

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

What are we to do to receive the King? The Ministry of John the Baptist: Preparing the way for the King through Repentance

Prayer

Father, we just thank You so much that You were so gracious and so kind; You are so loving. Thank You so much that You sent Your Son Jesus to die for our sins. That although we were and are weak and heavy labored, laden down with sin and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Father, thank You so much that You did not leave us in the misery of sin. Father, we thank You for Your Son Jesus who willing came and died for our sins. And Father, as we look into Your Word today, I do pray that You would help us to be aware of any sin in our lives, that we would confess it and set it aside, that we would not be like the forgetful hearer with the deluded worthless religion, who has sin and listens to the Word and walks away and forgets. I pray we would confess that sin and receive Your Word implanted. Father, we ask You to bless Your Word as it goes out, work in our hearts and lives what You have planned, through Your Word. It is in Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Sermon

There are many people who say, "I have received Jesus." That seems to be a popular term in our culture, "I have received Jesus." And there are many pastors who say, "Receive Jesus." Some say as Lord, some say as Savior, some say as Lord and Savior. Now is it by just receiving Jesus that we are saved? Yes we certainly do need to receive Jesus, and we need to receive the right Jesus from Scripture. Not the Jesus that is from the cults and the seeker movements, but the right Jesus. And certainly we need to receive Him as Lord and Savior, and biblically the idea of receiving Christ is right. In John 1:11 John writes, ¹¹ **He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.** (speaking of Jesus coming to the Jews) ¹² **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. [John 1:11-12]**

So yes we do need to receive Jesus. But I think unfortunately these verses are taken out of context. And I hear gospels being preached, and I hear these felt-need preachers and seeker churches saying that you must receive Him, but they leave out the most crucial part of receiving Jesus, which is the preparation to receive Jesus, through the repentance of sins. And that is what we are going to see today, that John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ by sharing repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And we are going to look at the question, and answer the question, "How are we to receive the King?" And I believe we are going to have the answer today as we look at the first portion of the ministry of John the Baptist, preparing the way for King Jesus and His Kingdom.

So would you turn in your Bibles with me to the book of Matthew, and we started our journey in the book of Matthew a couple weeks ago, and it has been such a blessing, and I hope you have been blessed

Matthew 3:1-3

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as you have been studying it. I am going to give you a little context briefly. We have got a long sermon, even though we are only going through three verses today, so I am going to condense the context. But we know that this book is about the presentation of Jesus Christ as King of the Jews. It is about the presentation of the King and His Kingdom, and how God uses the opposition to His Kingdom from His own people to bring about salvation and redemption, to bring blessing as we would see in Genesis, to all the nations through Abrahams' seed, which is Jesus Christ.

We saw in chapter 1 and chapter 2, the presentation, ultimately of Christ the King, first of all, through a genealogy, a genealogy that proved He had the right to be on the throne. And also we saw the birth of Jesus Christ, we saw Joseph's dilemma, as Mary was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit, and Joseph being a righteous man desired to put her away secretly. But God graciously intervened in a dream and told Joseph to marry Mary because what was in her womb would bring about the salvation of His people. God was taking on human flesh to save His people from their sins. And we saw the prophecy fulfilled. ²³ **BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." [Mathew 1:22-23]** It is the Lord Jesus who saves, Yahweh is salvation, and when He brings about a salvation in the life of someone, then He is with us.

And at this point we moved to chapter 2 in which we saw three different responses to the birth of King Jesus. We saw three different responses. We saw the joyful worship of the Gentile magi, we saw the fearful agitation of the Jews, and we saw the murderous hate of King Herod. Now the fearful agitation was totally opposite from what we would have expected. We would have expected them to be rejoicing, "Maybe the Messiah has been born!" But ultimately as we see in this book and in this generation was a generation besides a few, a remnant, of unbelief. And unbelief was manifest in an agitation at the birth of Jesus Christ.

And then we saw King Herod who wickedly set out to destroy anything in his way, and King Jesus, the true King of the Jews was in his way, and God graciously protected Christ as prophesied in Scripture. And we saw that Christ fulfills prophecies concerning the King. First of all, at the end of chapter 2 we saw that Jesus Christ is the one who fulfills the redemptive promises of God. Those promises pictured and foreshadowed in Israel's original trip to Egypt and redemption from Egypt. That the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who delivers us from our bondage of sin. We also saw that Jesus Christ is the one in the midst of an evil time of mourning, mourning in evil because of man's wickedness. He is the one who brings eternal hope. And lastly we saw the prophecy, I believe, that Jesus would be despised and forsaken, called a Nazarene, basically a low-life in Israel. It is that true that mankind's despising and forsaking, satanic evil upon Him, crucifying Him, that He would bring about sovereignly the forgiveness of sins. Jesus, the Lord is salvation.

And this brings us to our passage today in which I believe we are going to see in the book of Matthew how it is we are to receive Jesus. Now first of all I think we are going to recognize through John's example that God prepares the heart to receive Jesus, and He prepares it through His Word proclaimed.

