

# “God’s Troubling Ambassadors”

Matthew 3:3-4

April 21, 2024

**INTRO:** When was the last time (for good or bad) that **your expectations were blown away?**

- Category **1** = *Shocked*
- Category **2** = *Positive*
- Category **3** = *Negative*

Now... forget those outcomes... let’s...

Consider ***how you pick a premise!***

(a premise is a baseline for reasoning &/or belief...)

*[...like judging a book by its cover...]*

***Premise is & defines expectation(s).***

*Our premise shapes our perspectives... and our perspectives impact our interpretations... and our interpretations lead to our actions... and our actions are what we are ultimately responsible & accountable for.*

*It's true, our actions boil down to obedience or disobedience, right or wrong... in the end... what we do... how we act... the choices we make, will determine and dictate whether or not we will be in heaven or hell for ALL of eternity.*

What premise/expectations do you have?

- *Next 5 minutes... hour... later today... tomorrow...*
- *Macro, micro, me, ministry, mission, message, Messiah*
- *God’s Power... Purposes... Promises... People...*

# PRAYER

## CONTEXT:

- Sermon series: **m M m** (*miracle MESSIAH mission*)
- Matthew 1&2
  - Biblos Genesis
  - Christ's genealogy & theology
  - Christ's miraculous & humble coming
  - Christ's troubling narrative & realities...
- Matthew 3:1-2
  - *Evangelism's Troubling CLARITY*
  - **REPENT!** *is to be seen in a new light...*
  - Over & over again... **Truth Trouble Triumph!**
- Matthew 3:3-4 *God's Troubling Ambassadors*

## BIG IDEA:

**God's Messianic message and messengers  
are NOT what most people want  
or expect to hear.**

## PREVIEW:

1. God's Troubling Messengers
2. God's Troubling Message
3. God's Troubling Missionaries

## TEXT:

### Matthew 3:3-4

<sup>1</sup>In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

<sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

*“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;  
make his paths straight.’”*

<sup>4</sup>Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

**T/S:** After the Bible, what have been some of the most profound and impactful books you’ve read?

For me, here’s a sampling that I’d recommend...

1. *The Gospel According To Jesus*
2. *The Reformed Pastor*
3. *Spiritual Leadership*
4. *30 Days To Understanding The Bible*
5. ***The Barbarian Way*** (see quotes below)

While all of those books have been holistically helpful,

## ***The Barbarian Way***

**seems to be almost custom fit to me & Matthew 3!**

*“a primal longing... waits to be unleashed within everyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ. **To belong to God is to belong to His heart.** If we have responded to the call of Jesus to leave everything and follow Him, then there is a voice within us crying out, **“Fight for the heart of your King!”**”*

*Yet Christianity over the past two thousand years has moved from a tribe of renegades to a religion of conformists. **Those who choose to follow Jesus become participants in an revolution.** To claim we believe is simply not enough. The call of Jesus is one that demands action. Jesus began His public ministry with a simple invitation: **“Come, follow Me.”** His closing instructions to His disciples can be summarized in one word, **“Go!”** A quick survey of the modern church would lead you to believe His invitation was “Come, and listen,” and His closing mandate would be summarized in the one “word “No!”*

*The tribe of Jesus, above all people,  
should rightly carry the banner, **“Forward!”***

*“Jesus Christ has become the all-consuming passion of the Barbarian’s life. They are not about religion or position. They have little patience for institutions or bureaucracies...*

***“This is the simplicity of the barbarian way...  
If you are a follower of Christ, then you are called to fight  
for the heart of your King. It is a life fueled by passion...  
a passion for God and a passion for people. The psalmist  
tells us to delight ourselves in the Lord, and He will give us the  
desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4). ”***

# I. *God's Troubling* **MESSENGERS**

*<sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet  
Isaiah when he said,*

- “For”*** = another divine explanation!
- “this is”*** = another divine statement of fact!
- “he”*** = a reference to the male John the Baptist
- “who was spoken of”*** = a prophetic fulfilment!
- “by the prophet Isaiah”*** = note: no ambiguity.
- “when he said,”*** = Isaiah 40:3 is quoted next...

