

Week 3

Matthew series: Jesus revealed

Matthew 3: God is with them

Did it ever occur to you that the kingdom of God is not necessarily found in a church? Men have built great cathedrals throughout the centuries. In 70 AD. Rome sacked the Jewish temple of God. Jesus had predicted it's fall, but the religious leaders thought that was ridiculous. These first temples were large, made of stone, and usually the center of town. This model was based off of the Tent of meeting Moses built in the desert. A place for God to dwell. It is traditional for God to be found within a temple of some sort. Is that where you expect to find God?

The Jewish heritage always believed certain traditions. These were engrained into their DNA. One, was that the land was theirs. Second, was that they must rest their bones in that land for redemption day. Thirdly, they believed that the prophet Elijah would return to prepare the way of the Messiah. Jesus made reference to the fig tree and signs of the times. These symbols were important to the Messiah's return. In the Jewish mindset, there was no doubt the *day of the Lord* was coming. Do you think the end of days are near? What would you look for in signs?

I was listening to an NFL show and one of the fun parts is predictions. These men sometimes made funny predictions. One fellow said that he was concerned about the state of the country and believed the Super bowl would not be played in 2017. It was funny. Maybe he was serious. They are scriptures in the Old testament that warn, predict, and point to the fulfilling of God's covenant with the patriarchs of the Bible. God made promises to Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses that he would rescue them and deliver them back to a promised land. Men known in those days as Prophets spoke of a Messiah coming to establish the Godly kingdom. Matthew begins his third chapter with a declaration that the Kingdom is at hand or near.

Who is the guy named John? If you read the extra verses I gave you in this week's study, you will see some of those prophetic verses pave the way of the Lord. This was the hope of the Jewish nation. This group of people had mostly been in captivity all their lives. They had never really owned the land promised to them. The Jewish nation was waiting. Luke has the best account of who John the Baptist is. Matthew is concerned with telling us that prophesy is being fulfilled. It was always believed that Elijah the Prophet would return. Read Malachi 3 in this way. Verse 23 says Elijah is coming back. Then read the whole chapter. It points out that the person Elijah is declaring is coming back too. When John appeared, and spoke of the coming terrible *day of the Lord* the people's ears perked up. Their hearts perked up too. They believed John was Elijah.

It is by no mistake that John comes in the wilderness. The religious rulers wanted a ruler in Jerusalem. They wanted a ruler to seize back control of the holy city from the Romans. In short, they wanted the promise land back. In ancient times, the wilderness could be considered desert, mountains, or a place like a valley. These were the places spirits dwelled. A God is met on a mountain. Satan will be met in the wilderness. A spiritual journey usually involves time in the desert or what we call the wilderness. It is by no mistake that Matthew points to John and Jesus in the wilderness. God is coming.

Finally, we have the baptism of Jesus. I will get into this deeper (below) in the reading questions. Let me give you a little insight because I have been there in Jordan. I took a tour to the baptism place of Jesus. I did not expect so many flies. I did not expect the desert. I did not expect so little water. They say that in Jesus day the Jordan river was a big river. Today it is a stream of sorts. This is literally the border between Israel and Jordan. I stood in the water with guns pointing at me from both sides. In biblical terms this area is a hotbed of spiritual activity from Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses death place, and the threshing floor of Ruth. This was and is a crazy deserted place. A place that spirits probably dwell and wars were fought.

Read Matthew 3. Here are also the extra prophetic verses I mentioned earlier. Daniel 2:44-45, Zechariah 13:4-9, 2 Kings 1:8, Psalm 92:8-15, Isa 41:14-17, Jerimiah 15:7, Psalm 1, Psalm 2:6-8

1. As I stated above, the kingdom of God is not a church. I equally dislike saying that the church is universal. Universal means Catholic. Why I dislike universal is that the church building serves a purpose. People seek God in a church far more than in people. The kingdom though, is a message. It is all the good work a loving God is and wants to do. The kingdom has, is, and will reign. Yet, Jesus appearance here says that this kingdom has arrived on earth for the first time since Eden. The readers got that. Yet, I wonder if they expected a temple (kingdom) of God rather than a man of God.