Matthew 3:1-3

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And next week, Lord willing we will see that we must respond rightly to the Word of God. So first of all, God prepares the heart to receive King Jesus. Matthew 3:1,

¹ Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ 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!' [Matthew 3:1-3]

He begins with the phrase, "Now in those days." Well what were these days, what are the days he is talking about? Obviously some time has passed because John the Baptist, who was born very close to the time that Jesus was born, slightly before, is now entering into his ministry. And we saw in the book of Luke that he remained in the desert until he entered into his ministry, and now he is entering that ministry, and now it is in the days of John the Baptist, so obviously Jesus most likely is around 30 years of age, as we see in the book of Luke, chapter 2. So about 30 years have passed from chapter 1 in Matthew to chapter 3. And in Luke chapter 3:23 we see specifically that Jesus began His ministry at the age of 30, after being baptized by John. And as a side note, Acts 1:22 affirms that fact also, that Jesus' ministry began with His baptism.

So the term "in those days," about 30 years have passed since Christ was born, since Jesus was born, who took on human flesh, God incarnate. And at this point we will want to take a look at first of all, the man John the Baptist. "¹ Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying..." So who is this man, John the Baptist? First of all he is not the apostle John, he is not the one who wrote the book of John, he is not the one who wrote 1, 2, and 3 John, he is not the one who wrote Revelation. John the Baptist is a different guy. And John is not an apostle.

So what do we know about John the Baptist first and foremost from our text? Well first of all he is called "John the Baptist," or "John, the one who baptizes." He is identified with baptism. And with this in mind I want to share a little bit about baptism. We are going to get through this in depth as we go through the rest of this chapter, but I want to share a little bit to get a framework for understanding this idea of baptism, because we have got all kinds of different baptisms in Scripture. So he is called "John, the one who baptizes." And with this in mind it would behoove us to understand what baptize means. Well in the Greek we have the word *baptizo*, means simply to dip or immerse. And we have two words that I have shared translated, actually that were not translated but were transliterated. One is deacon, and one is baptize, which comes from *diákonos* and *baptizo*. So naturally when we look at those words deacon and baptize, we do not really understand conceptually what someone who understood Greek would know about those words. Because the word *baptizo* meant to dip, or to place into, or to identify with as we will see.

Now this word baptize could speak of being washed, there is one passage in Mark 7:4, it speaks of ceremonial washing. And certainly if you take something and dip it in water, it is going to be washed right? If I baptize my hands in the water in the sink, if I dip them in, they are going to be washed, so it certainly can be used in that way. But I think its main usage in Scripture speaks of identification. And you

Matthew 3:1-3

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say, "What do you mean by that?" Well first of all in this time, someone would baptize a piece of fabric. They would take a fabric, if they were to change its color, put it in dye, they would dip it in dye, and when they pulled it out, it would be identified with the new color. They baptized that cloth, and I believe, we will see in the New Testament this action speaks of identification.

You are still saying, "What do you mean by that?" Well there are a few baptisms in Scripture. I am not going to go through all of them; I am just going to share them briefly a couple things about baptism, and then I am going to move on to our passage. But since he is John the Baptizer, I think we need to understand about baptism. So we have some baptisms in Scripture, we have the baptism of Moses in the cloud, and in the sea of the Israelites into Moses. We have a baptism of fire later on in our chapter, we have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We have those who have been baptized into Christ. We have those who have been baptized into one body, we have water baptism commanded by Jesus, we have the water baptism of John. Then we have, you are probably saying about the baptism of the dead in 1 Corinthians. Well we are not going to get to that because there are about 200 different ideas of what that is. I could share my view on that, but I think it is a very obscure passage and we are going to stay on the main ones today.

So let's briefly look at some of these baptisms. And I think in 1 Corinthians 10, we have an interesting baptism that helps us understand the concept. Flip over to 1 Corinthians 10, we are going to look at verses 1-4. The apostle Paul is speaking to a church that is out of order, that is messed up, a group of believers that is totally out of whack, and he has graciously come alongside them and presented the truth to them. And now he shares in 1 Corinthians 10:1,

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, ("I do not want you not to know this...") that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and all ate the same spiritual food; ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. [1 Corinthians 10:1-4]

So he is saying, "I do not want you to be unaware..." He is speaking of the Jews, that they were all baptized into Moses. "Well, what do you mean? How were they baptized into Moses?" Well they were identified with Moses, they were identified with those who followed Moses as their leader who was following the Lord God. They were the Israelites who had been delivered out of Egypt, out of their bondage, and they were identified with those events, the cloud and the sea, and they were identified with Moses. And that is what this term means here, "they were baptized into Moses." And I think it is very helpful to see this term in this way.

What about the baptism of fire? Later on in Matthew 3:11 we are going to see that, the baptism of fire. And I think it is speaking in context and alluding to the fire of judgment, if you read through it. That if you do not receive Christ through repenting and believing in Him that the result of that is you will be baptized with fire, you will be placed into, you will be identified with the judgment of fire. I think that is quite possible what that is saying.