## A. **Isaiah**

- a. Like all of God's spokesmen he was ***truthful***
- b. Like most O.T. prophets he was ***troubling***
- c. Like all of God's family he was ***triumphant!***

## B. **John the Baptist**

- a. He was the cousin of Jesus
- b. He supernaturally affirmed Jesus as Messiah when both boys were still in mom's wombs
- c. Yet... in **John 1:31** John says of Jesus: ***“I myself did not know Him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that He might be revealed to Israel.”*** **(shocked?)**

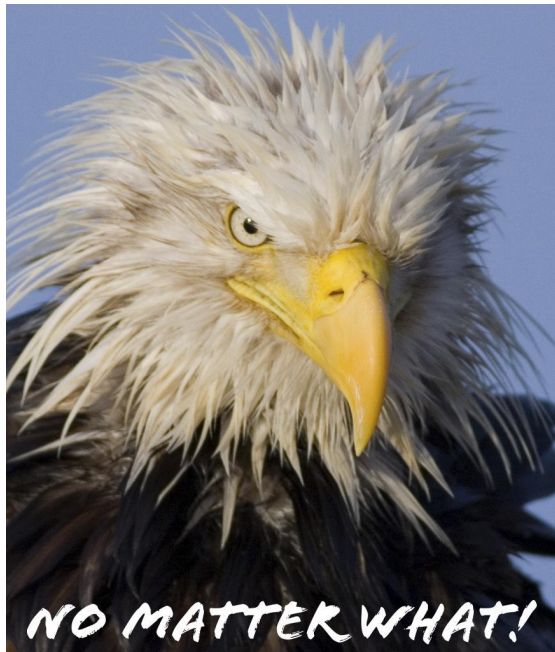
d. We'll learn more about him as the text goes on over the coming weeks... but for now...

(Per The Barbarian Way...)

*What kind of person did God choose to prepare the way for the coming of His Son? His name was John. We know him better as John the Baptist.*

***John the Baptist was a true barbarian.***

*“Oh, and by the way, he had no formal education, no degrees. His occupation was prophet, and his mailing address was the wilderness. To say the very least, he was not the person whom anyone was expecting to prepare the way for the Messiah. John was the voice that proclaimed the coming of the Christ, and through his encounters with Jesus, we can rediscover the barbarian call.”*



I pray that the  
**“No matter what!”**  
**battle cry**  
will echo in your hearts  
like the **barbarian call!**

## II. *God's Troubling* **MESSAGES**

*"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
'Prepare the way of the Lord;  
make his paths straight.'"*

- A. First: note that this is a quote... a prophetic quote
- B. Next: note the context of the original quote...
- C. Isaiah 40 thru 66 is a major transitional text
- D. Context here is a Messianic & Eternal prophecy
- E. There was/is a 3-fold context to embrace:
  - a. God bringing the exiles back from Babylon
  - b. John the Baptist's affirmation as the forerunner
  - c. Eternal blessing of God... bringing us to heaven

**I say all that to say this:**

To treat this text/quote as anything less than "good news" is to have the wrong premise and perspective...

***"The voice"*** = this is God's spokesperson

***"of one"*** = affirmed individual exclusivity

***"crying"*** = proclaiming, declaring, PASSION!

***"in the wilderness:"*** = another connection to John

**“Prepare”** = **Culturally, Spiritually, Eternally**

~ Isaiah to his countrymen

~ John the Baptist to his hearers

~ Messiah – Jesus The Christ to ALL

**“the way”** = ~ **Physical** for the O.T. reference

~ **Spiritual** for John’s message

- Isaiah 35:8 **“way of holiness”**
- John 14:6 **“I am the way”**
- Acts... Church = **“The Way”**

~ **Eternal** per Messiah’s message

**“of the Lord;”** = Creator, King of kings, The Christ,

**“make his paths”** = **“...Consider Him...”** (Heb. 12:3)

~ **Cultural** *kingdom connecting roads*

~ **Spiritually** per John... **REPENT!**

~ **Eternally** per Jesus... **THE GOSPEL!**

**“straight.”** = another loaded word... (think **HOLY**)

~ **Culturally** = a smooth royal road...

