

The Repentant and the Pharisees

Matthew 3:1-17: *“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ² And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ³ For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁴ And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: ⁹ And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. ¹⁰ And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: ¹² Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. ¹³ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. ¹⁴ But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? ¹⁵ And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. ¹⁶ And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: ¹⁷ And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

I. Verse 7—“When he saw many of the Pharisees”

- A. **Matthew 3:7-8** says, *“⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”*
- B. This is the first mention of the Pharisees in Matthew and as is so often the case in the Bible. This shows fundamental points.
 1. God directs us to see the fundamental.
- C. This is the case with the first mention here of the Pharisees.
 1. They were coming to be outwardly baptized, but they did not have the correct inward motivations to be baptized.

II. Verse 7—“Warned to flee from the wrath to come”

- A. What John said to the Pharisees showed why all the people were coming to his baptism.
 1. **Matthew 3:7** says, *“Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”*
- B. What the people were saying in coming for baptism is “I have sinned against God, and I am afraid of God’s judgment for my sin.”
- C. Those people were afraid to die because they knew the truth of **Hebrews 9:27**.
 1. The verse says, *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”*
- D. They all knew that there was one death—no reincarnation and after death. There was one judgment—no purgatory or temporary suffering. There was only one final death and one final judgment.
 1. They knew that they had wrath written all over them; the wrath of God was going to break loose all over them.
 2. They were afraid; they were so afraid that they were fleeing from the wrath of God.

- E. When those people were coming to John's baptism, they were urgent. They were running from the wrath of God.
- F. They were people who had been warned. That is the way it is today. When a person comes to the Lord Jesus, He is fleeing from the wrath of God.
- G. He is fleeing because he has been warned to flee from the wrath of God.
- H. John asked the Pharisees in **Matthew 3:7**.
 - 1. The verse says, "*Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath of God?*"
- I. We can picture John referring to the people coming to be baptized as the ones that had been warned to flee from the wrath of God. John asked the Pharisees, "*Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*"
 - 1. The answer is no one.
- J. That leaves the question about all the other people who were coming to John's baptism confessing their sin. Who warned them to flee from the wrath to come?
 - 1. The person who warned them was the Holy Spirit, whose ministry is to convict the world of their sin.
 - a. **John 16:7-8** says, "*7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*"
 - 2. The Holy Spirit and His ministry is to convict the world of sin.
 - 3. The Holy Spirit convicts the individual of righteousness. That is the righteousness that he does not have.
 - 4. That is the righteousness that the Lord Jesus has which resulted in the Lord Jesus being resurrected from the dead to go to the Father.
 - 5. The Holy Spirit convicts the individual of judgment. That is the wrath to come after death.
 - a. That work of convicting a person that personal judgment is right around the corner is what causes a person to run to the Savior to flee from the wrath of God.

III. Verse 7—*"The Pharisees"*

- A. When John saw the Pharisees, he saw a group who saw themselves as righteous and not in need of repentance. In fact, when John rebuked the Pharisees for coming to his baptism, the Pharisees rejected John and did not want to be baptized as recorded in **Luke 7:29-30**.
 - 1. The verses say, "*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.²⁹ ut the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.³⁰*"
- B. If you were to choose one phrase to describe the Pharisees, it could be that they are the "We are not" people. This is how the Lord portrayed them in **Luke 18**.
 - 1. **Luke 18:9-14** says, "*9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.¹¹ The Pharisee stood and **prayed thus with himself**, God, I thank thee, that **I am not** as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*"

- C. In this parable, here were two different men with two very different prayers that came from two very different self-images that resulted in two very different destinies.
1. With that parable, the Lord Jesus was saying that in life there are only two groups of people and every person falls into one of those two groups.
 2. The two men were a Pharisee and a publican.
 3. The two prayers were “I thank thee that I am not a sinner” and “God be merciful to me a sinner.”
 4. The two self-images were self-righteous and a dirty, rotten sinner.
 5. The two results of prayers were not heard by God or just praying with himself and heard by God.
 6. The two destinies were not justified and justified.
 7. It was simply a prayer that is not heard and a prayer that is heard.
 - a. A prayer not heard indicates that they are not saved.
 - b. A prayer heard indicates that they are saved.
 8. Every person falls into one of the two categories of prayer. It all depends on how that prayer starts with either “I am righteous” or “I am sinful.”
 9. The self-righteous man is said to have prayed with himself or in other words, his prayer was not heard.
 10. Whereas, the sinful man’s prayer was heard.