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

We have in many Christian circles the baptism of the Holy Spirit being spoken of, very often. We see this in Acts 1:5, speaking of when the Holy Spirit came upon the church as God had predicted it would, they were to wait for the Spirit. The Lord Jesus told them to wait, and it came upon them, and they were placed into, they were identified with the Holy Spirit as they received the Spirit. And this same baptism of the Spirit is referred to in 1 Corinthians. And it is for every believer, and it happens when we believe. 1 Corinthians 12:11, I will read this for you,

¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ¹² For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, (it was the Spirit of God, when we believed in the Gospel that placed us into the body of Christ, we were identified with the body of Christ, we are placed into the body of Christ) whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. [1 Corinthian 12:11-13]

“All of us, all you believers in Corinth, there is not any believers waiting for the baptism of the Spirit, you were all made to drink of it. It happened, if you are a believer.” So we have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it speaks of being placed into, identified with the Holy Spirit, bringing us into the body of Christ when we receive the Spirit as a pledge.

Now we see this same concept being baptized, that term “being baptized into Christ.” When we are baptized into Christ Jesus - you are saying, “I do not know what he is talking about.” - well, we are going to go through this more and more. Do not worry about it if you do not get it, because we are going to see it a little more deeply as we get into the baptism of John. But there is the baptism into Christ. When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, when you repent of your sins, believing in Him as Lord, crying out to Him to save you, you are placed into Christ. You are identified with Christ, you are united with Christ. Romans 6:1

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? (You know, God’s grace is manifest, you know as we sin, God was gracious, sending Christ forgave our sins. “Well hey, maybe we should sin that grace may abound.”) ² May it never be! (May you never think that way. God did not save you to sin more, He saved you to make you like Christ. May it never be!) How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (All of you who have been placed into Christ, you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you were made part of His body, you were also placed into, identified with His death). ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. [Romans 6:1-5]

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

We are baptized into Christ, we are identified with His death, His death applies to us. We are baptized into His death, placed into, identified with. And we have this concept we see also in Galatians 3, and I will read this for you, verse 26,

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (You are a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ) **²⁷ For all of you who were** (not are being, not will be, but were) **baptized into Christ (Jesus) have clothed yourselves with Christ. So we, when we believed, are placed into the body of Christ, we are identified with. [Galatians 3:26-27]**

Ok so we have this concept of baptism, what about water baptism? There are two specific water baptisms in Scripture. As we will see there is the baptism of John which was with water, and there was also the baptism that Christ commanded for those who believe in Him. In Matthew 28 we see that all true believers are to be baptized, Matthew 28:19,

¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples (in your going, make disciples literally, and then here's how you make disciples, two things) **of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,** **²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** **[Matthew 28:19-20]**

How do you make disciples? You baptize them, there is a water baptism which relates the truth that they have been placed in Christ, it confirms the fact publically that they are followers of Jesus Christ, they have died to their old life, and raised in newness of life. First step, you do not disciple someone who is not saved; you disciple someone who is saved, who has made a commitment to Christ, who has been placed into the body of Christ, and is willing to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and be baptized. Then you teach them, "teach them to observe all that I commanded you."

Now this baptism is so identified with our faith that at times it almost seems simultaneous. But Scripture is clear that this water baptism happens after we have repented. Let's take a look at Acts 10:47, and I will just read this quickly so we do not get confused because the cults come along and say you need to be baptized to be saved, "This is how you are saved, it is through water baptism. Once you have had the experience you will really know the Lord." That is a lie! That is a lie.

When we believe in Christ we are placed into the body of Christ, and water baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality, and we see that in Acts 10. Acts 10:44, as Peter is speaking to the first Gentile converts, giving them the Word of God,

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words (he is speaking the Word of God), **the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.** **⁴⁵ And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.** **⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,** **⁴⁷ "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit** (They got

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

saved by listening to the message, they received the Holy Spirit because they were saved, and he says, "Surely we cannot stop them from being baptized can we?" Baptism comes after salvation.) ***just as we did, can he?"*** ⁴⁸ ***And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days. [Acts 10:44-48]***

And there is another passage if you want see in Acts 16:33 that shows the same thing, that is belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, having received the Spirit as a pledge, and then we are baptized in water as obedience. Well what about John's baptism? And that is John the Baptizer right? What about his baptism? John's baptism as we will see is a baptism in water for repentance. i.e., it was an outward identification that someone had repented. "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" They repent, and then are baptized as we will see later on, confessing their sins, they are identifying, "I have repented!" It is identification with repentance; identification with repentance just like water baptism for the believer is identification with Christ. It is an outward symbol of an inward reality. Now we are going to look at this more.

Now folks we need to recognize that John is not saying he baptizes people so that they would repent, he baptizes them, as we will see, because they have repented and been forgiven. Do not forget verse 2, John is preaching repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. And then in context, those who repent are baptized, showing an outward identification with that. So then John's baptism was an outward identification which we will see more, with the fact that one had repented. Just as the Israelites were identified with Moses, they were baptized into him, so too were those who were baptized into John identified with the fact that they had repented. And we actually see this in Acts 19, as the apostle Paul comes to Ephesus. Acts 19:1,

¹ And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, ² and he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" [Acts 19:1-2a]

That is the norm, there were some abnormal things that happened in the beginning of Acts; it is a historical book. God delayed the coming of the Spirit to show those Jews that He was moving salvation from the Jews to the Gentiles; and now the norm is, we see here and in the rest of Scripture, is when you believe you receive the Spirit of God. He said, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Didn't that happen to you?"