~ **Spiritual** per John = **REPENT of sin**

~ **Eternal** per Jesus = **BE righteous!**



Per the Great Commission... **we have the same troubling message!**

# Now What?



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It's time for Truth in love!

**(Per The Barbarian Way...)**

*"It's hard to imagine that Jesus would endure the agony of the Cross just to keep us in line. **Jesus began a revolution...** The new covenant that He established puts its trust not in the law, but in the transforming power of God's Spirit living within us."*

*"The barbarian way can be known only by those who have the heart of God. The steps of the barbarian are guided by the footprints of Jesus. Barbarians see the invisible and hear the inaudible because their souls are alive to God."*

### III. *God's Troubling* **MISSIONARIES**

*4Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.*

- Notice the intentional descriptions... Why?
- Who would pick characters like him/us?
- 2 Kings 1:8 parallels description of Elijah...
- **Another troubling contrast...**
  - Social... Cultural... *Biblical alignments*
    - He aligns with the poor & outcast
    - He aligns with the lowly & humble
    - He aligns with the desert dwellers
    - He aligns with God's Word
    - He aligns with God's will & ways
    - He aligns with God's power
    - He aligns with God's purposes
    - He aligns with God's priorities
    - He aligns with God's contrasts
    - He aligns with God's convictions
    - He aligns with God's commission
    - He aligns with God
  - Visual barbarian vs. verbal theologian

- Tax collector vs. Pharisees
- Younger vs. Older prodigal brother
- Zacchaeus vs. Rich Young Ruler
- Fishermen vs. Scribes & Sadducees
- Shepherd boys vs. Militant Giants
- **Disciplined Warriors** vs. **Deviant Wimps**

(Per The Barbarian Way...)

*“Barbarians can be counted as worthless when all is safe and secure, but dangerous times suddenly make them invaluable.*

*We live in such times.*

*And we are not ready for the great challenges set before us.”*

*“Jesus is being lost in a religion bearing His name....  
Christianity has become docile, domesticated, civilized. We  
have forgotten that there is a kingdom of darkness stealing the  
hopes and dreams and souls of a humanity without God. It is  
time to hear the barbarian call, to form a barbarian tribe, and  
to unleash the barbarian revolt. Let the invasion begin . . .”*

The point is, Christ's messengers,  
message, and missionaries are all  
troubling to those who have the wrong  
**premise, expectations, and/or desires...**

*The invitation of Jesus is a barbaric, revolutionary call to fight for the heart of humanity. We are called to an unconventional war using only the weapons of faith, hope, (truth) and love. Nevertheless, this war is no less dangerous than any war ever fought. And for those of us who embrace the cause of Christ, the cost to participate in the mission of God is nothing less than everything we are and everything we have.”*

**An unwillingness to REPENT & believe is as clear a response as is the biblical call to REPENTANCE.**

*Barbarian’s lack of respect for tradition or ritual makes them seem uncivilized to those who love religion.... But barbarians are not about religion; they’re about advancing the revolution Jesus started two thousand years ago.”*

***Let’s start pulling this all together to align our expectations...***

- God’s Troubling MESSAGE
- God’s Troubling MESSENGER
- God’s Troubling MISSIONARIES

What do they all have in common?

What should WE all have in common/unity?