IV. Verse 9—*“Think not to say...We have Abraham”*

- A. Verse 9 says that the Pharisees called themselves the seed of Abraham.
- B. In verse 7, John the Baptist called the Pharisees the seed of the serpent or the seed of the devil.

V. Verse 10—*“The axe is laid unto the root of the trees”*

- A. John told the Pharisees in **Matthew 3:10**, *“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”*
- B. By telling them that the axe mark had been put at their base like they were trees, John was saying that every tree is going to bring glory to God.
 1. Some trees that were like the people who repented would bring glory to God as they showed the mercy and grace of God to save them from their sins.
 2. Other trees that were like the people who did not repent would also bring glory to God. Through judgment, they would show the righteous judgment and justice of God.

VI. Verse 11—*“I...baptize...but he...cometh after me”*

- A. John, then went on to explain what he was capable of doing and what he was not capable of doing when he said in verse 11.
 1. Verse 11 says, *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”*
- B. John said what he was capable of doing when he said, “I indeed baptize with water unto repentance.”
- C. What John said he did was to baptize with water unto repentance.
 1. That meant that John just helped people to express their inward feeling of baptism.
 2. That inward feeling is what the Lord called in **Leviticus 16:29**.
 - a. The verse says, *“And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you.”*

- D. “Ye shall afflict your souls” was what was to be done on the day of atonement
- E. To “afflict your souls” meant to fast and not even drink water. In other words, you would try to make yourself feel terrible.
 - 1. In those days, children would not do this until they were able to understand what it was for. After they came to an age of understanding, then it was the custom to wait for two years before having the children engage in fasting on this day of atonement.
 - 2. There was no atonement for the person unless the person afflicted their soul. This is when a person made himself feel awful for his sins in repentance.
- F. By baptizing, John was giving the people the opportunity to express outwardly what they were feeling inwardly which was feeling awful for their sins.
 - 1. John was limited to just helping the people express outwardly their awful feeling for their sins.
- G. With the word “But” in verse 11, John made it very clear that he was not the judge, and he was not the person who saves.
- H. When John said in verse 11, “*He that cometh after me,*” that shows us that John was acutely aware that the Lord was coming even though he had not seen Him before.
 - 1. John knew that the Lord was right behind John and would immediately follow John.
 - 2. John knew that he himself was the messenger of **Malachi 3:1**.
 - a. **Malachi 3:1** says, “*Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and **the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come** to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*”
- I. John knew that he was the sent messenger that was to prepare the way of the Lord before the Lord.
 - 1. John focused on that word, “suddenly” in verses 1-3 of Malachi.
- J. “Suddenly” was behind John’s passionate preaching of crying out to the people.
- K. “Suddenly” implies a surprise—something that was unexpected similar to the way death so often is.
- L. When a person realizes that he is going to die, he thinks, “So soon? I thought it would come later. So sudden?”
- M. John was saying to the people that there was not much time left for them. They had to get ready by repenting to open their heart and receiving the Lord when He suddenly came.

VII. Verse 11—“*Mightier than I...I am not worthy*”

- A. John explained his relationship to the Lord who would follow him when he said in verse 11.
 - 1. The verse says, “*He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.*”
- B. In comparison to the Lord, John saw himself as not worthy. Here in Matthew, John said that he was not worthy to even pick up or even untie the shoes of the Lord to bring them to Him.

VIII. Verse 11—“*He shall baptize...Holy Ghost...fire*”

- A. John said what the Lord would do that John could not do in verse 11.
 - 1. He clearly states, “*He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*”
- B. The Lord will baptize a person with either the Holy Ghost or with fire—not both.
- C. If a person repents of his sin and makes for the Lord a straight highway to his open heart, that person is baptized with the Holy Spirit.

1. This means that the person will be managed by the Holy Spirit who will direct him and be a light to the path of his life.
 2. That person will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.
- D. If a person rejects the message to repent and make for the Lord a straight path to his open heart, that person will be baptized with fire.
- E. All people will either be saved and taken over by the Holy Spirit or lost and taken over by fire.