^{2b} And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." [Acts 19:2b-5]

Obviously the context as we will see later on in the book of Acts, these Ephesians believed, and then were baptized with the baptism in Christ.

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

Ok so, we have here the idea of baptism, John the Baptist; and baptism for the Jew at this time was not a new concept. There was what was what was called "proselyte baptism." If a foreigner would convert to the God of Israel, he would be water baptized to show he identifies with Israel. Showing an identification with the Jews, so they understood this concept of baptism and identification; and John baptized a baptism of repentance. And when they were placed in the water, they were identifying outwardly that they had inwardly repented.

With that in mind, back to our passage here. Hopefully you understand that. If you do not, do not worry about it; we are going to go through this in bits and pieces in the next few weeks. So then first of all, what do we know about John. He was the baptizer. "Now in those days (back to Matthew 3:1) John the Baptist came...." John, the one who baptizes, came. Well what else do we know about John the Baptist from Scripture? Well it's interesting to note that in every Gospel there is mention of and teaching concerning John the Baptist. And we see the most teaching concerning John the Baptist in the book of Luke. And the book of Luke records a proclamation to Zacharias by the angel, the fact that his wife Elizabeth, advanced in years and barren, would bear a son. And in this announcement to Zacharias we see that John was special from the beginning.

Let's skip over to Luke 1, and we will read this. Luke 1:5,

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. ⁷ And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. ⁸ Now it came about, while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, ⁹ according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. ¹¹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son..."[Luke 1:5-13]

What is interesting is they probably, maybe had stopped praying that since they were advanced in years. Obviously they petitioned at some point in their lives, because they were praying possibly for a son, and now he is advanced in years, he (the angel says)

^{13b} "...your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵ For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb (miraculous). ¹⁶ And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

(Remember Israel was walking away from the Lord, even though they were pretending to follow Him). ¹⁷ And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." [Luke 1:5-17]

He is one who is going to turn the hearts, as we see in the context, from sin to righteousness, to prepare their hearts for the Lord. And if you remember when Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth heard the greeting from Mary and the baby leaped in her womb for joy. And then we saw the prophecy concerning Zacharias, that Zacharias shared concerning John when his tongue was loosed on the eighth day in Luke 1, we saw that wonderful prophecy that pointed to the fact that John would prepare the way for the one who would bring about redemption and salvation. And at the end of that prophecy he says, (Luke 1:79)

⁷⁹ "To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." (And this is speaking of John) ⁸⁰ And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel. [Luke 1:79-80]

So we know John was special, miraculous conception, filled with the Spirit while in the womb. John was destined by God to prepare the way for Christ; and he stayed, notice he stayed in the desert until now as we have his ministry beginning here. But what about his public ministry? I believe we are going to see you could summarize John's public ministry this way, that he preached repentance and he affirmed repentance publically through baptism. That that is what John did, he preached repentance (verses 2 and 3) and he affirmed repentance publically through baptism (verses 5 and 6).

Let's take a look at our passage again. (Matthew 3:1)

¹ Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ 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!'" ⁴ 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. ⁵ Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; ⁶ and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. [Matthew 1:1-6]

John's ministry consisted of preaching (verse 1) and baptizing (verse 6). Now with this in mind I want to look at, from Scripture, his method, and the message of John the Baptist. First of all the method, says in chapter 3:1 "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching..." John the Baptist came preaching, this is the method of John the Baptist, he came preaching in the wilderness. The word preaching is a familiar Greek word *caruso*, and it speaks of an official activity of heralding or announcing, publically proclaiming making something known verbally. And it is used in Scripture extensively concerning the

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

Word of God, the Gospel, and Christ being proclaimed. Preaching is the verbal heralding of God's truth. And it is the only method in Scripture that God has ordained for the New Testament, for His bondservants to share His Word, and make Christ known.

John the Baptist as we will see preached the Word, verse 3:1, I am going to mention a few verses here, you can jot them down and look them up. Jesus Christ preached, He *caruso'd*, and proclaimed the Gospel throughout Scripture - Matthew 4:17 and 4:23 and Luke 4:18-19. Jesus instructed His disciples to teach and preach the Kingdom - Matthew 10:7. The Gospel of the Kingdom is to be preached to the whole world - Matthew 24:14. Repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be *caruso'd*, it is to be proclaimed throughout the entire earth - Luke 24:47. Peter makes it clear in Acts 10:42 that the apostles were ordered to preach and teach all the peoples. Paul thoroughly and completely without shrinking back preached the Kingdom in Acts 20. Paul also made it clear that it is through the preacher, preaching the Word that the message goes out and is heard and believed and one calls upon the Lord for salvation - Romans 10.

