

# *Matthew 3:4-10*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009*

## **Preparing the way for the King: Warning the hypocrites**

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, just thank You so much for Your grace and Your mercy towards us. Father we praise You that You sent Your Son to die for us. And we praise You that we can boldly come before His throne and receive grace and find mercy in time if need. Thank You that it is sweet to trust in You Son, that He is faithful, that He righteous, that He is just, that He is kind, He is merciful, that He fully reveals Your character, that He has explained You. Father we praise You for Your Son Jesus. Thank You that You have also given us Your Word that we might know Him better, we might know You better. As Your Son said "This is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the one and only true God and Your Son whom Though has sent". My prayer intent today is not to gather knowledge about theology or concepts but our intent would be to know You better. That You would use You Word to pierce our hearts, to draw us unto Yourself. I pray for those who aren't saved, that You would pierce their hearts, and in their heart of hearts before You they would be saying "What must I do to be saved?". And I pray for those of us You have graciously brought into Your family, that we would be desiring to know Christ better. So Lord I ask You to bless your Word as it goes out. May it bring You glory and honor now, in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Sermon**

There are many false religions. There are many false Christs. There are many false gospels being proclaimed. And we see it all the time, we unfortunately these days in churches that used to be like us, and evangelical churches we see gospels aimed at the needs of man rather than man's need being a sinner in need of salvation. Now with these false gospels are false converts. And we see the truth of scripture, that this would happen. But in spite of these false gospels the true gospel is being proclaimed, and people by God's grace and mercy are being saved. But unfortunately in the context of the true gospel being proclaimed, there are always those who accepted externally but to know accept it internally. They accept a gospel for a time, and outwardly conform, but yet over time their deeds prove that it was not a genuine conversion, but a false hypocritical conversion.

And this leads us to what we're going to see today, I believe, in which we're going to see how we are to truly receive the King, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we continue our look at the ministry of John the Baptist, from Matthew chapter 3, where he is preparing the way for King Jesus and His Kingdom. And today specifically we're going to see a warning for the hypocrites. So would you turn in your bibles with me to Matthew chapter 3, and we are going through the book of Matthew and the book of Matthew is about

# Matthew 3:4-10

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King Jesus, it is about Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. It is about Jesus Christ coming to His own. We saw in the first chapter of the book of Matthew that the genealogy of Jesus Christ proved that He was rightfully the King. That He is rightfully the King of the Jews. We also saw in chapter 1 the birth of Jesus Christ. We saw that Joseph had a dilemma, that Mary was found to be with child, but the scripture says she was with child by the Holy Spirit, and Joseph righteously desired to put her away secretly, but the Lord intervened in a dream, and told Joseph to take her as his wife. And the reason why is because He would be taking on human flesh to save His people from their sins. He is the Lord who saves. He is the one who broke the sin barrier between God and man. It is because of the forgiveness of sins that we can have a relationship with the living God.

And then we turned to chapter 2 in which we saw three different responses to the birth of King Jesus. We saw the joyful worship of the magi, we saw the fearful agitation of the Jews, and we saw the murderous hate of king Herod. Now with the Jews it was totally opposite from what we would expect, we would expected the Jews to say "the Messiah's been born, let's go see Him, let's go worship Him!". But because of their unbelief, we see it laid out in Herod's life also, as King Jesus got in the way of him being king, and he went ultimately to try and destroy the King. But God protected Jesus as a child.

Now we also saw in chapter 2 three prophecies fulfilled in Christ. First of all that Christ is the one who fulfills the redemptive promises of God, which were foreshadowed in Israel coming out of Egypt. Secondly we saw that Christ is the only hope, He is the only true eternal hope, in the midst of sin and despair and evil and weeping, Christ is the only hope. And lastly we saw this same Jesus being called one from Nazareth, He would be despised and forsaken, and mankind would ultimately crucify Him. But in that God would bring about sovereignly the forgiveness of sins because Jesus is the Lord, He is salvation.

And that brings us to our passage today in which we look at the book of Matthew chapter 3, and we're going to review what we saw last week in how we are to receive the King. And first of all we need to remember that God prepares the heart to receive Jesus through repentance. Matthew 3, let's look at verse 1, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." <sup>3</sup> 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!'"

