**January 24 - Matthew 3**

Today, let’s answer one question about the ministry of John, two about baptism in general, and three about Jesus’ baptism in particular.

Concerning John the Baptist’s Ministry

1. What does it mean that John baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire?
This has been sadly distorted by many in modern theological circles. This is speaking of two separate things. The Holy Spirit’s arrival in Acts 2 was the inaugural fulfilment of this promise, but it continues to be fulfilled every time an unbeliever comes to faith in Jesus Christ. The baptism of fire, on the other hand, is a clear warning of judgment. Verse 10 references God’s warning to Babylon in Daniel 4. God promised to cut down that tree, and now God is promising the same to those who do not follow Christ. Verse 12 confirms this to be the case when it speaks of Jesus coming to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Concerning Baptism in General

1. What is the proper mode of baptism?
Some believe in pouring or sprinkling, but there is bountiful evidence in Scripture that God’s intended mode for baptism has always been immersion. This text contains one simple clue in verse 16. When Jesus had been baptized, He CAME UP from the water. That only happens if one is first DOWN IN the water. Baptism is by immersion.
2. What does baptism symbolize?
Baptism is a picture of judgment. Water usually depicts judgment in the Bible. In Noah’s day, the world was judged by water. For Israel, this picture became very poignant after God led the Israelites through the water, but the armies of Pharaoh who followed were destroyed. We who know the Lord go down, but will be raised up. This is true both physically and spiritually. When we are baptized, we are declaring that we identify with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus was judged so that we will not be.

Concerning the Baptism of Jesus

1. Why did Jesus need to be baptized?
Jesus says that He needed to fulfill all righteousness. In other words, Jesus had to obey everything the Father told Him. And, He needed to perfectly model everything we are commanded. This is called the ‘active obedience’ of Christ. He produced a record of perfect righteousness that He was able to give to us in place of our sins (2 Cor. 5:21).
2. What is the significance of God the Father’s declaration?

God is well-pleased with His Son. He cannot say that of anyone else based upon our track record. He was not pleased with Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, the nation of Israel, or even John the Baptist. The only person who has ever perfectly pleased the Father is Jesus Christ the Son. This announcement indicates the perfection of the Son.

1. Why does the New Testament often make a big deal about this point in Jesus’ ministry?
This is considered the official beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. He had always been God, and since His birth in Bethlehem He had been God incarnate. Now He was going public with that reality. The apostles confirm this as the official starting date of Jesus’ ministry in Acts 1:22.

But, there is another, more glorious reason why this event is so incredibly valuable. This is the only time in recorded history that all three persons of the Trinity are observable with the human senses. God the Father could be heard with human ears, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit could be seen with human eyes.

For your encouragement – This might be outside of some of your comfort zone musically, but it is an excellent song regarding some of the things mentioned in this chapter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1b5o_U2gy0>

If rap is not your think, here is a site with the lyrics: <https://genius.com/Timothy-brindle-death-and-resurrection-pt-3-water-judgment-lyrics>

**January 25 – Matthew 4**

Today, let’s make six simple observations about this chapter.

1. Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted. This temptation was not a surprise. It was an intentional part of God’s plan for Jesus. This is something that holds true for us as well. We cannot be tempted or tested unless God permits (see Job 1-3). And God will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we can endure, and He provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).
2. Jesus was tempted in three different ways. All three of those temptations were of good things: sustenance, worship, and lordship. So, what is the big deal? Why not make food for Himself, or prove His Messiahship, or rule over all earthly kingdoms? Because God had required that Jesus not eat during this fast. He had required that Jesus not display His identity in that manner. And God required to claim the crown, Jesus would first go through the cross.
3. If you were at our previous Bible study, you will remember how we paralleled Eve’s temptation to that of Jesus. 1 John 2:16 tells us that there are three categories of temptation: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Eve failed in all three categories. You have too. But, as we see, Jesus succeeds in every way that we have failed.
4. How did Jesus battle temptation? He knew God’s Word and was able to stand firm on it. Eve failed in this way. She misquoted God’s command when she was tempted. This should encourage us to know and even memorize the Word.
5. When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, they left their incredibly expensive nets and immediately followed Jesus. Fishing was actually a relatively lucrative career in those days, and by leaving them behind, they abandoned their inheritance not caring what happened. They had been called to a different kind of fishing career. They were now fishers of men. And thank God that they were because everyone that is a Christian today heard the gospel from someone, and if you trace that back all the way to the first century, it was first told by these disciples. And like them, we should become fisher’s of men, leaving behind our dreams and ambitions and making the mission of the kingdom our priority.
6. Matthew is broken up into a series of sections of narratives and sermons. It looks like this:
Chapters 1-4: Narratives about the early ministry of Jesus
Chapters 5-7: Sermon on the Mount
Chapters 8-9: Narrative of Nine Miracles
Chapter 10: Sermon to the Disciples
Chapters 11-12: Narratives of Opposition
Chapter 13: Sermon of Parables
Chapters 14-17: Narratives of Faith
Chapters 18-19: Sermons about true Greatness
Chapters 20-23: Confrontations from within and without
Chapters 24-25: Sermon about Judgment (Olivet Discourse)
Chapters 26-28: Lord’s Supper, Death, Burial, Resurrection

We are now leaving our first section of narrative and moving into the first and most famous of Jesus’ sermons tomorrow.

For further study: How do I mortify sin by John MacArthur <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIAvIkAfvXY&t=4s>

**January 26 – Matthew 5**

With chapters these dense, I can only present a few things, but this is one of the most influential chapters of the Bible in my life. Someday I plan to preach through Matthew, but I know it will take me years because of sections like this one. Let’s just zoom in on the beatitudes today, shall we?

The eight beatitudes (promises of blessing) that open this sermon are sometimes read as if/then statements. If you are poor in spirit, then yours is the kingdom of heaven. And technically, that is not wrong. The problem is that Jesus is not saying that true disciples display these qualities, and therefore receive these blessings. In other words, true disciples are are meek, therefore they shall inherit the earth. It is not just a subset of Christians who will inherit the earth, etc. So think of it like this.

True Christians will be poor in spirit. They will not think they are worthy of God’s blessing. Only when you realize that your best works are bankrupt and you are morally destitute without Christ can are you pleasing to Him. Those who see themselves as sinners in need of grace have gained the kingdom.

True Christians will mourn. This could be a reference to mourning over sin or over suffering experienced for our faith. Regardless, the God of all comfort will care for His children.

True Christians will be meek. They will be strong, but controlled. They shall be bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1), but as gentle as doves (Matthew 10:16). The world says nice guys finish last, but God says that the meek will be the ones to inherit the earth.

True Christians will hunger and thirst for righteousness. In a world of cultural Christianity, there may be no greater evidence of a genuine believer than a heart that hates sin and loves to honor the Lord. We all fail sometimes, but a real Christian has cravings just as real as hunger and thirst to obey the Lord. Those who desire to be satisfied by the Lord will not be disappointed.

True Christians show mercy. We have received mercy. At the last day, we will receive mercy.

True Christians have hearts of purity. This means that there is a constant pursuit of cleaning from anything that would stain us (James 1:27). What an amazing blessing is given to such people: we will see God! Moses could not do this without dying. Yet we will see the full, unveiled glory of God and live!

True Christians are peacemakers. The natural human heart is inclined to war, regardless of the scale. But these people try to bring others together rather than tearing them apart. As far as it depends on them, they are at peace with all men. Such people are sons of God.

Christians are persecuted. This is one of those uncomfortable promises in the Bible.
“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will** **be** **persecuted.**”(2 Timothy 3:12) Darkness cannot extinguish the light, but it would like to. This section of the beatitudes is substantially larger than the others. Perhaps because it is the hardest one to see God in the midst of that kind of suffering. Yet, those who persevere through perseverance are those who have received the kingdom.