***Love God, Love People, Serve the World***

# Learning, loving, & living THE GOSPEL

*BE-ing Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20)  
means BE-ing His truth in love, Gospel-sharing,  
disciple-making, worshipping witnesses.  
No matter what!*

**We keep the main things the main things and  
the minor things the minor things.**

*Camel hair... locusts... unshaven... tattoos... creative tools...*

**LEARN THE STRAIGHT WAY.**

**LOVE THE STRAIGHT WAY.**

**LIVE THE STRAIGHT WAY.**

**SHOW THE STRAIGHT WAY!**



[1 Peter 3:15](#)

*In your hearts honor  
Christ the Lord as holy,  
always being prepared to  
make a defense to anyone  
who asks you for a reason  
for the hope that is in you*

## More perspective from The Barbarian Way:

*Perhaps the tragedy of our time is that such an overwhelming number of us who declare Jesus as Lord have become domesticated—or, if you will, civilized. We have lost the simplicity of our early faith. Beyond that, we have lost the passion and power of that raw, untamed, and primal faith.*

*The barbarian way is about love, intimacy, passion, and sacrifice. **Barbarians love to live and live to love.** For them God is life, and their mission is to reconnect humanity to Him. **Their passion is that each of us might live in intimate communion with Him who died for us.***

*“So many of us have put our hope in teaching our children about God rather than guiding them into an experience with God. We essentially civilize our children rather than guide them to the barbarian way.*

### **VIDEO:**

*Stickman Gospel Drama @ Mahali Safi*

*I am concerned that there are many who have grown up in church and have been effectively Christianized but have never genuinely met Christ...*

*Our goal must not be to populate the Christian religion but to bring people into a genuine relationship with God.*

***We must make a clear distinction between the religion of Christianity and the revolution that Jesus began two thousand years ago.”***

## REVIEW:

**God's Messianic message and messengers are NOT what most people want or expect to hear.**

1. God's Troubling Messengers
2. God's Troubling Message
3. God's Troubling Missionaries

## CLOSE:

A barbarian invasion is taking place even right now. They are coming from the four corners of the earth and they are numbered among the unlikely. From the moment Jesus walked among us the invasion began. And just as with those who crossed paths with Him here on earth, those who are most religious will be most offended and indignant. Barbarians are not welcome among the civilized and are feared among the domesticated. The way of Jesus is far too savage for their sensibilities. The sacrifice of God's Son, the way of the Cross, the call to die to ourselves, all lack the dignity of a refined faith. **Why insist on such a barbaric way?"**



Because Jesus did not suffer and die so that we could build for ourselves havens, but so that we might expand the kingdom of His love. Because invisible kingdoms are at war for the hearts and lives of every human being who walks on the face of this earth. And times of war require barbarians who are willing to risk life itself for the freedom of others.”

*“Stay off the paved road.”* - Erwin McManus

**NO MATTER WHAT!**

PRAYER

**WORSHIP:** *The Same Love*



## NIV Application Commentary:

John is the one foretold by Isaiah who would be privileged to prepare the way for the Lord's arrival and his kingdom:

*“A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’ ”*

([3:3](#); cf. Isa. 40:3).

John wasn't just another religious zealot drumming up support for a new following.

As a road must be cleared of obstacles (ie. T-9) before an approaching king, John is calling for the people to clear the obstacles out of their lives that might hinder their reception of the Lord. He calls for the people to get themselves ready—to prepare their heart and life—for the arrival of the Coming One with the kingdom of heaven.

In this sense, then, we can say that the kingdom of God has come near in the person of Jesus, but the full manifestation of that kingdom had not yet arrived.

The expression “*the kingdom of heaven*” is typical religious language of the Jewish people. Found only in Matthew’s Gospel (thirty-three times), “*kingdom of heaven*” is interchangeable with the expression “*kingdom of God*,”<sup>9</sup> which is found in the other Gospels (cf. 19:23–24; Mark 10:24–25; Luke 18:24–25).