Now since we're going to be looking at John the Baptist today I want to briefly review what we saw last week, not as in depth as we did but I want to share a little bit about John the Baptist. First of all what do we know about him? We know he is not John the apostle, he is not the one who wrote 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, the Gospel of John and Revelation. He is not the same John. We know here in this text he is called "John the Baptist, the one who baptizes". It is interesting to note that John the Baptist is spoken of in every Gospel. Now in the Gospel of Luke we have the most concerning John the Baptist and we looked at that more last week, but Luke records the proclamation from the angel to Zechariah concerning his elderly wife who was barren, who would bear a son. The announcement we see is that John would be special from the beginning, that he would prepare the way for Christ.

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

And if you remember Zechariah's wonderful prophecy concerning John on the eighth day when his tongue was loosed, because of his unbelief it was tied, on the eighth day when he names John. Luke 1:67, let's turn there actually, and then we'll move to our passage.

Luke 1:67 <sup>67</sup> And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: <sup>68</sup> "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, <sup>69</sup> And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant-- <sup>70</sup> As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old-- <sup>71</sup> Salvation from our enemies, And from the hand of all who hate us; <sup>72</sup> To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, <sup>74</sup> To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, <sup>75</sup> In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. <sup>76</sup> "And you, child (this is speaking of John), will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; <sup>77</sup> To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, <sup>79</sup> To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." <sup>80</sup> 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."

John was special from the beginning. From his miraculous conception being filled with the Spirit while in the womb, John was destined to prepare the way for the Christ. And if you remember last week we saw John the Baptist's ministry, we saw first of all his method, verse 1 "And now in those days (thirty years has passed since Christ was a babe, He's around 30 years old, John is around 30) John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying," And we saw last week the method of John the Baptist was preaching. We saw the verbal heralding of God's truth, that is what God ordained to bring forth the message. And we saw he was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, that area which is east of Jerusalem, bordering the Dead Sea, and up in lower portion of the Jordan river, a wilderness area. And we'll look at this today, last week we looked at the question "Why was John in the wilderness, why did John not just make the trip to Jerusalem? And we saw it's quite possible that John preaching in the wilderness represented Israel's spiritually lost wilderness condition, certainly possible in that.

So then we saw John's method was preaching, but what was his message? He says, verse 2, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". Now we spent a lot of time looking last week at repentance, and we're going to see it today, so I'm not going to go through everything concerning repentance, and if you have questions about that, we have a lot on the cd from last week. But I am just going to give an overview of repentance. Let me summarize it right now, first of all repentance is a true change of mind which would be accompanied by a change of behavior. Biblical repentance is a turning from sin, to God. And remember we saw last week that God is declaring that all men everywhere should repent. Acts 17 when Paul was talking to those Athenians, Acts 17:30 <sup>30</sup> "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> 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."

# Matthew 3:4-10

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Because there is a judgment for sin, because God is a righteous God, God in His grace and mercy is declaring to all men everywhere that they must repent. And we saw that repentance is a mandatory element, it is part of faith, repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin, it's not a work, it's something God does in us. Luke 24, Jesus declared that repentance for the forgiveness of sin should be declared in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:46). And we saw from scripture that it is the Lord God who leads us to repentance. It is God who does this. Romans 2, it is His loving-kindness that leads us to repentance. 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:25, it is God who grants repentance. And if you'll remember we saw through scripture it is through the Word of God we are exhorted to repent. And don't forget that we were born again through a living and abiding Word God, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1.

That He brought us forth by the Word of truth, James 1. And it was also through the Word of God by Paul's letter to the Corinthians that God accomplished His will, bringing about a sorrow that led to repentance. This is such a great passage. Let's turn there right now to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7. And we're going to look at verses 8-10. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7:8-10, " <sup>8</sup> For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, (it's the apostle Paul who wrote them a letter concerning their sin, and it cause them sorrow) I do not regret it; though I did regret it-- *for* I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-- <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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."

You know there's a lot of people that are sorry for their sins, are sorry for the consequences of their sins, but the results of that are death. But when God through His Spirit by His Word convicts the heart, and we were genuinely sorrowful over our sin, it leads to repentance, without regret. It leads to a change of mind concerning my sin, and thus concerning my relationship with the living God. I recognize these things are wrong, I can't stop them within myself, but I know I go to the God who can help me stop. I turn to the living God from sin. And folks all human repentance finds its beginnings in God, God is the one who convicts the heart to kindly bring about Godly sorrow of sin which leads to repentance. And we also saw that when one sinner repents, trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we saw angels rejoice in Heaven, and the sinner is forgiven.