For further study: Here is a sermon about how Jesus fulfills the law, which is spoken about in Matthew 5:17-20. I hope you find it helpful. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSWPqiUIZBo>

**January 27 – Matthew 6**

Today we continue the Sermon on the Mount. Let’s think through three things mentioned here.

**Prayer**

The night that I wrote this, I asked my son Mordecai to pray (he just turned 4). He said, “I don’t know how.” This has happened several times. And my answer is, “Let me help you. Repeat after me.” The disciples probably prayed regularly. However, when they heard Jesus praying, they realized that His prayers were far better than their own. So, Jesus graciously teaches us how to pray. This is not a command to pray these exact words. We know this because we read the disciples pray in other ways in their epistles. However, it does serve as a really helpful outline for our prayers.

Vs 8: Begin by honoring and worshiping the name of the Lord.

Vs 9: Pray that His will would be the priority on heaven and earth (including your own life and circumstances).
Vs 10: Ask for temporal needs

Vs 11: Ask for spiritual forgiveness for any sin you have committed

Vs 12: Pray for spiritual protection to avoid sin in the future

**Treasure**

The word ‘lay up” in verse 18 is the same Greek word for treasure that he uses in that same verse. Don’t treasure earthly treasure. This is really hard, especially for those of us who live in a consumeristic society like this one. Is your money your god? You cannot serve both God and money. Your money belongs to God, and He can take it back in any way and at any time He wants. If that is your treasure, the longest it will last is until you die. It is therefore a bad investment. But, store up heavenly treasure, which alone is a good investment. It is eternal. I don’t think this means to store up heavenly gold by doing good works and getting something like a heavenly paycheck when you get to heaven. Rather, I think this is speaking about Jesus being your treasure.

[Here is a good sermon from a friend of mine about this text.](https://soundcloud.com/user-369263376/01-02-2022-everlasting-treasures-matthew-619-21?in=user-369263376/sets/mgcsermons)

**Anxiety**

God’s commands are always good for us. This is a great example. God commands that you and I stop being anxious. Worry is a sign that we lack trust in God. Our anxiety could be associated with unrealistic or frivolous fears, or they could be associated with the most challenging pressures in this life. Regardless, we have the ability to lean on Christ. Is He good? Yes. Is He able to help us? Yes. Does He want what is best for us? Yes. God could not have created better circumstances for you, even if you can’t see that right now. So, instead of anxiety, seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and your needs will be met as God sees fit.

For the kids! – This is a great song from this chapter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8h2Uty5JMQ>

**January 28 – Matthew 7**

Sometimes when preachers get near the end of the sermon, they start to fizzle. Things get fuzzier or gentler. Not so with Christ. He lands the plane with explosive and powerful vignettes of shocking truth. There is much here to soak in, but let’s consider two ways this text corrects some incorrect thinking in our world.

**Judging**

I heard a few years ago that Matthew 7:1 had surpassed John 3:16 as the most quoted verse in the Bible. I don’t know if that is true or even how someone would track that information. However, I do know that our world has twisted this little statement to an extreme degree. In fact, we are commanded to judge others (For example: “Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?” – 1 Cor. 5:12). The point Jesus is making is that those who were judging also happened to be hypocrites. He tells us first to take the log out of our own eye before seeking to do a minor surgical removal for our neighbor. Brothers and sisters, let us not be hypocrites! Repent, remove the log. Live in the light before the face of God.

**Asking**

The prosperity gospel is a virus that has swept into the church. It is a false gospel that turns Jesus into nothing more than a means to an end. He is a tool to get the true desires of one’s heart. And, sadly, part of Matthew 7 is often quoted by ravenous wolves who call themselves pastors as they promise people with itching ears that no matter what they ask for will be given to them if they ask in faith. The point is not that God will give you whatever you ask for, but what is good for you (see verse 11).