Matthew’s “kingdom of heaven” reflects the Hebrew expression *malkut šamayim*, found abundantly in Jewish literature. A feeling of reverence and a desire not to blaspheme inadvertently the name of God (Ex. 20:7) led the Jews at an early date to avoid as far as possible all mention of the name of God. “Heaven” is one of the usual substitutions for the name of God (e.g., 1 Macc. 3:18–19; 4:10; 12:15; *m. ’Abot* 1:3, 11).

By this time the people of Israel had had their fill of other kingdoms and rulers dominating them. They wanted a return to the glories of the ancient monarchy under David and Solomon and their descendants. They had a brief tantalizing experience of semi-independence during the Maccabean revolt and the rule of the Hasmoneans, but that had long ended. Once again, another power, Rome, ruled over them.

## The thirst for independence was strong in Israel.

The prophecies of David’s house and kingdom enduring forever (2 Sam. 7:11–16; 1 Chron. 17:23–27) seemed as if they would never be actualized.

*John the Baptist ignites those hopes anew by preaching that “the kingdom of heaven is near.”*

*John's mission is like that of a courier who preceded the king to proclaim his coming and the need for the citizens to ready themselves for that arrival.*

Their readiness was indicated by their repentance from sin and sinful ways to await the kingdom.

But what kind of kingdom did they expect? What did John expect would occur now that the kingdom of God was near? **As the story unfolds we will look closely to separate the various expectations from what God actually intended to accomplish.**

### **John's appearance (3:4).**

Like his message, John's appearance—especially his clothing and food—stirred up recollections of the prophecies of Elijah's return to prepare the way for God's vengeful appearance (cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5–6).

**John appears in the desert wearing garments made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist (cf. 2 Kings 1:8).**

Goat's hair or camel's hair was often woven into a thick, rough, dark cloth, which was used as an outer garment or cloak, particularly by nomadic desert dwellers.

The garment was so dense that it was virtually waterproof and could protect from most weather elements. It was proverbially the garb of poorer people, in distinction from the finery worn by those in the royal court (11:8).

Moreover,

garments of woven hair were sometimes worn as a protest against luxury and as a symbol of distress or self-affliction, so John the Baptist's garment of camel's hair probably visualized the repentance to which he called the people (cf. **Neh. 9:1; Jer. 6:26**).

**John's food was locusts and wild honey, not an unusual diet for people living in the desert.**

The locust is a migratory grasshopper and was permissible food for the people of Israel to eat (Lev. 11:20–23). They are an important food source in many areas of the world, especially because they are a ready source of protein and are abundant even in the most desolate areas. They are often collected and then dried or ground into flour. John's diet of locusts and honey from wild bees supplied him with a crude but fairly balanced diet.

But more important, John's diet causes him to stand out as one who has rejected the luxuries of life.

His diet and clothing combine with his message to cast a powerful demand for repentance in the light of the nearness of the kingdom.

## He embodies in his lifestyle the message of repentance he preaches.

The last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, brought his thundering message to a climax with a prophecy of the Lord sending Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, who would “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:6). Many Jews were awaiting God’s intervention.

No wonder, then, the remarkable response of the people to John. Although Matthew does not mention the connection yet (cf. 11:2–19; 17:9–13), here is another like Elijah. God is again speaking to his people through a prophet!

**Expectations of the Messiah.** The Jews of the first century experienced various kinds of reshaping and transformation as well, and Matthew wrote his Gospel to address their hopes. He looked out on the same Jewish heritage and narrates another kind of story—a story of *arrivals*. Hundreds of years of wandering through exile and oppression were real for his audience. But the prophetic message that sustained their hope was now fulfilled. **John the Baptist, that fiery messenger of God, announced that the hoped-for kingdom of God, the hoped-for Messiah, and the hoped-for redemption of Israel and the entire human race had indeed arrived.**