But we also looked at last week what happens when we do not repent. The Lord Jesus Christ made this point clear in Luke 13:3 "I tell you no, but unless you repent, you all will likewise perish". And last week we saw the reason why from our passage back in Matthew why John was saying repent. Back in Matthew 3:2, repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand, the kingdom of Heaven is at hand, the King is at hand, the King and His kingdom are at hand, Christ the judge, the King is at hand. Therefore repent because the Lord God, the Son of God took on human flesh, and had now come to His people Israel, He was at hand, they were to repent for the King was at hand.

And then there was an explanation in verse 3, from Isaiah 40, for this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, calling out in a dead land. Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. John was not speaking of preparing physical roads for the Messiah to

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

come into Jerusalem, he was speaking of making a heart ready through repentance. Make a heart ready, and I tell you right now if you don't know Christ you've perverted His paths, your heart is crooked, it is twisted, your ways are not right before God. And the first step we see in receiving Christ is to repent of sin, turning to Him as Savior.

Now it's my view, and I shared this last week, that John the Baptist personifies the Law, that he is the pinnacle of what the Law says, the Law says you are a sinner, and you fall short before God, it reveals sin. It doesn't save us. Christ saves us. But we see ultimately that the Law brought about the knowledge of sin, and that is what John the Baptist was doing, preaching that they should repent. And by the way I think this concept helps us understand Matthew 11 which we're going to look at later, Lord willing in a couple weeks. Matthew 11, I'm going to read this to you, it's concerning John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:11, Jesus says, “<sup>11</sup> Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist; (he's the greatest guy that was ever born Jesus is saying) yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (That's an interesting statement, right?) <sup>12</sup> And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. <sup>13</sup> For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.” You're saying, what does that mean? Why was he the greatest, but yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than John? I think it's because John was the greatest man because he faithfully brought forth the message of the Old Testament until then, the Law and the Prophets. He brought it forth, but God's message does not save. There needs to be a pointing to a Savior, so we now in the kingdom, we have the full Gospel, we have the understanding that we need to repent and trust in Jesus Christ who died for our sins on the cross; therefore we have this understanding, John in that sense is the least compared to those who have the full Gospel.

So then how are we to receive the King? God prepares the way through the preaching of repentance through His Word. And now we come to our passage today in which we're going to look at verses 4-10, and we're going to see once we hear the message, we need to respond rightly to His Word. Matthew 3:4, “<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; <sup>6</sup> and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.”

First of all we have a description of John's manner, which is really very odd to us right? A very rough garment, not smooth, made of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was quite rough also. We see locusts and wild honey, but I've never eaten locusts before with honey flavoring but that was his diet, locusts and wild honey. But my question is why does Matthew inspired by the Holy Spirit reveal this element concerning John? Why was he dressed this way? Why did Matthew share this? I think it goes along with the fact that he was preaching in the wilderness, he had very simple and rough clothes, and a diet that certainly could have been a visible condemnation of what Israel perceived their religious leaders should be like. At that time the religious leaders were hypocritical and they were dressed elegantly, and they ate the best.

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

Consider Jesus's rebuke in Luke 7:25 "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing (the implication, no he wasn't in fine clothes). Behold those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet, yes I say to you, and one who was more than a prophet, this is the one about whom it is written, "Behold I send my messenger before Your face, who will prepare You way before You". And I say to you of those born of women there is no one greater than John, yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And when all the people and the tax gatherers heard this they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John." (God's justice, You(?God?) have a right to judge, we need to repent of our sins). But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. To what then should I compare the men of this generation? And what are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another and say "we played the flute for you, but you did not dance.....through verse 33.

I think there was a rebuke in the clothing and the food of John the Baptist on the lifestyle of these hypocritical Pharisees. Now with that in mind, are we to go out and buy a camel's hair coat, and belts and say "well, we should do the locusts diet, the nutrition people have said it actually is very good for you" is that what we should do because it's in the Word of God? Folks, God does not command us to live in shabby garments and eat bugs and live in the desert. And I think those who do not have Christ who hold on the externals, try to follow those things apart from the intent of what God had in His Word. I think it was simply a condemnation of those, they were coming out to see someone in soft clothes, they thought he would be a grand prophet, but he was this guy in the wilderness dressed in shabby clothes and eating bugs.