Throughout Scripture the Gospel is preached, the Gospel of Christ Jesus. And throughout Scripture it is Christ Jesus as Lord who is preached, 2 Corinthians 4:5. And at the end of Paul's life, he exhorts Timothy to preach the Word, to be ready in season and out of season, to reprove, rebuke and exhort with great patience and instruction. God has ordained the means in which His Word is to go forth. But you are saying, "What about drama and movie clips? Can't we share Jesus through dance?"

We had a lady come here, and she told me, "You know, we share Jesus through dance." And I said "By what authority do you do that?" And she pointed to an Old Testament passage concerning David dancing around when the Arc came back, which was not in the assembly of the Lord, and there is nothing in the New Testament, we see that ordains that. Folks, there are well meaning but very naïve believers and make-believers being led by pastors and charlatans ignorant of the Word of God or disobedient to it, who are doing everything but what they are called to do, which is preach the Word.

The only authority we have is to preach the Word. And that is what God has ordained, and John the Baptist, if you look at his ministry, he preached the Word of God. That is how God has ordained in the New Testament His Word comes forth. Back to Matthew 3:1, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea...." John was continually, habitually preaching in the wilderness of Judea. Well where is the wilderness of Judea? We all know where it is right? I did not know where it was; as I looked in the map, it is a little bit east of Jerusalem. This wilderness borders the Dead Sea and part of the Jordan River. So the wilderness is to the east of Jerusalem, bordering the Dead Sea there and the Jordan River. And I find it quite interesting that John is preaching in the wilderness. Because when I went to seminary, I was taught to do the marketing to find where the most people are so that we can win the most. And God in His sovereignty had John preaching in the wilderness, a marketing strategy that no one would have this time.

But why in the wilderness? I am not sure, but I think quite possibly God was symbolizing the spiritual condition of Israel at the time. He is coming to a barren nation that is unbelieving, that would ultimately

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

reject Him, they are in a spiritual wilderness; and John is a voice, one voice in the wilderness, in this wilderness of unbelief. I think it is quite possibly what he is pointing to.

So the method is preaching, but what is the message here? I believe we will see it is one of preparing the heart for the King through repentance. Matthew 3:1, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" [Matthew 3:1-2] Here is the message, one word: repent. It is a message that is so simple, yet so avoided by so many these days. Repent. I say it is simple, but maybe some of you are saying, "Well, I have some questions concerning repentance. I am not really sure what repentance is." If you will notice on your outlines here, I have put a few questions that I want to briefly answer with the Word of God concerning repentance, because it is a very important concept. It is the one word sermon that John gives, "Repent," and here is why.

But first of all what is repentance? Well the Greek word translated repent here is the Greek word *metanoia*. *Meta*, "after." *Noia*, speaking of "mind" or "receiving." After perceiving, after thinking, a redirection of thinking. Some say it would be a change of mind. And we have it's Old Testament equivalent, which is *shuwb*, it speaks of a turning. Now in the Old Testament we see this idea of repentance throughout, where the Jews were commanded to repent and turn from their wicked ways. The Lord commands Israel to repent in Ezekiel 14:6, to repent and turn. We see a command in Ezekiel 18 that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. If you died in your sins God does not say, "Ah hah! You died in your sins!" He takes no pleasure in that. Ezekiel 18:23, ²³ **"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked?" declares the Lord God, "rather than they should turn (that word repent) from his ways and live? [Ezekiel 18:23]** Ezekiel 18:32, ³² **"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore repent and live." [Ezekiel 18:32]**

Now I think we are going to see that repentance can be seen in two aspects. It is a change of mind but in Scripture a change of mind always relates to a change of behavior. There are those who would say it is just changing your mind. Well if you truly changed your mind, you are not going to continue the way you were going. If you changed your mind, you are going to change your direction, and we will see that. So repentance can be seen, I believe, in Scripture in two aspects, a turning from and a turning to.

So first of all what does the mind change from or turn from? In Ezekiel it was turning from sin. And I believe that is what we see in Scripture in the New Testament. Many passages reveal that repentance is from sin. For example Jesus reveals that He has called sinners, not the righteous, to repentance. Luke 5:32, ³² **"I have not come to call the righteous (or self-righteous), but sinners to repentance." [Luke 5:32]** Sinners understand their problem, which is sin; the self-righteous do not understand their problem because they think they are righteous. Sinners understand their problem. Jesus makes it clear, it is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick, or really, those who realize they are sick. "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." They are sinners that are called to repentance. In the book of Acts we see Peter tell unsaved Simon that he needed to repent from his sins. Acts 8:22, Peter tells him to repent of his wickedness, ²² **"...of this wickedness of yours and pray the Lord that if possible, the intent of your heart would be forgiven you." [Acts 8:22]** "You are a wicked

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

man Simon; you need to repent.” And we see in the book of Hebrews that the foundational elementary teaching for believers concerns repentance. Hebrews 6:1, ¹ **Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God. [Hebrews 6:1]** It is repentance from sin, these dead works, repentance from sin.

