Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is Near

Matthew 3:1-17

Key Verse 3:2

1. Read verses 1-3. What was God doing in "Those days…"? What does it mean that the kingdom of heaven is near? What was John’s mission? (3; Isa 40:3) Why is it important that his mission was rooted in God’s word?

(A) God was working hard in “Those days…”. God raised up a powerful messenger named John the Baptist to be a herald of his son Jesus Christ. John was God’s first offensive weapon against the hardened hearts of Israel. John’s life and ministry was a key component to people’s acceptance of Jesus Christ.

(B) “The kingdom of Heaven is near” means that God’s is soon to reclaim his right as the LORD and ruler of all creation. So far, the kingdoms of men have ruled the earth and corrupted it with sinning since the fall of Adam and Eve. The reign of sin and Satan is soon to be snuffed out and in its place Heaven’s dominance exerted over all. The establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven began when Jesus came to this earth and died for the sins of the world. By his death he dethroned the devil completely.

(C) John’s mission was to wake people up from their spiritual slumber. All the people in Jerusalem and the surrounding area knew that the Messiah was supposed to be coming but they certainly were not ready for him. Instead of living a righteous life in the hope of his coming they had given into sinful desires and self-centered nationalism. They were not zealous for the coming Kingdom of Heaven.

(D) Since John was to be an instrument of God he discovered his identity in the pages of the Bible. John didn’t exert rule over his own life but surrendered his will to God. He found his life’s mission in God’s Word and developed it over several decades of personal repentance and devotion. John’s life is an example of man’s greatness when he is ruled by God and his holy Word. All men and women must derive their identity and life purpose from the pages of the Bible if they seek to do anything meaningful.

2. Read verses 4-6. What does John’s lifestyle show about him? How did the people respond to him? What does this show about them? How did John’s baptism prepare the way for Jesus?

(A) John was a man who abstained from many pleasures and conveniences. He did this for many reasons: 1. God’s leading was clearly upon his life style—God took him to the desert and raised him there for His set purpose. 2. John was beyond reproach and accusation unlike other religious leaders whose lavish lifestyle was a source of distrust and accusation. No one could accuse John that he was in it for the money. (3) John ate locust and wild honey because these were the resources available to him in his region of ministry. It was a practical diet because the area he baptized had such food readily available. (4) John’s clothing of choice was based on the style of dress embraced by Elijah (see 2 Kings 1:8). John was the fulfillment of prophecy coming from Malachi 4:5, “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. Surely John made his wardrobe choice based on this prophecy and 2 Kings 1:8. He was a man inspired by the Word of God even in his choice of dress. He was a man who was surrendered and inspired by God’s Word.

(B) People responded to John by coming out to hear him, by confessing their sins to him and by being baptized by him. When they “confessed” their sins they were owning up to their evil deeds and expressing their change of mind and change of heart. They weren’t hiding their sins or ignoring them anymore.

(C) The people had guilty feelings built up inside. The religious leaders didn’t help cleanse the people of their sins but neglected God’s flock.

(D) John’s baptism softened people’s hardened heart. It was preparatory work for accepting Jesus Christ. It was a vital work to bring salvation.

3. Read verses 7-10. Why did John rebuke the religious leaders? What were they proud of? Why was this pride groundless? What evidence of real faith does God seek in his people? What happens to those who do not repent?

(A) The religious leaders looked like they were repentant because they didn’t commit big sins like sexual immorality, stealing and murder. On the outside their cup was clean but inwardly they were filthy. John pointed out their hypocrisy and told them to repent.

(B) They were proud of their outward religiosity and their claim to be descendants of Abraham. They tried to ride the coattails of Abraham but neglected their personal relationship with God.

(C) Their pride was groundless because being a descendent of Abraham means nothing. We have to be careful to not put our confidence in anything but God’s sin forgiving mercy and love for us in salvation.

(D) Repentance and confession is evidence of real faith to depend on God’s help and mercy.

(E) Those who do not repent will be judged most severely.

4. Read verses 11-12. What was John's testimony about Jesus? What was the purpose of John's baptism? What does it mean that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire?

(A) That Jesus was greater than himself and that the ministry of Christ was far superior to his own ministry. People exalted John but John exalted Christ.

(B) John’s baptism was to help people repent and make room in their hearts for Jesus. Jesus was the end to John’s means.

(C) Jesus brings the kingdom of God to man’s inner life and outer life by baptizing us in the Holy Spirit and fire. We need this fire of the Spirit to elevate our minds to God’s level. We need this fire of the Spirit to empower us to overcome sin and Satan and build God’s kingdom in the hearts of others. Without the work of the Holy Spirit God’s kingdom cannot be manifested in and around us.

5. Read verses 13-15. Why did Jesus come to be baptized by John? What does “to fulfill all righteousness” mean? What does this show about Jesus?

(A) Jesus set the example for us in all things. He was baptized by John’s baptism because we need to undergo a baptism of repentance too.

(B) To “fulfill all righteousness” means to do all things “right”. Jesus did all things right so that his people could have a righteous credit before God. When we put our faith in our king Jesus we are credited with righteousness that he manifested.

6. Read verses 16-17. What happened as soon as Jesus came out of the water? What was God's testimony about Jesus? Why do you think God was pleased with Jesus?

(A) The Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and lighting.

(B) God’s testimony about him was that he was “well pleased”. Though we can try to “please” God — what he is most pleased with is our faith in his Son. When we put our faith in him, God is “well pleased” with us.

(C) God was pleased with Jesus because Jesus properly represented the kingdom of heaven.