So with this in mind, what was the response of the people, verse 5, back in Matthew 3, " <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; <sup>6</sup> and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins". Pretty clear, people were coming out to John the Baptist and they were confessing sin, and they were being baptized by him. And I shared last week, a lot about baptism, we'll see some next week. But first of all, if you remember we saw John's baptism, it was a baptism in water, for repentance, and we looked in depth at the concept of baptism. That word baptize, or *baptizo*, means to place, or dip, to place into, to put into water to dip into. And it speaks of in scripture, identification with. It is symbolic, John's baptism was symbolic external action representing something that had happened on the inside. They were identifying if they got baptized that they had confessed and repented of their sins. That's what John the Baptist's baptism was about. And we see that later on, in Matthew 3:11 we see "<sup>11</sup> "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance".

Now John wasn't saying that he baptizes so that people will repent, he was baptizing because they have repented as we see back in our passage, they were confessing their sins. And this term, confessing back in verse 6, *exomutlogo* (?) speaks of acknowledging openly, or admitting openly. They were openly saying, man, I've sinned, I have messed up, they were confessing their sins. And folks, this is the center of our understanding of repentance. There is no repentance apart from the acknowledgement of sin before God. Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. So John's baptism was an outward identification with the fact that one had repented. And these people for Jerusalem and Judea were coming out and they were initially outwardly identifying with this repentance. And I want to ask you as we saw last week, have you truly repented? Have you truly repented of your sin? Have you been convicted that you have sinned against a Holy God? We saw in Luke 7, these people recognized God's

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

judgment, they realized God would judge. Have you really repented because you know He will judge you for sin?

The second question was, if you have repented, was it genuine? The initial response of the Jews seems to be genuine, but I question the mass of the Jews, if they really were repentant. We see in scripture some evidence to the contrary, and in a minute we are going to see the comments to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Now we know as we saw a few weeks ago, the Jews at this time were in unbelief, they knew the Word of God, but they were in unbelief. As exemplified by the fact that they delivered up Christ for crucifixion. The apostle John in John 1:11 <sup>11</sup> "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."

Does it turn out that all these people repenting, that they really truly were repenting? We see in scripture most likely most of them weren't. Certainly there were those who did. Do you remember what Jesus said concerning Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37, "'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.'" The Lord's compassionate heart towards sinful man.

We see Jesus's rebuke after the feeding of the 5000, in John 6, where they didn't really want Christ, they wanted the physical stuff, nothing has changed. John 6:35 <sup>35</sup> "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.' <sup>36</sup> "But I said to you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.'" And lastly, we see in John 10 the outright rejection of the Jews of Jesus, John 10:24 <sup>24</sup> "The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.'" <sup>25</sup> "Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me.' <sup>26</sup> "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. <sup>27</sup> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; <sup>28</sup> and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> "I and the Father are one.'" <sup>31</sup> "The Jews took up stones again to stone Him."

They didn't believe. So most likely the repentance of these Jews, at least Matthew isn't pointing at this aspect, but later in other Gospel's we see it, was most likely not genuine. And we will certainly see that as we look at the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And I believe the second part besides receiving the Word is that we need to heed the warning concerning superficial, hypocritical repentance. And we'll see that the truly repentant will bear fruit. And those who don't bear fruit will be judged. Verse 7 of Matthew 3, <sup>7</sup> "But when he (that's John) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; <sup>9</sup> and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup> "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

At this point we have a contrast between the general response of the people coming out to be baptized and confessing their sins, and now we have John seeing the Pharisees and Sadducees coming forth specifically not to repent, not to confess sins, but coming to be baptized. Coming for baptism. We have a contrast here, and our text says "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism". Now before we get into the text here in terms of what John says to them, I want to share a

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

little bit about Pharisees and Sadducees, so that we can have a little background in this. In Israel there were different religious sects. There were two main sects, there were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were the strictest sect, as Paul would share in Acts 26:5 he says he was of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. The term Pharisees meant "separated ones". In scripture we see that Pharisees were religious, self-righteous, legalistic, nationalistic, isolationists on their way to hell. They were not good. The Pharisees hypocritically separated themselves from those they saw as sinners and common Jews. They had taken the Law out of its rightful context, which was to reveal sin and they had hypocritically believed they could keep it apart from a relationship from the living God. A true relationship, and so that they could keep it, they had to add all sorts of laws to the Law, so that they could do what it said. They were extremely prideful, they elevated themselves, they were religious hypocrites holding the external of the Law, keeping others to that yet on the inside breaking the Law.