But it was a different kind of hope than many in Israel expected. Various groups within Israel had reshaped their hopes for a coming kingdom of God or for a coming Messiah. Some were engrossed in ritual practices to purify themselves. Others immersed themselves in meticulous study and interpretation of their Scriptures in an attempt to make relevant an old message. Some thought of a conquering king approaching, while others thought of a kingdom in which the temple and its priestly sacrifices and purity would be paramount. Still others thought of God’s judgment and wrath poured out. Finally, some had nearly given up hope of God’s intervention and took their hopes into their own hands, whether through political action or violent revolution. Different groups within Israel took their same Hebrew Scriptures and

focused on specific strands of prophecy to end up with diverse expectations of what God would do when he sent his messianic deliverance at the end of the age.

Chaim Potok's reshaping of his own understanding of his Jewish faith is not so new. It was occurring in the first century. That reshaping often caused people to have their expectations so entrenched that they had difficulty actually accepting God's work among them.

Matthew declares that Jesus is the Expected One foretold by John the Baptist in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets, but it is a far more astounding truth than most in Israel had anticipated. It will blow away their expectations. Their thinking will need to be reshaped, and that is what Matthew does. On the one level he tells the story, but on another level he reshapes his readers' understanding to re-conform their hopes to those revealed through the prophets.

## The gospel of the kingdom.

Matthew writes for us, therefore, not a biography in the modern sense of an exhaustive account of a person's life; rather, he writes for us a "gospel," an account of the good news that Jesus Messiah has brought salvation to his people.

He focuses on significant events and teachings in the life of this one born "king of the Jews" (2:2), which establish Jesus' rightful claim as the One who will "save his people from their sins" (1:21).

Matthew uses the noun “gospel” (*euangelion*) only four times, and three of those four occur in his unique phrase “gospel of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35; 24:14).

*The “good news” that Matthew stresses for his readers is that the age of the kingdom of God has finally dawned.*

Matthew’s quotation of the kernel of John’s message in 3:2 captures a theme that will be central to his message. It is the same message Jesus will announce at the beginning of his public ministry (4:17) and the Twelve will preach on their missionary tour through Israel (10:5).

We have seen how Matthew emphasized the genealogy of Jesus as One who has a right to the throne of David, the miraculous conception of the One who will save his people from their sins, and the birth and divine protection of this One born “king of the Jews.”

Now he focuses on the prophesied herald and the actual arrival of the Coming One on the scene of Israel’s religious landscape.

No doubt many who heard John were highly devout individuals who recognized in his message the prophetic voice of God. **Many were at least nominally religious. But John's baptism called for a personal commitment of all the people to God's new activity within Israel.** Those responding were heeding the call to the presence of the kingdom and arrival of the Coming One whom John announced.

## **The mind-boggling truth of Jesus as Son of God.**

We are all probably too familiar with Jesus to recognize how difficult it was for people in the first century, including later even his own disciples, to comprehend fully who he was. We have learned from our earliest years in Sunday school, youth groups, and Bible studies that Jesus is both God and human. **We have recited doctrinal creeds and heard countless sermons discuss Jesus' divine and human natures. But our familiarity with the truth numbs us to the reality.**

As **Malcolm Muggeridge** says,

**“The coming of Jesus into the world is the most stupendous event in human history.”**

It is not just the religious significance of Jesus' ministry to which Muggeridge refers. He refers especially to the mind-boggling truth that God actually became a human and lived among us. **It will remain for Paul and the apostle John to explain the significance of the Incarnation for human redemption.**

**Matthew writes to recount the good news of the Incarnation's reality.**



He has already given his readers a behind-the-scenes understanding of Jesus' identity as he unfolded the messianic pedigree (1:1–17), and narrated accounts of the divine conception (1:18–25) and prophetically anticipated messianic infancy (ch. 2). Now he gives further insight to Jesus' true identity in his baptism (3:13–17). He is the anointed Messiah, the beloved Son, and the suffering Servant. We should note two points here.

