

## The Church of the Servant King

Home Bible Study

### Survey of the Bible Series

#### *The Gospel of Matthew*

(Lesson SB-3)

Matthew Chapter 3

In between Chapters 2 and 3 approximately thirty years elapsed. Jesus grew up in relative obscurity, unknown to the world. All of a sudden, in Chapter 3 He seems to arise out of nowhere to begin His public ministry. His parents are not people of means or notoriety. He grew up in Nazareth which was the location of the Roman garrison in northern Galilee. Those who lived there were suspected of compromise with the Romans.

Matthew 3:1-3 – the Kingdom of Heaven

- “Repent” (metanoew) – means to change one’s thinking and is closely associated with a radical transformation of the entire person.
- The concept of a coming kingdom was well known in the Old Testament Scriptures; however, the idea of repentance to be a pre-requisite for entering the Kingdom was foreign to the Jews. They thought that simply being children of Abraham would grant them entrance into the Kingdom.
- There are many ideas as to the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven/God in Scripture. Each idea is attempting to deal with the following questions among others:
  - Is there a difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God?
  - What exactly was the Kingdom that was offered to the Jews?
  - If the Jews rejected the offer of the Kingdom presented by John and Jesus, what is the nature of the Kingdom today?
  - Are Church Age believers members of the same Kingdom?
- Without conducting an extensive study of the subject of the Kingdom in Scripture, let me just state the conclusion. The Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God are terms for the same kingdom. Both refer to the Messianic kingdom that Jesus would have established had the Jews accepted His offer. Sometimes Scripture makes reference to Church Age believers as participants in the kingdom (e.g. Col 1:13; Rev 1:6, 9). I believe that these passages are references to our heavenly status as believers in Jesus Christ (i.e. Eph 1:21; 2:6). As believers in Jesus Christ, we will rule and reign with Him from the New Jerusalem (heaven) during the Millennial Kingdom on earth that He establishes at His Second Advent. Compare the following passages and note that the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem during the Millennium will consist of believers from all dispensations:
  - Eph. 5:22-23 (Christ is the Head of the Church)
  - 1 John 5:4-5 (“overcomers” are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God)
  - Heb. 12:22-24 (“spirits of just men” are believers of dispensations prior to the Church Age)
  - Rev. 3:21 (“overcomers” sit with Christ on the throne)
  - Rev. 5:10 (saints reign on the earth)
  - Rev. 7:9-17 (Tribulation believers serve the Lord in heaven - see also 21:24-27)
  - Rev. 12:10-11 (Tribulation believers are “overcomers”)
  - Rev. 19:7 (the “bride” at the marriage supper of the Lamb is the New Jerusalem)
  - Rev. 20:4, 6 (Tribulation believers reign in the Millennium)
  - Rev. 21:7 (“overcomers” inherit the New Jerusalem)
  - Rev. 21:12, 14 (mention of the 12 tribes and 12 apostles - Israel and the Church)
- Therefore, I do not believe in a so called “mystery” form of the kingdom today. Many dispensationalists have concluded that it is a mystery form of the kingdom about which Christ taught in Matthew 13. Therefore, these parables are applied to the Church as a part of the mystery form of the kingdom. However, to adopt this approach, which is a form of spiritualized interpretation, seems to open the door for criticisms of the

- dispensational approach, e.g. that dispensationalists are guilty of using a spiritualizing hermeneutic for which they criticize their non-dispensational brethren. If true, then the dispensationalist is merely relying upon a hermeneutic to interpret Scripture that he applies in an inconsistent manner based only upon his personal preference.
- Rather, I believe that the references to the kingdom in Scripture relate to the Messianic reign of Christ on earth also known as the Millennial reign of Christ. We will discuss more of this later.
  - The phrase “prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight” is from Isaiah 40:3 where Isaiah announces the need to prepare a highway for the return of the Jewish exiles from captivity to their homeland, Israel. In the same manner that roads were repaired, smoothed, straightened and leveled before the arrival of a king, John was preparing a spiritual highway for the coming of Christ.

#### Matthew 3:4-5 – John’s Clothing and Diet

- The clothes of camel’s hair and the leather belt were the clothes of poor people and they established a linkage to Elijah (see 2 Kings 1:8 and Malachi 4:5).
- His preaching in the desert of Judea indicates that he came to separate those who would believe from the religious systems of the day.
- Locusts are large grasshoppers which are still eaten in the East.
- John’s diet points to a poor man used to living in the wilderness and it establishes a connection with prophets from centuries before. Sometimes false prophets would dress like a real prophet in order to deceive (see Zech 13:4). Both Elijah and John had ministries that prophesied judgment and in which austere dress and diet were used to confirm their ministries.

