

The Kingdom-Driven Life #6

The Book of Matthew

A Voice in the Wilderness

I. Historical Context of Matthew 3: 1-12

A. Israel's origins are found in the patriarchs:

Abraham>Isaac>Jacob>12 Sons of Jacob>12 Tribes of Israel

B. The central issue for Israel in the Old Testament is "THE LAND" (Gen 12:1-2)

**Now the Lord said to Abram,
"Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
to the land which I will show you;
And I will make you a great nation."
Genesis 12:1-2a NASB**

1. Abraham never saw the "Promised Land."
2. Jacob's sons went into Egypt and 400 years of bondage.
3. They were led out by Moses.
4. They finally entered the land, crossing the Jordan under Joshua.
5. Centuries later they were displaced into Babylonian captivity.
6. The "return" began 70 years later, and was still progressing at the time of Jesus' birth.

C. Here is a major principle:

Disobedience Brings Displacement!

- Lucifer's rebellion got him cast out of heaven.
- Adam's sin got him driven out of Eden.
- Israel's idolatry and sin got them sent into Babylonian captivity.
- How many are fired for dishonesty? Divorced for infidelity?

1. Israel's sin had "displaced" them. But now, at the time of Jesus' birth, the Jewish population was slowly returning to "the land".
2. The time of Jesus' birth (Matthew 1) was sovereignly predestined by God:

**But *when the fulness of the time came*, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...
Gal 4:4 NASB**

3. Christ is born and now become 30 years of age.
4. Now, *for the first time in 400 years*, the “voice of the Lord” is heard again in Israel.

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying,

**"The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
'Make ready the way of the Lord,
Make His paths straight!'"**

Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. 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? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Matt 3: 1-9 NASB

II. Voice in the Wilderness

A. John the Baptist: Last of the Old Testament Prophets

1. All four gospels give space for this great man.
2. The cousin of Jesus, according to the flesh, John is the fulfillment of the “forerunner” of Messiah:

**A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.**

**Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let the rough ground become a plain,
And the rugged terrain a broad valley;
Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
And all flesh will see it together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."**

Isaiah 40:3-5 NASB

3. The call in the wilderness is a call to RETURN to an identification with Israel crossing the Jordan under Joshua (same name in Hebrew as Jesus) where John was baptizing them at Bethabara (Heb. for “place of the crossing”*) where Israel had entered the land centuries before!

****The term “Hebrew” literally means, “one who has crossed over”!***

These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John 1:28 KJV

- a. The “stones” John referred to in Matthew 3:9 were the memorial stones Joshua had placed at (and in) the Jordan in Joshua 4:9-20!
- b. The baptism of John was a *re-enactment* of Israel passing through the Jordan into their “Promised Land”...only this time it is spiritual, signifying entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven!

B. John’s Message Is the Doorway to Kingdom-Driven Living!

**“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand...”
Matthew 3:2**

God’s call to the Kingdom-Driven life BEGINS with true repentance!

1. The term “repent” is little used today, and yet a genuine understanding of saving faith is incomplete without it.

**Repentance is the radical turning away from anything which hinders one’s wholehearted devotion to God, and the corresponding turning to God in love and obedience.
New Bible Dictionary of Theology by J.M. Lunde**

2. The “turning away” implies a “turning toward” something else; in this case, repentance--we turn away from sin and turn toward God!

**And...I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.
Acts 20:20-21 KJV**

**Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God...
Heb 6:6 KJV**

3. Saving faith is IMPOSSIBLE unless accompanied by true repentance!

**But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee God's coming wrath? *Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.*"
Matt 3:7-9 NLT**

4. What a rebuke to the “easy believism” of contemporary Christianity!

John refused to baptize anyone whose life bore no witness to a changed heart!

5. Christianity is “fashionable” for Hollywood, rock stars, sports celebrities and countless spiritual dabblers who call themselves “Christians”because there’s no “John” to challenge their profession.
6. There is an important progression and kingdom order here:

- a. You can't preach the Kingdom without the "new birth" requirement.
- b. You can't preach the "new birth" apart from faith.
- c. You can't preach (saving) faith apart from (genuine) repentance!

7. Repentance "prepares the way of the Lord" in our hearts!

The roots of repentance are humility and a willingness to "change our mind" about who has final authority over our lives.

8. John's ministry is prophetic for us. We are ALL "called" by God into the "wilderness", to "cross the Jordan", to be baptized with repentance, which accompanies saving faith, to enter into our own "Promised Land", which is the "Kingdom-Driven Life"!

C. Stop Here! Make Sure Our Theology Is Right

1. Salvation is "Christ...Plus Nothing!"

- a. There is absolutely nothing we can add to our lives to "save" us.
- b. Christ's work on the cross was sufficient..."It is finished."

2. But genuine faith (faith that saves) is *ALWAYS* followed by changed lives, by "good works", and by evidence that the heart has experienced Christ!

**But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?
James 2:20 KJV**

3. How much Christian "faith" professed today is genuine?

**Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone.
Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.
Thou believe that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.
James 2:17-19 KJV**

4. We may bemoan why more don't preach the Kingdom. But how can you preach the Kingdom apart from a requirement of verification that saving faith is present?

5. If the Church doesn't preach "repentance", it can never preach saving faith, much less the Gospel of the Kingdom!

III. The Coming of the Kingdom = The Promise of Judgment

**And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
Matthew 3:10-12 NASB**

**As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.
Matthew 3:11-12 NASB**

A. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets (after the flesh) and he links the coming of the Messiah with judgment, the separation of “wheat” and “chaff”.

B. Jesus fulfills all three anointed offices of the Old Testament: (John 14:6)

- Prophet-He came to point out the “way” to God.
- Priest-He came to mediate the “truth” of God to man.
- King-He came to bring the “life” of God, the Kingdom-Driven Life.

C. The change He brings as king is at the “root”-it is “radical”, from the heart.

- As Prophet, Christ shows us the way to God.
- As Priest, Christ becomes our Mediator with God, our Advocate.
- As King, Christ is to be obeyed and dispenses judgment.

D. We cannot separate judgment from the Kingdom.

E. Receiving the Holy Spirit is the equivalent of receiving the Kingdom of Heaven, because the Kingdom is **“in”** the Holy Spirit!

**For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Rom 14:17**

F. The Kingdom of Heaven, with all its joy and provision, came in Christ, and comes to us in the Holy Spirit.

IV. Conclusion

Are you ready for the Kingdom-Driven life? Have you heard the “voice in the wilderness”? Have you truly repented? The call of God to the Kingdom-Driven Life is an expression of His goodness, which leads to the first step of repentance!

**Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that (it is) the kindness of God leads you to repentance?
Rom 2:4-5 NASB**