List to Christ's condemnation of them, if we go twenty chapters ahead in Matthew 23, we see the woes concerning the Pharisees. And in these woes we see a glimpse of their character from the living God who is pronouncing woe upon them. Matthew 23:1 "Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; <sup>3</sup> therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things*, and do not do *them*. <sup>4</sup> "And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger. <sup>5</sup> "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels *of their garments*. <sup>6</sup> "And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, <sup>7</sup> and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi." These guys were full of pride, they were full of pride.

Down to verse 13, there's a whole bunch here, but we're going to skip through, " <sup>13</sup> "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. <sup>14</sup> "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.* <sup>15</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte (that's a convert); and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."

Down to verse 23, " <sup>23</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness;..." It goes down later on, verse 25, " <sup>25</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also". And it just goes on and on and on. And in verse 33 He says "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?" This is not a good group, this is not a good group of people. As I shared before they were religious, self-righteous, legalistic, nationalistic, isolationists on their way to hell.

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

Now what about the Sadducees? Now they were on the opposite end of the religious politically spectrum. They were extremely liberal in their theology. They basically didn't believe in anything but the Law of Moses. And they didn't really hold to that much either. In Paul's defense before the council, we see the Pharisees (Sadducees?) didn't believe in a lot of stuff, and I'll read this for you Acts 23:6-8, Luke recording Paul says " <sup>6</sup> But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" <sup>7</sup> And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided (and here it goes). <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all."

They were really liberal, they didn't believe in resurrection, they didn't believe even in the spiritual sphere, they didn't believe in angels. They were extremely liberal. And there's an old joke that you probably already know, but because the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection they were so sad you see? Right? Ok, that's an old one, you all know that one. Ok, but Sadducees also were quite wealthy. Most likely they were the ones who ran the money changer business in the temple that the Lord came and broke up. They were the ones who were selling animals and making profit on it, they were very wealthy. And the people didn't really like the Sadducees very much because of that.

So then here we have religious leaders coming from Jerusalem most likely, out to the wilderness, Pharisees and Sadducees, legalistic and liberal, the two possible direction that man goes religiously apart from a relationship with the true God. And we see them coming out, and here's John's response " <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, (what does he say to them?) he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?". And I think it's interesting to note they were coming for baptism, they were coming for the outward right, that's why they were coming out. It doesn't talk about confession of sin, repentance, they were coming to do the outward religious symbol. And remember folks, those who are on their way to hell always focus on the external. Baptism, communion, outward acts, rather than an inward heart change by faith in Christ. And this is what the Pharisees and Sadducees were doing also.

Maybe some of you have got into the religious swing of things and got baptized because everyone else was. But your heart was never changed because you didn't repent and trust in Christ. As we will see, you are like the Pharisees and Sadducees, and there is a warning by God for you today from this passage. Verse 7 " <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Wow, that's not too nice. Shouldn't John have said "Wow, I can't wait for you all to get baptized, hop on in". Shouldn't he have accepted everyone? Notice he says, you brood of vipers. The word translated brood is *agrima*(?), it speaks of that which is born, it speaks of produced from, or offspring, and the viper was a very poisonous snake, desert snake, and certainly John would have been familiar with them. Now it was said that they were very dangerous because when these snakes were not moving looked like sticks. And if you'll remember from Acts 28 the apostle Paul when he was on the island of Malta, after he'd been shipwrecked, he was grabbing sticks for a fire and what happened, he got bit by a viper. They

# Matthew 3:4-10

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009*

were very dangerous, because they didn't look like what they seemed to be, they were disguised, and they were very poisonous. And he says you offspring of vipers.

I believe John is calling these Pharisees offspring of vipers to point to the fact that they are of their father the devil, right? Certainly he is the serpent of old, we see that symbolism, and that their religious hypocrisy was poisonous and deadly. And when you become like them, you become twice the son of hell. Jesus uses this term in two other passages to describe the same Pharisees, Matthew 12:34, I'll read it for you "You brood of vipers, how can you being evil speak what is good, for the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart". Back in Matthew 23:33 which we read a little while ago "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?"