Moreover, in Paul’s defense before king Agrippa, he points out that repentance is also a turning towards God. There is a “to” side to repentance, there is a “from” side. But before that I want to share a couple passages too that also point out the fact that repentance is from sin. We have been going through the book of Revelation and we saw in our Wednesday night study, that Jesus makes it clear that repentance is from sin as He calls upon Jezebel, the prophetess at that time, to repent. Revelation 2:20,

²⁰ **“But I have this against you (He is speaking to the church), that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent (and here it is) of her immorality.”[Revelation 2:20-21]**

It is repentance from sin. Repentance from sin.

So we turn from sin, but what is repentance “to”? We will see in Scripture I believe that repentance is a turning from sin to God. Here are a couple things in Scripture that validate this. We see in Mark 1:15 that repentance is declared by John, “...repent and believe in the Gospel.” Repent and believe in the Gospel, the Gospel concerning Christ. And this faith is in Christ. In Acts 20:21 we see that Paul was faithful, solemnly testifying to the Jews and Greeks of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And moreover in Acts 26:20 as Paul shares again before Agrippa, he points out that repentance is turning towards God. Paul states that he kept declaring both to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem, and then throughout the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate with repentance. We will see this later that true repentance has fruit. True repentance has fruit.

There were Jews who repented and identified with John’s baptism but there was no fruit. The Pharisees came out to be baptized but John called them on their unrepentant hearts as we will see. Lastly I think turning to God in repentance also has an element of giving Him the glory He deserves. Revelation 16:9, we see that sinful man did not repent, so as to give Him glory. Romans 1, they did not honor or glorify God, that is the mindset of the unbeliever, and the unbeliever did not repent so as to give God the glory. So then in a nutshell, repentance has a “to” side, and a “from” side. We repent from sin, to God, and indeed this is what we see in the example of the Thessalonians, in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, ⁹ **For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had (that is Paul and the Word) with you, and how you turned to God from idols... [1 Thessalonians 1:9]** A turning from sin to God, a turning to God from sin.

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

Well with that in mind, who does Scripture say must repent? Who must repent? The Lord Jesus makes it pretty clear, after He rose from the dead in Luke 24. Luke 24:45

⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." [Luke 24:45-47]

This first is proof that the Gospel includes repentance. But is repentance required for salvation? Absolutely. I believe, as we will see, repentance is integral in true faith. To believe in Christ, to turn to Him in faith is to repent and turn from, we will see.

But what about those, and there are many of those, that say, "It is by faith alone." And I am going to qualify that because I believe it is by faith alone, but we need to qualify our terms here. They say it is by faith alone but no repentance is needed. What about those who say repentance is a work? You have got to do a work, therefore it is faith and not by works. I would say to them, and you if you feel this way, "You are terribly misled, and you are acting like Satan, taking clear passages out of context and re-interpreting them."

Repentance is a work, but it is not our work as we will see, it is a work of God. He is the one that brings about repentance; He is the one who causes us to have a change of mind as the Word of God convicts us of sin, and a turning to Him. But what about these people who would say and subtract repentance from faith, using the account of the Philippian jailer? That is the main passage that is used, as the apostle Paul and Silas, as they were beaten, and they were in jail, and they were praising God, and God caused an earthquake, and they were set free and they did not run away. The jailer thought, "Oh boy, I lose a prisoner, I am dead." So he decides to commit suicide, and as he is about to do that Paul tells him to stop, and then he says to them, ^{30b} **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"** ³¹ **And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved; you and your household." [Acts 16:30b-31]**

And some people say "Ah hah, he does not say 'Repent.'" But folks if you read the context, and you read it honestly, the jailer has got a repentant heart, he has got a repentant heart, he has got to believe, he has got to believe in the Savior that Paul and Silas have been singing about and praising Him. So if you are still not convinced, the very same book of Acts declares it very clearly, Acts 17, as the apostle Paul, do you remember what he said to those wise-guys on Mars Hill in Athens? Acts 17:30,

³⁰ "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent (It is pretty clear. All everywhere should repent. Why?), ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." [Acts 17:30-31]

God declares to you to repent because there is a judgment, and you will stand before Him, and if you are in your sins you will be eternally judged for your sin, and God is saying because He is going to judge

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

you, He is saying "Repent" because He is a gracious God. Repent, He is declaring to all men everywhere. So who must repent? Everyone, everyone.

Well what is it that brings about repentance? "I am going to try to repent, I am going to just try to repent, I am going to try, I am going to try, I am going to try." What brings about repentance? Scripture reveals that God brings about repentance. 2 Timothy 2:24, I want to share this. It is a wonderful passage, Paul says,

²⁴ And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome (Do not argue.), but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth [2 Timothy 2:24-25]

God grants repentance. In Romans 2 it is the apostle Paul who reminds the religious person, specifically the unsaved Jew, that it is God's kindness that leads you to repentance. Romans 2:4, ***⁴ Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? [Romans 2:4]*** God is a king God, and His kindness leads you to repentance.

