**Monday Evening Bible Study**

**November 28, 2022**

**Matthew 3:1-12**

**Immediate Context**

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| Matthew 1:1-17 The Genealogy of Jesus | Matthew 3:13-17 The Baptism of Jesus |
| Matthew 1:18-25 The Birth of Jesus the Messiah | Matthew 4:1-11 The Temptation of Jesus |
| Matthew 2:1-12 The Visit of the Wise Men | Matthew 4:12-17 Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee |
| Matthew 2:13-15 The Escape to Egypt | Matthew 4:18-22 Jesus Calls the First Disciples |
| Matthew 2:16-18 The Massacre of the Infants | Matthew 4:23-25 Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People |
| Matthew 2:19-23 The Return from Egypt to Nazareth | Matthew 5:1-12 The Beatitudes |
| **Matthew 3:1-12 The Proclamation of John the Baptist** | Matthew 5:13-16 Salt and Light |

**Helpful Background Scriptures**

**2 Kings 1** – Elijah Denounces Ahaziah

**Isaiah 5** – The Unfruitful Vineyard; Social Injustice Denounced; Foreign Invasion Predicted

**Isaiah 10-11** – Judgement on Arrogance and Oppression;the Repentant Remnant; the Peaceful Kingdom

**Isaiah 27** – Israel’s Redemption

**Isaiah 39-44** – Envoys from Babylon and God’s People Are Comforted

**Jeremiah 11; 13:24; 15:7** – Israel and Judah Have Broken the Covenant; Wicked as Chaff

**Ezekiel 15; 17; 31** – The Useless Vine; Lofty Cedar

**Hosea 10; 14** – Israel’s Sin and Captivity; A Plea for Repentance; Assurance of Forgiveness

**Joel 2:28-3:21** – God Pours Out the Divine Spirit on All Flesh; God will Care for and Protect Judah

**Malachi 3-4 –** I Send My Messenger; The Great Day of the Lord

**Key Words/Phrases**

**In Those Days –** Many years have elapsed between the infancies of John and Jesus and the inauguration of John’s and Jesus’ ministry.This phrase indicates that a Kairos moment has arrived—one of those moments that forever shifts history and changes our lives.

**In the wilderness –** John begins his ministry in the wilderness (which happens to be the place where the Israelites wandered prior to entering the Promised Land).

**Repent – μετανοέω – תְשׁוּבָה** is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word. It was used frequently by the prophets to urge Israel to return to a right relationship with God (cf. Deuteronomy 30:2; Jeremiah 4:1; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Hosea 14:1). The idea is to change directions and make a radical break from a sinful past and turn afresh to the God who will soon come in judgement. It is more than just turning away from sin, but also a turning to or a return to a fruitful life; a change in heart, mind, and actions.

**Kingdom of Heaven** –Means the same as “kingdom of God” which is the phrase used by Mark and Luke. Matthew is writing to Jewish Christians, and uses “Kingdom of Heaven” to honor their reluctance to use God’s holy name lest they somehow profane it. The Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven is that realm in which God is king.

**Make ready the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.”** Matthew cites Isaiah 40:3, a verse quoted in all four Gospels (Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). In its original context, it spoke of preparing the way for the people of Israel to return from exile to their homeland. It constituted a joyful vision of a God-blessed, God-facilitated journey through an otherwise deadly wilderness. The earlier exile and the return to Israel had the purpose of redeeming Israel from tis sin.

**Camel’s Hair, Leather Belt** – Elijah wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). Jews expect Elijah to return prior to the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). John’s dress identifies him as the fulfillment of that prophecy. Later, Jesus will make this connection even more explicit, saying, “This is Elijah, who is to come” (Matthew 11:14) and “I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they didn’t recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted” (Matthew 17:12). Matthew goes on to explain, “Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist” (Matthew 17:13).

**Locusts and Honey** – Leviticus 11:22 establishes locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers as ritually clean foods (which in a wilderness or desert setting is one of the few sources of food). John’s clothing and diet indicate he has adopted wilderness ways.

**The Jordan River –** The Jordan river figures prominently in the story of the Israelites’ entrance into the promised land (Joshua 1–4). Moses was not permitted to cross it with the other Israelites (Deuteronomy 34; cf. Numbers 20:10–13; Deut 32:48–52), and the Jordan was a clear natural landmark for establishing tribal boundaries (see above).

**Baptism** – The reenactment of what it means to be rescued through waters of death in order to enter a new creation life. Jesus’ baptism is the beginning of a new creation. He is the ultimate Noah’s ark where we can be saved and start again. He is the new Moses who rescued us from slavery and into freedom. He is the new Joshua who we can follow into God’s promises. All that Jesus did when he underwent the violent flood of chaos in his crucifixion made a way for everyone who trusts in him to enter the new creation life that he offers. He is where life can flourish and God’s pleasure rests.

**Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance –** In Christian theology, there is always a healthy tension between grace and good works. John does not tell us that our works save us, but he does say that repentance produces good fruit.

**God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones** – In the Aramaic language, the words for “stones” (*benayya*) and “children” (*abnayya*) are similar, so John is using word play here. The God who makes humans from the dust of the earth can create children of Abraham from the stones that fill the wilderness.

**Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees –** The picture is that of an ax the owner has taken to cut down unproductive trees as a final solution to the lack of fruit.

**Cut down, and cast into the fire** – a place to fear having received God’s fearsome judgment (see Matthew 7:22-23; 10:15; 11:22; 12:36-42; 13:30, 40-43, 49; 22:11-13; and the whole of chapter 25).

**Winnowing Fork –** Used to throw grain into the air, where the wind can carry away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain settles back to the floor.

**The chaff** – Chaff is useless for food, so it is burned as waste. The Jewish scriptures include a number of references to the wicked (or Israel’s enemies) as chaff (see Job 21:18; Psalm 1:4; 35:5; 83:13; Isaiah 17:13; 29:5; Daniel 2:35; Hosea 13:3; Malachi 4:1).

**Gehenna** – In the NRSV, the word “hell” is only used in the NT, where it translates Greek *γέεννα*. It is thus distinct from Sheol and Hades, names for the realm of the dead that the NRSV simply transliterates from Hebrew and Greek respectively. The Greek word γέεννα (Gehenna) is derived from Hebrew gehinnom, meaning “valley of Hinnom,” also known as the “valley of the son of Hinnom” (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Neh. 11:30; Jer. 7:31–32; 19:2, 6; 32:35). Located west and south of Jerusalem and running into the Kidron Valley, the valley of Hinnom once formed part of the boundary between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Josh. 15:8; 18:16; Neh. 11:30). During the monarchic period, it became the site of an infamous high place (called “Topheth” and derived from an Aramaic word meaning “fire place”), where some of the kings of Judah engaged in forbidden religious practices, including human sacrifice by fire (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 7:31; 32:35). Because of this, Jeremiah spoke of its impending judgment and destruction (7:32; 19:6). King Josiah put an end to these practices by destroying and defiling the high place in the valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10). Used metaphorically during the Second Temple period to refer to a place of punishment by fire for evil spirits and the wicked dead (1 Enoch 18:11–16; 108:3–7, 15; 2 Esdras 7:36–38).