Folks all throughout scripture God's servants call the enemies of the cross what they really are. False teachers, false professors are unmasked throughout scripture in continual warnings for our benefit, and for theirs by a gracious God. Notice what else he says, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? We're going to see this in a minute, but there is a wrath to come, God is going to pour out His wrath on sin and sinners, those who have rejected the provision in Jesus Christ. He says, who warned you? Now I believe this statement is in keeping with the viper figure, for example, when a farmer would have a brush fire at this time they would burn the brush and what would come out of the brush that's burning? Serpents and animals would come scurrying out of the heat. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Now is John saying these Pharisees were actually concerned about God's wrath, and doing the right thing? I don't think so. Otherwise he wouldn't have called them a brood of vipers. What I think he's saying here, I think he's being sarcastic. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? I think John's calling them on their phony-bologna outward actions. Performing religious rituals without a heart change. And maybe some of you, maybe doing the same thing, going to church, getting baptized, taking communion, doing all these things to protect you from God's wrath in your own thinking. God is a gracious God to warn you that you are still a child of Satan rather than a child of God, you are in the domain of darkness. There are two places that we are, we are either in darkness under his domain, or we are transferred from their by faith in Christ into the kingdom of His beloved Son. These were brood of vipers.

So then what should you do? What does John say you should do? There's an exhortation and a warning, bear fruit, not relying on ritual or your affiliation or you'll be judged. Verse 8, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; <sup>9</sup> and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves (that's inside), 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." Here's the exhortation, therefore, if you're truly repentant, if you're not doing this for an outward show, therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. Bring forth, literally means do, or make, or accomplish. The production of something. It's a command. Fruit in keeping, or literally worthy, the term we have in scripture worthy art thou, worthy of repentance, worthy of repentance. If you truly repented of your sin, it will be manifest in your actions. I'm not saying we're not tempted, I'm not saying that we don't sin, I'm saying that if we've truly repented we will have changed lives, and there will be fruit in accordance with repentance. When the heart has been convicted by the Word of God, when there has been a Godly sorrow for sin, it leads to a turning from that sin unto God which by nature, His

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

nature now because you're in Christ will produce fruit. And I tell you right now if you've repented of your sins and nothing has changed in your life, nothing, I would question whether you're saved or not. And I would say you are on the precipice of judgment. If you've outwardly repented of your sins, yet never desired to do what is right, you've not truly repented of your sins, your mind is truly not changed.

Well what then is the evidence of true repentance here? He says therefore, bring forth fruit in keeping with their repentance. Folks, when the homosexual does come to faith in Christ, they will turn from that sin, I'm not saying they're not going to be tempted, they're going to turn, they're going to recognize God has a right to judge me for this and I need to be forgiven. When the thief comes to Christ, he will turn from that sin, he will recognize it is wrong, God has a right to judge me, Lord God I need you to deliver me from this sin, I can't do it. The idolater who comes to Christ will turn from that sin, therefore bring forth fruit in keeping or worthy of repentance. And I believe he's saying religious rituals don't bring fruit, it's not the dunking in the tank that brings forth the fruit, it's true repentance. Worthy of repentance, he doesn't say bring forth fruit worthy of baptism, it's one thing in a ritualistic manner to confess your sins, it's another to truly confess and turn from it. True repentance will bear fruit.

And this was Paul's message from the beginning. Turn to Acts 26, and I want to share this passage with you as he is before king Agrippa, in verse 19. From the beginning of the ministry of Paul, from the beginning of his conversion to Christ, he received a heavenly vision of Christ, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? Paul didn't know who it was, who art thou Lord? He didn't know who it was, he didn't know Jesus. Jesus identifies Himself, Paul believes, and we see Paul's testimony before king Agrippa. Acts 26:19, " <sup>19</sup> "Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, <sup>20</sup> but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

There should be fruit in your life. James says (James 2:14), " <sup>14</sup> What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" You say I trust in Jesus Christ, I believed in Him for salvation, and your life shows nothing of that, can that type of faith save you? Perform deeds. And the only way you can have fruit is to be abiding in Christ, it is an evidence of Him working through you. Some of you are saying I still don't understand. What might an evidence of saving faith look like? Well in our parallel passage in the book of Luke, actually we see the same question, these people, he's saying repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, there are people who are going to ask questions of John the Baptist, well what do I do?

Luke 3:8, " <sup>8</sup> "Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup> "And also the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." <sup>10</sup> And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" <sup>11</sup> And he would answer and say to them, "Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise." <sup>12</sup> And *some* tax-gatherers also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" <sup>13</sup> And

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." <sup>14</sup> And *some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about* us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages."