#### Matthew 3:6 – The Baptism of John

- John’s baptism was not the same as Christian baptism. It was a religious rite signifying confession of sin and commitment to a holy life in anticipation of the coming Messiah.
- There were two primary uses of baptism during John’s time – 1) ceremonial purification and 2) as a public acknowledgment of repentance (change of mind).
- Baptisms were common in most ancient near Eastern religions and the Jewish religion was no exception. Baptism was considered a form of ceremonial purification. Not only the priests and other individuals were baptized, but clothing, utensils, and articles of furniture were subjected to ceremonial cleansing. Examples include:
  - Leviticus 8:6 – Moses took Aaron and his sons and washed them with water to symbolize their dedication to the Lord.
  - Exodus 19:10-14 – Moses is commanded to instruct the people to wash their clothes and consecrate themselves (a reference to purification rites) for two days prior to the Lord’s appearance to them at the base of Mt. Sinai.
  - Mark 7:3-4 – Mark explains to his readers in Rome the traditions of the Jews that involved such purification rites.
  - Hebrews 9:6-10 – The writer of Hebrews explains the limitations of the ceremonial rites of the priests under the Law to complete the reconciliation to God that was accomplished through Christ. This included “various washings” and other activities that had to be repeated in contrast to the work of Christ.
- Confession of sin was associated with John’s baptism. The reason – confession of sin was commanded by the law as a part of a priest’s duties (Lev 16:21) and as an individual responsibility for wrongs done (Lev 5:5; 26:40; Num 5:6-7; Prov 28:13).
- Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many have tried to link John’s baptism with that of the Qumran community of Essenes. However, their washings were regarded as purifying and were repeated since they were for the purpose of removing ritual uncleanness even though they were related to confession.

- John's baptism was unrelated to ceremonial impurity and was most likely a once-only rite. The rabbis used baptism in this manner (i.e. in association with the confession of sins not ceremonial purification) to induct proselytes but never Jews.
- As far as we know, though baptism itself was not uncommon, the pointed but limited associations placed on John's baptism stem from the Baptist himself and was not unlike circumcision, which predated Abraham but lacked covenantal significance before his time.

#### Matthew 3:7-12 – John Castigates the Unbelieving Religious Types

- The Pharisees and the Sadducees were two prominent groups in Judaism during this period. Both groups claimed to be followers of Judaism, but their beliefs were considerably different. The Pharisees were primarily related to the lay people of Israel. In doctrine, they adhered to not only the Law of Moses and the Scriptures, but they also adhered to a whole body of oral tradition. Their activities were centered in the synagogue. The Sadducees were associated with the priestly caste, for whom worship was centered in the temple. They were extremely conservative and they based their beliefs primarily upon the Pentateuch.
- John sums up the basis of their unbelief in his message. They believed that they, as physical descendants of Abraham, were automatically qualified for the Messiah's kingdom.
- John correctly understood that belief in Jesus as the coming Messiah was a pre-requisite for entrance into the Kingdom.
- John also correctly understood that God could raise up any person or people to become His children, i.e. Gentiles. Judaism was in danger of being replaced.
- The "wrath to come" that John referred to would have been the tribulation period that would consummate in the Second Advent of the Messiah. This seven year period would have occurred even if Israel had believed. Jesus would have still had to pay the penalty for man's sin in order to accomplish redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, and justification. The Second Advent will accomplish deliverance for believing Israel and the baptism of fire for unbelieving Jews and Gentiles.
- John used water baptism to identify people with his message. Jesus, the One coming after him, was so much greater that he would unite people to Himself by means of the Holy Spirit.
- John did not foresee the Church Age since the only revelation available to Him was contained in what we call the Old Testament.
- John knew that the kingdom to come would be characterized by a great display of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people (see Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 11:19; 36:26; 39:29; Joel 2:28; Mal 3:2-5; Zech 12:10).
- John's mention of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that would be characteristic of the Millennial Age (see Jer 31:31-25 cf. Ezek 36:25-27; 39:29; Joel 2:28). This initially occurred on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.
- John knew nothing of the Church Age and his Scriptural frame of reference included only the timeline shaped by eschatological prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures. John's predicted baptism with the Holy Spirit that occurred on Pentecost is entirely different than the baptism that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12:13 wherein the believer is baptized into the body of Christ.
- The baptism of fire is a reference to the judgment that God will pour out upon the unbelieving world at the Second Advent of Christ. Through this baptism, unbelievers will be taken in judgment and believers left to enter into the Millennium (see Mal 4:1 cf. Matt 24:40-41; 25:31-46).
- In the judgment associated with the Second Advent, the "wheat" (believers) are gathered into the "barn" (the Millennial kingdom). On the other hand, the "chaff" (unbelievers) are burned up with an unquenchable fire (a likely reference to the Lake of Fire into which they will be thrown after standing before Christ at the Great White Judgment Throne).

### Matthew 3:13-17 – John Baptizes Jesus

- Only Matthew records John's opposition to Jesus' request to be baptized. John recognized that Jesus did not fit the requirements of his (John's) baptism.
- Jesus was not repenting. He had never sinned (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1 John 3:5).
- The act of baptism is associated with identification. The baptism of Jesus was necessary to identify Him with the Messianic Kingdom and with those who had been baptized in association with repentance in order to enter the Messianic kingdom. Therefore, Jesus' baptism was for the purpose of identifying Him with the Messianic kingdom and all who would enter it.
- In addition, the Levitical law required that all priests be consecrated at about thirty years of age (Num 4:3; Luke 3:23). The consecration was two fold – first the washing (baptism), then the anointing (Ex 29:4-7; Lev 8:6-36). Jesus is our eternal priest.
- Jesus' baptism was authenticated from heaven by the other two members of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit descended upon Him. The voice of the Father in heaven confirmed the divine nature that Christ possessed as the Son of God (these words were repeated on the Mount of Transfiguration – Matt 17:5). These events were in keeping with the prophecy of Isaiah that the Spirit would rest on the Messiah (Isa 11:2).