times Matthew specifically points out that the OT reference has been **fulfilled**, as in **Matthew 4:14**, “This was to **fulfill** what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet.”
2. Sometimes Matthew takes his quotes from the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. But most often he quotes the Hebrew text – which is the text we have in our Bibles.
3. Matthew’s many references to the OT affirm that God knows the future, He plans some things in the future, He foretells the future, and He does what is necessary to bring about what He has spoken.
 - a. Matthew’s use of the OT encourages my trust, confidence, and dependance on God to be my provider and protector. And it provides another reason to trust **Romans 8:28**, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

- b. In relation to Jesus, these OT quotes provide additional credibility to the account Matthew presents – for his account is supported by what was foretold long before.
4. I hope your faith in God’s presence and activity in you and for you will be encouraged and strengthened as we encounter Matthew’s OT quotes – for they verify that what God says will happen, even if years pass between what He says and the fulfillment of His word.

C. Pray

II. John, repentance, kingdom of heaven

A. Many in our day believe it is vital to make children and adults feel important, to feel special – and to accomplish this they are told that they are unique, that they are one of a kind, and that God has a special and specific plan for their life.

1. How true this is, is a discussion for another time. But I can tell you that God had a special plan for John the Baptist, a plan that in at least one way, made him truly unique, that is, a one-o- a-kind servant of God – for he was the only forerunner of Jesus Christ.
2. Isaiah prophesied that John would serve God in this unique capacity, and Isaiah foretold the essence of the message John would preach and teach. We read this in **Isaiah 40:3**.
3. In foretelling John’s birth to his father, the angel of the Lord said to Zacharias, “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and **he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb**. And he will turn many (*All? No, but many*) of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a **forerunner** before [Jesus, the Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children (*that is, fathers caring about how they live because they know that the way they live effects the lives of their children*), and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous (*doing right for God’s sake, the sake of the community, the sake of the family, and their own sake*), so as to make ready a people prepared (*outwardly and inwardly*) for the (*coming of the*) Lord” (**Luke 1:13-17**).
4. Jesus said of John that “Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come” (**Matthew 11:11,14**).

5. Matthew affirms John's unique calling and ministry by quoting the prophecy from **Isaiah 40:3** – which he takes from the Septuagint.
 6. Concerning the book of Isaiah, I want to point out that it is divided into two parts. **Chapters 1-39** deal with God's judgment of Israel for their years of disobedience and idol worship – which God accomplished by having the foreign powers of Assyria and Babylon (*idol worshipers*) take them captive. **Chapters 40-66** deal with God's promised release of Israel from their captivity and restoration to their homeland.
 - a. The quote from **Isaiah 40:3** about John the Baptist preceding Jesus comes at the beginning of Isaiah's prophecies about God's release of the Israelites from captivity and restoration to Israel.
 - b. What is interesting is that John's ministry, as the forerunner to Jesus, prepared the way for God's promised Messiah who came to free us from sin's captivity, reconcile us to God, and restore us to our place as a member of God's family in the kingdom of heaven.
- B. [2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
1. There are two parts to this statement that deserve our attention. The first is the word repent. The second is the phrase, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 2. We will begin with the kingdom of heaven, because understanding it makes it clear why repentance is required to become part of it.
- C. **For the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**
1. The three-word description, "kingdom of heaven" only appears in Matthew's Gospel. Mark and Luke use "kingdom of God."
 2. It is commonly thought that this descriptive reference is taken from **Daniel 7:13-14**, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. [14] And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."
 3. It is also held by most that the kingdom of heaven is an eternal kingdom with physical properties – such as the church in this world, and the new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem in the next.
 - a. It is also understood that the kingdom of heaven is a righteous kingdom, for only a kingdom free of sin and evil, and built on godliness and love has the capability to last forever.

- b. Finally, the kingdom of heaven is a spiritual kingdom – for it not only encompasses a large group of people, it must of necessity encompass each citizen’s heart – for that is what enables it to remain a righteous kingdom free of sin forever.
4. If you accept that the kingdom of heaven is eternal with physical attributes, that it is righteous (*no sin*), and that it is spiritual – then it becomes understandable why repentance and living accordingly is required to enter in and remain a part of this kingdom.
5. Jesus made it clear that we must have a redirection in life (*repentance and living accordingly*) if we are to enter and remain in God’s kingdom. We read this in **Matthew 21:42-44**, Jesus said to them (*chief priests, Pharisees*), “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’ [43] Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. [44] And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”

D. [2] **Repent** (*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*)

1. We sometimes use words without giving sufficient thought to their meaning. Among modern Christians the words repent and repentance are classic examples.
 - a. Sadly, too many Christians treat repentance as an option that is made unnecessary by grace in relation to eternal salvation.
 - b. However, there are Christians who define the words repent and repentance as a change of mind, yet they disconnect that change of mind from a change of life.
2. The reality is, repentance, as it is used in the scriptures, begins with a change of mind about who we are serving and how we are living, and results in a change of life – from serving sin to serving God, and from living a selfish and sinful life to living a godly, loving life.
 - a. If what you call repentance does not bring forth a change of mind, heart, and behavior, then it is not repentance.
 - b. In other words, if our supposedly changed mind (*repentance*) does not result in a changed life, then we haven’t really changed our mind, which means we haven’t really repented.
3. Now you may think that this can’t be, given our more modern theology about God’s exceedingly great graciousness toward sinners like you and me. However, to separate a change of mind from a change of

behavior is contrary to reality in relation to how you use the word in relation to someone who repeatedly sins against you, mistreats you, or fails to love you.

- a. **Imagine:** someone repeatedly mistreats you, and in so doing makes your life unnecessarily harder and more painful. Each time you bring their mistreatment to their attention, and each time they say they are sorry – yet the mistreatment continues on.
 - b. You finally confront them, as clearly and directly as you know how, with the result that they clearly see how their actions are hurting you. They respond by agreeing that what they are doing is wrong and they need to change. They acknowledge what the change should be. And they promise to be different going forward. It seems they have repented, or have they?
 - c. For a time, they no longer mistreat you – and you feel relieved. But slowly, they return to their mistreatment of you. After enduring their return to mistreatment for a time, you confront them again. And again, they repent. Yet again, after a while, the mistreatment begins again.
 - d. This cycle of confronting, repentance, no mistreatment for a time, and then a return to mistreatment recurs four or five times. They claim they have repented each time and cannot understand why you are so upset at them.
 - (1) But what do you claim? Do you see their repentance as genuine and your confronting them as unfair or even unfounded?
 - (2) Would it not be the case that you see them as not having repented at all, because their supposed repentance has not produced an accompanying change of behavior that validates their repentance?
4. What is my point? If you won't accept as sincere their use of the word "repentance" because they do not bring forth fruit in keeping with their repentance, then why should God treat our repentance as sincere if we do not proceed to live accordingly? Words have meaning, and that includes the word repentance.

III. Conclusion

- A. John came preaching repentance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
- B. According to **Matthew 4:17**, following John's arrest, Jesus, too, began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repentance is a necessary part of faith in God unto salvation.
- C. My goal is to pick up here the next Sunday.