

Sunday, 8th February 2026

Matthew 3: 1-12

John the Baptist prepares the way

1. We know from Luke's gospel (3:23) that Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry, as was John the Baptist (John and Jesus were cousins) – see Luke 1.
 - If you are over 30, what did life look like when you were 30 – what would you do differently now / what would you tell your 30-year-old self?
 - If you are under 30, what do you think/hope your life will look like when you are 30 – what are you doing to achieve these goals?

Read Matthew 3: 1-6

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 round 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 baptised by him in the River Jordan.

2. Are we sorer for being caught than for what we have been caught doing (or not doing)?
 - a. Give an example of when you have been caught.
 - b. What were the circumstances.
 - c. Was it a 'fair cop'.
 - d. Would you have carried on if not caught.
 - e. Did you carry on anyway, but in a more discreet way?

3. Repentance means more than 'being sorry', more than a change of mind, more than remorse, it is to return to God and return to 'covenant obedience'.
 - a. When we repent is there a risk that we are sorry for 'being caught' rather than for our wrongdoing?
 - b. Did our 'repentance' result in us returning to God, to 'covenant obedience' or returning to our old way of life?
 - c. Is there anything that we need to repent today?

4. If John was telling the people to, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near', 3:2, and Jesus also commenced his ministry with the same message (Matthew 4:17), should we be repeating the same message today?
 - a. If so, how easy is this?
 - b. How do we 'tell' the message?
 - c. To whom?

5. Barclay has written:
 - John pointed beyond himself – it was not himself he wished to see; he wished to prepare them for the one who was to come.
 How can we ensure that God remains the focus of the message and not us?

6. Do you have or had a favourite 'wild' piece of clothing? What it is – maybe you have picture on your phone!

7. *'John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt round his waist. His food was locusts and honey'.*
 John's appearance created some excitement as it reminded the people of the OT prophets Elijah (2 Kings 1:8) and Zechariah (Zech 13:4). How can we create an excitement (what we wear / how we present the gospel) without distracting from the message. Maybe we shouldn't create an excitement?

Read Matthew 3: 7-10

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?' ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And 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 axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

8. John warns the Pharisees and Sadducees that ‘every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.’ Jesus has the same message:

⁵ *‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

- a. Is there a tendency within the church to focus more on holiness than repentance?
 - b. Do you think that ‘loving’ people into the kingdom is more effective than ‘shouting’ or ‘shaming’ them into the kingdom through a ‘hell and damnation’ message? Why?
 - c. In whatever way, is everyone in the church responsible to ‘preaching repentance’? How are you doing?
9. ‘Produce fruit in keeping with repentance’- vs 8. Paul writes:

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-33)*

Jesus says:

⁷ *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:7-8)*

- a. What type of ‘spiritual fruit’ are you producing in your life?
- b. There is one fruit which consists of all the elements that Paul mentions – do you struggle with any of the ‘elements’?
- c. Jesus tells us that to bear fruit we need to remain in him – how’s that going?

10. John indicates that we do not inherit our faith, our faith comes through a personal relationship with God through Jesus. How can we ensure that each generation understands this?

Read Matthew 3: 11-12

¹¹ 'I baptise 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 baptise 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.'

11. It is suggested that within this reading there are three types of baptism: water, spirit and fire. Water, an outward sign/public declaration of repentance; the spirit coming at conversion, bring new life and offering guidance, and fire referring to the future judgment. Many in the group will have made a public declaration of repentance, experienced the spirit, but are we ready for the fire?

12. In these last verses there seems to a humility to John – *But after me comes one, who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.* Do you think that in today's society, humility is seen as a weakness? If so, how can we encourage people to be humble? To conclude share the prayer below:

A Christian Prayer for the Virtue of Humility

Lord Jesus, when you walked the earth,
Your humility obscure your Kingship.
Your meekness confused the arrogant,
Hindering them from grasping your purpose,
Your nobleness attending to the destitute.
Teach me to model after your eminence,
To subject my human nature to humility.
Grant me with a natural inclination
To never view myself greater than anyone.
Banish all lingering sparks of self-importance
That could elevate me greater than you.
Let my heart always imitate your humility.

- Author Unknown