

Day 1

Background:

This passage of the Word of God is from the book written by Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples. Matthew had been a tax collector and was called out of that life to follow Jesus closely with eleven others. This account comes from the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. The man Matthew is describing, John, was actually Jesus' cousin. His father Zechariah had been the high priest chosen to burn incense before the Lord, and while in the room an angel appeared to him, promising him a Son, though he and his wife were already very old. The angel told Zechariah that his son would come before the Messiah and prepare the hearts of the people. Zechariah questioned the angel, and because he did not believe, he was unable to speak until the day came to name the child. When the old man wrote "His name is John," in obedience to what God had commanded him through the angel, his mouth was opened. John grew up to become a prophet.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, as I prepare my heart and open my hands to receive the message you have for me today, I ask that you take away any distractions and clear my mind and heart from anything that is not of you. Amen.

The Word of God:

Matthew 3 New International Version (NIV)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

'Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.'"

4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Discussion:

Can you imagine a job posting for John's position?

WANTED

Prophet to announce the coming of the Messiah!

Must be willing to live in the desert, separated from society.

Salary includes itchy, scratchy clothes and bugs sweetened by honey to eat.

Preach a message that is unpopular with the elite.

If you know a little more about John the Baptist, you would also be aware that he was put to death for speaking out against the immoral behavior of King Herod.

Would any of us readily sign up for this post?

John willingly let go of the physical and emotional comforts most people pursue their whole life. He wasn't socially acceptable. He dressed and ate like the poorest people in society. He did not earn the respect of any of the important people, whether the religious, the royal, or the government. So many of us claim we want to follow Jesus, but we are unwilling to be socially uncomfortable for even a minute. What about physical comforts? I am embarrassed to think of how annoyed I am if I wake up to find I forgot to make sure there was coffee and cream in the house; would I really do without the little things if God called me to that life? It is something to think about. John understood that it's ok to be uncomfortable in this life. He trusted in the character and promises of God.

So what was this unpopular message? It was repentance. Repentance means not just regretting what you did, but turning away from that life. It is a full 180 degree turn. If you were with us during the last series, Rooted, then you are familiar with Psalm 1. Do you remember the directions it gave, to live a life closely connected with God, not standing with this world? If we do that, we will be a tree with deep roots producing a fruitful life. If not, we will be blown away with the wicked. It is amazing how John's message to the people echos the teaching of Psalm 1:

Matthew 3:10-13

“The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

How far are you willing to obey? Is there something God is asking you to do today? Will you obey even if it is humiliating. In our next devotion we will look at Jesus'

Day 2

Background:

In the previous devotion, we looked at John the Baptist. He was preaching a message that prepared people's hearts for encountering Jesus. In the next passage we find Jesus coming to the place where John was baptizing people. John's baptism is different from our baptism today. John baptized into repentance people who confessed sin. The baptism of Jesus is into the death and resurrection of Jesus, who himself has paid for our sins that we confess. When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill us. It is through the baptism of fire, the continual filling of the Holy Spirit, that we have the power to live a life turned away from sin.

The Word of God:

The Baptism of Jesus

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Discussion:

Jesus did not need to be baptized by John as he was without sin. John humbly tried to deflect Jesus' request to be baptized. Yet Jesus insisted that it was the right thing to do. Why?

Jesus was obedient to his Father in everything. By joining the people and receiving this baptism, Jesus was humbling himself to the state of sinful humans. He took on the form of the rabble, the sinners, the outcasts even though he was the very Son of God. The Son of God had already humbled himself to become a man, emptying himself of his own power as God. Now he humbled himself to the state of a sinner and would later die as a criminal, even though he was without sin.

Jesus was placed into the waters of the Jordan River to fulfill all obedience to his Father. What happened after that? We see the whole Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit working together. Jesus comes up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends on him, and the voice of the Father speaks from heaven. The Father is pleased with Jesus.

Application:

Earlier this week we spoke of John's willingness to obey, even though it was uncomfortable and humiliating. Here, we see Jesus display ultimate humility in obedience to God the Father.

In the letter to the Ephesians in the Bible Paul writes these instructions:

Ephesians 5:8-10

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. “

What pleases the Lord is obedience. We hear this in the Father's response to Jesus.

Matthew 3:17

And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Sometimes we like to complicate things, which is probably why Jesus said we must have faith like a child. A child easily believes that Jesus died to pay for their sins, and they are forgiven if they believe. A child also easily understands that the way to please God is to obey.

What is God asking you to do today?