IX. Verse 12—“*Whose fan is in His hand*”

- A. John described the Lord as verse 12.
1. Verse 12 says, “*Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*”
- B. John said that the Lord had a fan in His hand.
1. The word used here is a forked shovel that was used to throw all the wheat into the air where the wind would blow the lighter chaff away. The heavier wheat would fall to the ground.
 2. This forked shovel was for separating the wheat from the chaff.
 3. If you saw a farmer carrying one of those forked shovels, then you knew that he was about to separate the wheat from the chaff.
- C. That is the picture that John gave to the people of the Lord. He was like the farmer with the forked shovel in His hand.
1. His job was going to be to separate the wheat from the chaff.
- D. This was the Lord’s ministry. **John 7:37** says, “*In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*”
- E. The separation was based on whether or not man thirsted in his soul for God.
1. If any man did not thirst in his soul for God, then the wind just blew him away from the Lord.
 2. If any man did thirst in his soul for God, then he fell to the Lord.
- F. The Lord said this about his His ministry in **John 6:35**—“*And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*”
- G. The separation was also based on whether or not man hungered in his soul for God.
1. If any man was not hungry in his soul for God, then the wind just blew him away from the Lord.
 2. If any man was hungry in his soul for God, then he fell to the Lord.
- H. He even announced the invitation in **Matthew 11:28-30**.
1. The verses say, “²⁸ *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*”
- I. Next, the separation was based on whether or not man needed God for rest in his soul.
1. If any man did not feel tired in his soul and did not feel that he needed God for rest, then the wind just blew him away from the Lord.
 2. If any man felt tired in his soul and knew he needed God for rest, then he fell to the Lord.
- J. The Lord said in **John 14:6**, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*”
- K. The final separation was based on whether or not man had any interest in coming to God.

1. If any man had no interest in coming to God, then the wind just blew him away from the Lord.
 2. If any man wanted to come to God, then he fell to the Lord.
- L. That is how the Lord had the forked shovel in His hand in verse 12 and was using that shovel to throw the wheat and chaff into the air. His invitations were like the wind that separated the wheat from the chaff.
1. If a person did not respond to the invitation, he was blown away and separated from the person who did respond to Christ's invitations.
- M. In the same way, we are called to send out those Gospel invitations to separate the wheat from the chaff just like the Bible says in **2 Corinthians 5:17-20**.
1. The verses say, *"¹⁷ Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: **old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.** ¹⁸ And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and **hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;** ¹⁹ To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and **hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.** ²⁰ Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."*
 2. We are told that if any man is in Christ that he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new.
 - a. Before we were in Christ, our old way of life was to leave everyone alone and let them live the lives they want.
 - b. But, now that we are in Christ, that attitude towards others has passed away, and our new way is called a ministry of reconciliation.
 - c. Now, we tell others that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.
 - d. Now, our new thing is to beg others to be reconciled to God through Christ.
 - e. That is how we also have the ministry of separation like the Lord has when we make the Lord's invitations to come to Him and be saved. That is the ministry of separation.
- N. John said that the Lord would be complete and thorough in His ministry of separation when he spoke in verse 11.
1. The verse says, *"He will thoroughly purge his floor."*
 2. That meant that every person who was ever born was made by the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bible says in **John 1:3**.
 - a. **John 1:3** says, *"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."*
 - b. **John 1:9** says, *"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."*
- O. Everyone is on the floor of the Lord's earth, and the Lord as the true light of every man will challenge every person with His invitation to come to Him. Every person will make his own choice to respond to the Lord and accept His invitation or to reject the Lord.
1. There is not one person who the Lord will overlook in this separation.
 - a. Verse 12 says, *"He will thoroughly purge His floor."*
- P. The wheat is said to be gathered up into the barn which is what He meant when He said in **John 14:1-3**.
1. The verses say, *"¹ Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for*

you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

- Q. The Lord saying that He will gather up His wheat into His barn.
1. **1 Thessalonians 4:17** says, *"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."*
- R. The chaff that do not respond to the Lord are described in **Matthew 3:12**.
1. The verse says, *"But he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*
- S. The worst word in that description is the word *"unquenchable."*
1. If there is one word to describe hell, it could be the word *"unquenchable."*
- T. This is how John described the Lord to the people. He was the great separator of all men to see who would respond. Based on their response, they would be separated to a destiny to either be with the Lord in His house or to be separated from the Lord in a place where the fire is unquenchable.
- X. Verse 13—*"Then cometh Jesus"*
- A. What John said was like the grand introduction, and that is why verse 13 is so dramatic when it says, *"Then cometh Jesus."*
- B. The Lord's appearance on the stage of history was as sudden as the Bible said that He would appear in **Isaiah 45:15**.
1. The verse says, *"Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."*
 2. The Lord Jesus as God and the Savior was hiding Himself until John finished his announcement of Him.
- C. **Genesis 28:16** says, *"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not."*
1. The Lord Jesus had grown up in Israel, and no one knew Him.
 2. **Malachi 4:2** says, *"But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."*
 - a. All of a sudden the Lord as the Sun of Righteousness just arose.
 3. **Galatians 4:4** says, *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."*
 - a. All of a sudden was the fullness of time when the Lord was sent to appear to man.