Matthew 3:1-2 "In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Psalm 9:7-8 "But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, And He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity."

2. There are instances in the Bible where we hit a crossroads or a pinnacle. These verses below remind me of that. Baptism is not a Christian invention. The Jewish nation used this method to symbolize being clean. That is why there were several healing pools in and around Jerusalem.

What is different is the prediction. Men baptized with water but God is the only one who could baptize with the Spirit. Equally, only God cleansed our sins by fire sacrifice. This is a pinnacle change in thought. Jesus says he takes care of the dirt and sin in our lives. Huh? Jesus will be on what is called the white throne judgment. He will judge the lives we lived by the deeds we did. Tested by fire. Only godly deeds will survive. Basically, only things under Spiritual baptism could survive the fire test. Baptism is far deeper than just an act we do.

Matthew 3:11-12 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

1 Corinthians 3:13 “their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.”

3. I would like to step away from Jesus for a second and mention the “Threshing floor.” There are moments when a certain area or place has meaning. The Mount of Olives is where Jesus spoke. It may also be a place where Abraham almost sacrificed his son. The threshing floor is a symbolic area in many scriptures. It is also possibly a place where several events happened. This place mentioned by Matthew is by no mistake. The threshing floor symbolized separation, redemption, sacrifice and purifying. Here are some scriptures that mention this place. Numbers 18:30, Judges 6:37, Ruth 3:3, 2 Sam 24:21, Dan 2:35. This area is a spiritual hotbed.

Matthew 3:13” His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

2 Samuel 24:21 “Then Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” And David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be held back from the people.”

4. There is nothing like seeing the movie Jaws and then experiencing the shark at Universal studios. There is nothing like meeting Micky Mouse at Disneyland for the first time. I have stood in the area of where Jesus was Baptized. That day a dove came over a church roof in the sunlight. It was stunning to me. For thirty years Jesus waited. Why, we don’t know, but here he stood. This whole plan of leaving the heavenly kingdom, becoming a human child, and growing to thirty years old was a journey. Yes, a journey and a gutsy play by God. Why?

In this moment, the plan was set in motion. John baptizes Jesus for two reasons (and many more). One is that Jesus is becoming one of us. He is baptized into the family of man. He drinks from the same Spirit we will. Secondly, Jesus is anointed by the Spirit. This is the beginning of his ministry. It is common to be anointed, sanctioned, and sent off to do the work of the Lord. I believe that is why God affirmed him in that moment.

Matthew 3:16-17 “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him 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, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Genesis 8:11 “When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth.”

What does it mean?

How does a person become a Christian? Maybe you don't want a title that is religious. The other day I talked with a woman who said she believed in a higher power, but refused to name that power. It's safe and easy to say you believe. It's safe to give it no name. People prayed in Roman temples to the unknown God. In many ways the Jewish God is unknown. They give him names to describe him like Yahweh (Lord) or Elohim (God). He told Moses that his name is *I am*.

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan, they gathered stones to commemorate the journey with God. I wonder if John's mention of raising up the stones in this chapter was reminding the people that God is with them still. Either way, these people seemed to still be chasing God. They could not see him in John the Baptist, the land, or Jesus. They want signs, wonders, and victory. Being a follower of this God is about relationship. It's never been about titles or miracles. Many times, in this book you will hear Jesus ask why they cannot see the Father in him. Do we see the Father in you?

Do we expect a dove to come upon us in baptism? In that area a dove was symbolic of so many things. It saved them from a flood. In that area a dove was common. The Spirit might have descended upon Jesus looking like a dove. Either way, the coming of God in a life is symbolic. To be changed, cleaned, and renewed should mean something. I know many alcoholics that celebrate their sobriety day. Do you plan on celebrating the day God's kingdom came down to you?