(1) In 3:16–17 we have the appearance of the Spirit, the presence of the Son, and the voice of the Father. As Leon Morris states, "Matthew has certain trinitarian interest." He will conclude his Gospel with another Trinitarian allusion in Jesus' instruction that new disciples are to be baptized in the singular name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:19). Matthew lays out a clear picture of Jesus' deity by drawing on Old Testament prophecies. Prior to the Incarnation the strong divine language of some of these prophecies could not be adequately understood and led to the diversity of views concerning the nature of the Messiah. But for Matthew, the reality of the Incarnation now makes clear God's revelation: Jesus is the divine Son of God.

(2) John said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (cf. Acts 2), and now in his baptism Jesus is anointed by the Spirit. This inaugurates the age of the Spirit foretold by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28–29). The consistent Christological picture in the New Testament reveals Jesus as a person who is fully divine in his essence and attributes during his time on earth, yet he does not operate in glorious display of his deity. Rather, he lives a fully human life in the power of the Spirit, giving his followers the ultimate example of a Spirit-led and empowered life, the example of how true human life is to be lived.

The reality of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God is a mind-boggling truth, if we allow ourselves to reflect deeply on the story that Matthew unfolds. It truly is the only sufficient answer to the hopes of the Jewish people in the first century—and the hopes for all people today. As we reflect on this truth, we will find that the story will reshape our own expectations of what kingdom life is all about.

**AT THIS POINT in Matthew's account, he has not revealed the full story of what the announced kingdom of heaven will be like. John has announced its arrival,** and Jesus has been anointed by the Spirit and confirmed by the Father to undertake its establishment.

*We will have to look closely at Jesus' ministry and teaching as it unfolds throughout this Gospel to understand the kingdom's characteristics and activities.*

But Matthew has already given us some important clues, especially as

***the arrival has confronted the expectations of many within Israel.***

The expectations of the people, of the religious leaders, and even of John himself must be either overturned or reshaped.

While many of us do not have backgrounds that contribute to a fully developed concept of a kingdom, our own expectations similarly will need to be either overturned or reshaped as we consider the implications of our life in the kingdom of heaven.

I emphasize this to my students through an acted analogy.

Walking into a classroom full of students, I shout out, "I'm the king!" After letting them recover from their shock, I ask them what came to their mind first when they heard me.

"King Arthur and his round table," said one student.

"I'm the king of the world!" shouted out a student, as he thought of the scene from the blockbuster movie *Titanic*.

Another student yelled, "There's been another sighting of Elvis Presley!"

And another sang out, "If I ... were the king ... of the foreeeeeeest!" bringing to mind the whimsical lion from *The Wizard of Oz*.

We all carry around different mental memories and pictures of what a "king" and "kingdom" are like, depending on our past experiences and mindset. If you were to walk up to a person on the street and invite her or him to come enter the kingdom, you would have to do a lot of explaining about what you meant, because she or he has already formed a mental picture of what she *remembers* and what he *wants*.

In other words, **our own expectations will likely need to be either overturned or reshaped.**

What is your expectation of the kingdom?

At the least, we can see from the incidents surrounding John the Baptist's announcement of the kingdom, along with Jesus' baptism and anointing as the Messiah of the kingdom, several important implications.

**A warning of judgment, but also an invitation to life and change.** First, the arrival of God's kingdom in the preaching of John the Baptist is a warning of judgment, but it is also an invitation to life and an expectation of real change in the lives of those who respond. This will be explained more fully as Jesus' ministry unfolds, but the arrival of the kingdom of God promises to bring with it kingdom life. John fully expected the Coming One to bring wrath and final judgment on the unrepentant. But he also fully expected the coming of the kingdom to include the gathering of the repentant into safekeeping and their baptism with the Holy Spirit. Within the kingdom is life; outside the kingdom is death.