Well, what else do we see? Moreover Scripture reveals it is through the Word of God that brings about saving faith which includes repentance. It is all tied up together. Do not forget that we were born again through the living and abiding Word of God, 1 Peter. God brought us forth by the Word of truth, James 1. And do you remember in Paul's fourth letter, 2 Corinthians (It is the fourth letter he wrote, but 2 Corinthians, we only have two) that he wrote to them concerning their sin, and God used His Word to bring about sorrow, which lead to repentance. Paul wrote to them about their sin, and they were made sorrowful about it. Second Corinthians 7:8,

⁸ For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it-- for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-- ⁹ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. [2 Corinthians 7:8-10]

There are many people sorrowful over the consequences of their sin, which produces death. But God when He convicts with His Word brings about sorrow, which leads to repentance. A turning from sin, to God.

And throughout Scripture we see it is through the Word of God that sinners are called to repentance. Matthew 12:41, Luke 11:32, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19. All true human repentance finds its beginning in God, and God uses His Word to convict a heart to bring about godly sorrow, according to His will that produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation. And I want to ask you, feeling unrepentant

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

today? Get into the Word of God, see what God says, what God says about you and your future in light of what He has done in Christ. See what God says concerning what He will do in judging sin. Look at what God says is true.

With this in mind, a few more things before we get back to our passage. What happens when God leads us to repentance? What happens when He does this? The result is the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:4, ⁴ **John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. [Mark 1:4]** Acts 2:38, ³⁸ **And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." [Acts 2:38]** Or you could literally translate it this way, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized, because of the forgiveness of sins." Repent, you are forgiven, get baptized. Luke 24, which I shared already earlier, that the Lord Jesus declared that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed throughout the earth.

Acts 3:18,

¹⁸ **"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (Christ has died, and suffered). ¹⁹ "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." [Acts 3:18-19]**

What a wonderful passage, when you are forgiven you are refreshed, you are in the presence of the Lord, God with us, Immanuel. If you repent of your sins today, you will be forgiven. If you change your mind concerning your sin against God, because right now, if you do not know the Lord, you do not really believe that your sins, that you are going to be held accountable for it. Or you do not even believe that it is that bad. In God's Word it is clear that you have sinned against Him, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. At a minimum you give God no glory. If you turn to Christ from sin for salvation, He will forgive your sins. And guess what? If you repent, the angels in heaven rejoice. The Lord said there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Heaven rejoices when God's will is brought about through His Word, and those who He has called unto Himself, when they receive Him, when one sinner repents, heaven rejoices.

I want to ask you, are your sins forgiven? Have you obeyed God's command to you to repent? What will happen if you do not repent? What happens if you dig your heels in, and you say "Not doing it"? In Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus made it clear that the unrepentant cities would face judgment and Hades. In Luke 13:3, Jesus says "I tell you, no, but unless you repent you will likewise perish." Unless you repent, and he says it is so important that He says later unless you repent, you will likewise perish. And some of you are familiar with the story of the rich man and Lazarus that Jesus tells in Luke 16. Let's turn there for a second. You see because this story shows us that the man in Hades who is being punished temporarily awaiting eternal punishment realizes what he should have done, which he did not do.

Luke 16:19-31 ¹⁹ **"Now there was a certain rich man (notice he is nameless), and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day (had a great life). ²⁰ And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with**

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

sores, ²¹ and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. ²² Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. (So the rich man died, body goes in the grave right? But yet verse 23) ²³ And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, (and God is warning you right now, so you will repent) and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you (Get that, "us and you," that is God and him.) there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house-- ²⁸ for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them (Or "admonish them" is really the term.), lest they also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them (They have the Word of God.)' ³⁰ "But he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will (What does it say?) repent!' (The rich man in Hades understood what he had not done, he had not repented.).³¹ But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.' [Luke 16:19-31]

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Folks, unfortunately in many churches these days, repentance is almost a dirty word. I rarely ever hear a Gospel which includes repentance. I am always hearing "Receive Jesus, accept Jesus, receive Jesus, accept Jesus." That is true, but it has to be in the context of repenting, and receiving Him as Lord. I rarely ever hear that unless you repent you likewise will perish. I rarely ever here that God is now declaring to all, everywhere, that they should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness. In the last century Henry Ironside writes, because there is nothing new under the sun, he wrote this concerning repentance: "...such a ministry is needed greatly today, when men have lost, in large measure, a sense of the sinfulness of sin... (he continues) It is useless to preach the gospel of the grace of God to men who have no realization of their need of that grace." And folks, what we are going to see is that John is preparing the way for the grace of God and truth in Christ. Repentance prepares the way to receive Christ.

Last question here, why should we repent? Now if I have to answer this question, you have not been listening. God is commanding and declaring that all should repent because He is going to judge. And he is a gracious God. Why should we repent? Because it is one element in which we receive forgiveness of sins. When we repent, recognizing our sin, it prepares the way for us to turn to the only means of salvation, Jesus Christ. And that is where we see the reason now for John's repentance. Back to Matthew 3:1, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ²

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [Matthew 3:1-2] Repent because the King is at hand, this is the King who will judge you for your sins. It is the righteous and the Holy One who was disowned by the same people. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, and for the kingdom to be at hand, the King is at hand.