John's answer inspired by the Holy Spirit was directed at each area of those people's sins. Each group sinned in those areas, that was their area of sin, and he directed it back. What shall you do? There shall be a change in your life. So then Pharisee want to get baptized, Sadducee you want to get baptized, outwardly identifying with repentance, then your life must bring forth fruit as an evidence. Rituals do not save. So then rituals do not save us from the wrath to come, but religious affiliations do not save you either. Look at verse 9, <sup>9</sup> and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

Notice the heart of the unrepentant Pharisee and Sadducee, they're saying to themselves, we have Abraham as our father. That's what they trust in. What did that mean? That meant because I am a Jew I am saved. Because I am in Abraham, that's why they believed they were saved, and he says, do not say that. John knew exactly what they were trusting in. Do not say that. Religious affiliations do not save. They thought because they were God's people, externally and racially that they were saved, and so they therefore just needed to go through the religious motions. Friend, because you grew up in a Christian home doesn't mean you were saved. Just because you raised your hand one day, but if you've never turned from your sin doesn't mean you're saved. Just because you take communion doesn't mean you're saved. Just because you do good in your own eyes doesn't mean you are saved. Just because you might be a catholic, protestant, or whatever you call yourself, that doesn't mean you are saved.

Do not say to yourself, we have Abraham as our father. It's my heritage, that is bringing me salvation. Notice what he says here, (middle of verse 9) "for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." What does that mean? You Pharisees trust in your heritage, but God is the one who takes those dead to Him, those like stones and raises them up and makes them like children. It is the dead that God raises and brings to life, spiritually dead. You think you are saved because of your heritage, but it is God who saves, God does that. God grants repentance, God saves. We're not saved through rituals or affiliations. My heart always breaks whenever I say, when did you get saved, and they say, well I was raised in a Christian home. And my heart just sinks. That's not the right answer, that's not the right answer. Do not suppose you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham for our father.

And with this exhortation John the Baptist graciously gives a warning for them. It says in verse 10, <sup>10</sup> "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire". It's a pretty clear warning, it's pretty stark. No fruit, God will cut you down, and throw you into the fire. Why? Because no fruit is an evidence that you have not repented of your sins, and you are not saved. And the unsaved are on the precipice of judgment. And I want to ask you, does your life bear fruit of a relationship with Christ, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, kindness, self-control? Does your life bear forth the fruit of a relationship with Christ? And the ax is already laid at the root of the trees, it's about ready to get cut down.

# Matthew 3:4-10

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009

And notice he uses a qualifier; he says every tree that therefore does not bear good fruit, good fruit. What did Jesus say concerning the prophets and false professors and make believers in Matthew 7, turn up just a couple pages to Matthew 7, Matthew 7:13 “<sup>13</sup> “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it.” There is a narrow gate, in scripture we know it is through Christ. And the gate is wide, otherwise that people think they might be saved, but leads to destruction. Verse 14 “<sup>14</sup> “For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.” (There are very, very few true believers, few.) Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, they’re bad guys, they’re wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing. But inwardly, it’s on the inside, you can’t see it, you can’t see it, but God warns us, inwardly they are ravenous wolves. I always hear, but they’re so nice, my pastor is so nice, but I hear the ungodly things they preach and do, and I say God says something different about their insides.

(Cont. Matthew 7:16) “<sup>16</sup> “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes*, nor figs from thistles, are they? <sup>17</sup> “Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. (If you’re a good tree, you’re going to produce fruit. If you’re a bad tree, you’re going to produce bad fruit. The ax is at the base of the tree.) “<sup>19</sup> “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> “So then, you will know them by their fruits. <sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (Where’s His will? It’s in His Word, and how are we enabled to do His will? It’s His Spirit empowering us to obey the Word of God. He says...) <sup>22</sup> “Many will say to Me on that day (it’s the day of judgment), ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? (We did so much ministry in Your name Lord)’ <sup>23</sup> “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ ”. Bad fruit.

What about Luke 6:46? Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say, Jesus says, no fruit. He says, they will be cut down and be thrown into the fire. And we’ll finish here, the fire relates to judgment. It’s not hard to understand that. Matthew 23:33 we saw that earlier, “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?”