Let me give one quick example of how this plays out in Paul’s life. 2 Cor. 12:7-10, “So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. **8**Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. **9**But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **10**For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Notice, Paul prayed that God would take away this thorn (whatever it was). God did not. Why not? Because, as Paul later understood, it was to keep Paul from becoming conceited, and to reveal to him that his true strength could only be found in Christ.

For further reflection:

Some claim to follow the Lord, but they give evidence by their works that they are not truly saved (vs. 15-20). There are others who think they are going to heaven who will be surprised when they reach the judgment seat. They are relying on their own righteousness, and therefore fall short. (Vs. 21-23). Take time to consider the fruit of your life, and the grounding of your faith. Are you standing on the grace of God for salvation? If so, are you living out His commands?

**January 19 – Matthew 8**

Welcome back to a narrative section of Matthew. Today I want to consider a connection between two stories presented here. In 8:10 we see that Jesus marvels, in 8:27 the disciples marveled. Let’s consider the similarities and differences and what they teach us about the heart of God.

**Jesus Marveled**

When the centurion displayed such great faith, it tells us that Jesus marveled. Marvel is the Greek word ἐθαύμασεν which means to be filled with wonder, amazement, or admiration. It is not to be paralleled with words like ‘shocked’ or ‘surprised.’ Jesus was not caught off guard by this Centurion. Jesus knows the hearts of men and therefore was never unaware of people’s inward thoughts or motives. (John 2:24, Mark 2:8 for example)

It is still a shocking thing for the text to say that Jesus marveled. He then speaks admiringly about how this man who is not Jewish has displayed a more profound and genuine faith than anyone to whom the promises had been revealed. He knew that Jesus had real authority over sickness and death. Jesus takes this as a moment to teach that His kingdom would always be filled with people from the east and the west (meaning the whole world) to dine with the patriarchs. On the opposite side of the coin, those who were Jewish who dismissed Jesus would experience the tortures of hell.

What is the point of Matthew telling us that Jesus marveled? It is for us to see that Jesus is primarily interested in our hearts fully trusting in Him. There is nothing Jesus seems to delight in more than the people who come to Him with a desperation and know that He is the only way to truly find help and hope.

**The Disciples Marveled**

What is it that made this rag-tag band of knuckleheads marvel? It doesn’t seem that they were blown away by the faith of the centurion. Rather, they marveled when Jesus controlled the weather. I don’t want to sound glib. I think any of us would marvel at that. To see Jesus verbally rule over His creation would be jaw-dropping. However, I think Matthew is presenting us with an intentional contrast here. I think he is pointing out that they were still setting their eyes on earthly things and being surprised by power over nature more than they were with spiritual matters of the heart. They were looking at outward appearances while Jesus looked at the what was going on inside that man. The reality is, Jesus extending the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth and promising to save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation is a far greater event than the calming of the sea.

Let me leave this point with three questions for your consideration.
1. How often does it enter your awareness that Jesus is vibrantly and interictally familiar with every one of your thoughts? If you dwelt on that more, would it change the things upon which you meditate?

2. Which would you prefer to see? The miracle or weather control? Or the miracle of salvation? What does your answer say about your Christian maturity?
3. Does your faith often reflect that of the Centurion more than that of the disciples in this chapter? In other words, do you typically find yourself in awe of God primarily when He proves Himself through obvious, visual, temporal means? Or are you, like the centurion, confident in the goodness and authority of Christ even when your circumstances seem dire? Trust me when I say that your prayer life will be strongly affected by whichever side of this fence you fall on.

For further listening: This sermon by Ligon Duncan does a great job of helping to understand what is going on when Jesus healed the leper. <https://t4g.org/resources/ligon-duncan/the-gospel-by-numbers-2/>

Congratulations on completing one more week in the Word!