Now I do not have time, we do not have time today, well we do have time if you want to stay, but we do not have time, at least in our time today, to expand on the concept of the kingdom of heaven, because we are going to see that throughout the book of Matthew. The book of Matthew expands throughout, giving us the teaching of the kingdom. What I just want to share about it is the kingdom is ultimately pointing to the King, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, the King is at hand. The Word means literally "draws near," the King draws near. Repent, repent. Because Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews came onto the scene taking human flesh that He might save His people from their sins because He was now at hand. They were to repent. And as we have seen in Scripture, we are to repent because He will judge.

Now we see after this explanation concerning the kingdom being at hand, this is why you should repent, because the King is at hand, the kingdom is at hand. We see that Matthew actually validates this with an Old Testament prophecy, and we will finish here, verse 3 (Matt. 3:3) " ³ 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!"'" [Matthew 3:3] We have an explanation by Matthew concerning the ministry of John the Baptist. He is quoting Isaiah 40:3, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. It's a voice of one, or literally crying aloud, and he says here, make ready the way of the Lord, and a parallel statement, make His paths straight. Make ready, means literally prepare the way. Prepare the way for the Lord. Term paths means well-traveled roads.

Now John's not saying prepare the roads for the entrance of King Jesus, he is speaking of preparing the hearts for the reception of the King. And folks, there is no way to receive Christ apart from repentance, making crooked paths straight. Let me tell you right now if you do not know Christ you have perverted His paths, your paths are crooked, they are twisted with sin, and there is no way to receive Jesus apart from recognizing you are a sinner, worthy of God's judgment. There is no way to be saved apart from that and turning to Christ in repentance and faith.

Folks, we do not try Jesus, we do not receive Him apart from repentance first. And I exhort you today, if you have raised your hand to a phony, false gospel, that did not declare repentance for the forgiveness of sins, your paths have not be straightened by God yet. Your paths have not become His paths. You must prepare the way for the Lord. Fall down before Him, in your heart of hearts, repent of your sin, and cry out to Christ Jesus to forgive you of your sins.

And as we close, I really believe, this is my view point, I do not see it totally laid out directly in Scripture, but this is my view point: I believe John the Baptist personifies the Law. He in one person is personifying all that the Law does, which reveals sin. John the Baptist is not the one who is the savior, he is not the Christ, he is pointing to the Christ. He personifies the message of the Law, which in short is, "You are a

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

sinner and you need to repent. You do not meet God's standards." The Law does not bring salvation. John the Baptist did not bring salvation; he declared repentance to prepare the way for the King.

And lastly what a beautiful picture Matthew is quoting, if we go, and we will finish up with this, if you would turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 40. What a beautiful picture Matthew is pulling out of Isaiah here inspired by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 40:3, and we are just going to read verses 3-5, but if you read on you will see it is all about the Word of God too. Isaiah 40:3,

³ A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. (God is saying that your sins have corrupted you, your life is perverted, it is all out of balance, clear the way. Then he says, verse 4) ⁴ 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; ⁵ 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]

Come to the Lord today, acknowledge every sin, every one that you know of, every one He has convicted you of. Admit it, repent of it, change your mind concerning your sin, recognize before God He has a right to judge you and you are in a terrible situation. And the only salvation is in Christ. This is the preparation for receiving Christ, and this is why John came.

So then, what do we do to receive Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior? First of all, the way must be prepared by God through repentance; and that is all together, repentance and faith are all in one, it is all a work of God, it is a turning from sin to God for salvation. Has the road of your heart ever been truly prepared, have you recognized because of God's Word, your ways are crooked? Have you acknowledged to Him your sin, and repented of it? Have you done this? If not, you have never been saved from your sin. Jesus said repentance for the forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed throughout the earth.

Well what about us believers, how does it apply to us? Brothers and sisters, have you bought into or tolerated like the woman Jezebel, a false gospel that does not include repentance? Have you bought into or tolerated churches and ministries that do not call sinners to repentance? Evil churches. What about us personally? Does our Gospel include repentance? Have you ever told anyone that their heart needs to be prepared by the Word of God, that they are sinful? That their hearts are crooked, that they need to be convicted of their sin before they can call out to the Lord to save them? What a wonderful passage we had today. And in the prophecy in Luke 1 we saw that John the Baptist would bring joy. And there is wonderful joy when you truly repent and are washed of your sins. Let's pray.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You so much for Your Word. I pray we would clearly see what You have laid forth in Your Word, that the road of our hearts needs to be prepared, to recognize Your Son Jesus. That we need

Matthew 3:1-3

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/17/2009

to acknowledge our sin, that we need to turn to You from sin. That we need to confess our sins. Lord, I pray people today would confess their sins to You, that they would repent, that they would be convicted, that the consequences You have clearly laid forth, that they have not given You glory, and repent before it is too late. Thank You that Your Son Jesus voluntarily came, lived the perfect life, died for our sins in His body on the cross, that we may be cleansed and washed. Thank You for Your Word now. We praise You for Your Son Jesus, and it is in His name we pray. Amen.

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