Hebrews 10:23, a discourse on the fact that we should be changed in Christ, but if we’re not, something’s wrong, and there’s judgment awaiting. Hebrews 10:23 “<sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. <sup>26</sup> For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” He says later on, it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. If God sent His Son, and He did, to die for you, the living God, the Son He paid the penalty for your sins, and you reject this, God righteously in His holy judgment will send you to eternal punishment forever. If there’s no fruit in your life, the ax is at the tree, the tree appears to be what it is, but it’s not. If your life has not been changed, as evidenced by a true relationship with Christ, fruit being born in that, if He’s not living out

# *Matthew 3:4-10*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009*

His Word in your life resulting in obedience I would ask you to examine yourself to see if you're in the faith. The ax is at the root of the tree.

If you're not saved here, you should be shuddering in your seat because God is a righteous judge, and He will hold you to account for everything you have done, and He will punish you eternally to separate you from Him and from the righteous forever, if you reject Christ. And God is so gracious, He gave His Son Jesus Christ, the penalty that you must pay, Jesus Christ paid, He went to the cross, He paid the full penalty for your sins. Everything God requires of you for your sin, Jesus Christ paid for on the cross. And if you reject that, as evidenced by no fruit, you're going to be cut and thrown into hell because of your sins. It's a warning, don't play church, don't be a Pharisee or a Sadducee, and come out and do the externals, coming to church and doing this and that, and baptize or whatever it is, don't play church. It's a warning against hypocritical outward confession with no inward change.

So then we've seen today the response of the Jews who came out to repent, confessing their sins, being baptized by John. And then we saw ultimately that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were coming to be baptized, and John calls the spade a spade, you offspring of venomous snakes, who warned you to flee from the judgment and wrath to come? You better bear forth fruit in keeping with repentance; your lives should demonstrate a changed heart, a heart that does not rely on ritual or heritage, but on God through Christ alone to save. If you don't, the ax is at the root of the tree, you outwardly profess to know God, but if you do not bear fruit you will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Well what about you, does your life bear fruit? I'm not saying perfect, if we say we don't have sin we're liars, we do sin, we're tempted, everyone's tempted, does your life bear fruit, a real relationship with Christ, are you convicted of sin, or do you just live your life on your own, never really thinking about God but doing these outward things. Are you convicted of sin, has Christ manifested His life in you? How does it apply to us? Truth is obvious, good trees don't bear bad fruit, bad trees don't bear good fruit. But bad trees pretend to be good trees and they will be cut down. If you're still in your sins your fruit stinks. You are self-righteous and hypocritical and your works do not save, they condemn you.

Secondly, repentance will be manifest in a changed life, you will turn, those sins that you, are engrained in you, what should I do, what should I do? You will turn to God. Lord God I can't stand what I've been doing, it's sinful, you have a right to judge, you must deliver me; Christ, you must.

Lastly, for those of us who believe in Christ, we should be rejoicing. We have been spared from the wrath to come. God's a righteous God, He is God, we're not God. We've been spared through Christ, Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross, He willingly came, He was rejected, He was crucified, He died, He was raised from the dead, He bore our sins, our sins are as far as the east is from the west, He no longer holds us to account for those, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. And if you trust in Him and abide in Him, you will bear forth much fruit in that the Father is glorified. What's your fruit look like? Does it come from a good tree or a bad tree?

# *Matthew 3:4-10*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/24/2009*

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank You for Your Word, You are so gracious to warn us. These are difficult passages, but they are wonderful because You are gracious. No one in this room has an excuse, none of us do. You call upon us to repent, to turn to You from sin, then to trust in the Savior Jesus Christ who will save His people from their sins. You call upon us to do that, You command us to because You will judge, You have fixed a day in which You will judge the world in righteousness through the man Jesus Christ, having furnished proof by raising Him from the dead. Lord I pray for anyone here who is not saved, I pray that they would be saying in their heart of hearts to You “what must I do to be saved?”. And I pray they would turn to You, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. And Lord I pray for those of us who have been saved, from so great a wrath, we know our sin is so awful, we know we are so wicked at times with our thinking, we have been so wicked, yet you have forgiven us, may we rejoice and praise You for the forgiveness of sins. May we give You honor and glory and praise because of Your son Jesus. So Lord we just thank You for Your Word, may it be a convicting influence in our hearts, for those who are saved to praise You, for those who aren't to repent. Thank You now, in Jesus name. Amen.

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