The preaching of John the Baptist was a definite intrusion into the lives of those around him. Not many of us would relish giving this kind of "hell and brimstone" sermon. We don't like to offend. Many a pastor, sitting by the bedside of a dying patient who has consistently rejected the tender message of salvation, struggles with the appropriateness of giving such a terrifying message of judgment to the very end. But John does warn us, as will Jesus later (11:20–24), of the coming judgment for those who reject the message of the arriving kingdom of God. We must be clear about this warning for ourselves and for those around us.

Although John's chronology of the arrival of messianic judgment has yet to be accomplished, it surely will come. We can create a warped view of God and the gospel by overemphasizing the judgment to come, but we just as surely distort people's view if we minimize the reality of judgment. There is no more painful, helpless, utterly desperate feeling than thinking of a loved one who has just gone into eternity with fist clenched against God. But great is the peace when thinking of a loved one safely in the receiving arms of God because he or she has heeded the warning and turned to the Savior.

But John isn't just holding out death. He is inviting those who respond to his message to experience life, to escape from the wrath to come, and to await the baptism of the Holy Spirit that the Coming One will bring. No message of judgment should ever be given without the accompanying message of promised life for those who respond.

This isn't just an escape into the future by and by. Real life promises real change in the present realm of our daily lives. The change of mind and direction of life that is one's responsibility in repentance is obvious. But John does not hold out the latest self-help promotion. Instead, he points to the source of real change: the Holy Spirit. The promised age of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Joel (Joel 2:28–29) is described by Ezekiel as the age of God's new covenant, when he will put his Spirit in his people (Ezek. 36:26–27). What kind of change will this be? Ezekiel promised purification and the ability to be obedient to God's law. But he connects all of this to the new heart that will be put into new covenant people. These are the beginning hints of the theme of regeneration through the Spirit, a theme that will later characterize not only Jesus' teaching (cf. John 3:3–7) but will be a foundational truth of Paul and the early church (Titus 3:4–7).

Change is not only possible, but it is the reality of those who experience the "new birth" and transforming power of the Spirit. All of this is hinted at in John's message in his reference to bearing fruit. He points to inner life and inner change that will ultimately produce external

change. Profession is not enough; bearing fruit is required. “Profession” is the external assertion that a person has repented and has received new life, but “bearing fruit” is the external evidence that the new life is real. The inner life-giving force of a tree will always produce fruit in keeping with the nature of the tree. The arrival of the kingdom will be accompanied by the Spirit, who will give life to all who respond.

**The snare of spiritual pedigree.** Religious pedigree does not guarantee participation in the kingdom of heaven. John pays no homage to the ancestral pedigree of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who have Abraham as their father (3:2, 9). We might find this surprising, since the covenantal promises to Abraham marked the beginning of the people of Israel (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–19). But in his warning to the religious leaders, John does not strike out anew. A consistent theme of the prophets all along has been that Israel ought not rely on pedigree or marks of the covenant, such as circumcision, but rather to “circumcise [their] hearts” (e.g., Jer. 4:4). God was the one who had established his people by choosing them as a covenantal people, and if he chose to do so, he could create a new people for himself even from stones (Matt. 3:9). Participation in the kingdom of God is a *heart* matter. Repentance means first and foremost to have one’s heart rightly directed toward God, which will then be evidenced by the fruit of one’s life.

I shudder at times when I remember that I am a “professional Christian.” I am paid to study the Bible, to teach the Scripture, to stand and pray before my classes and the church. When it comes right down to the specifics of who we are as people, the Pharisees and Sadducees are not much different from you or me. There will be some of these religious leaders, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who will acknowledge the movement of God in John’s message and Jesus’ ministry and will repent and turn to the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. But others will be so filled with the duties of their religious life and a commitment to their own understanding of God’s message in the Old Testament that they ignore, and later reject, Jesus’ offer to enter the kingdom of heaven. The privilege of their inclusion in the people of Israel and the added privilege of their leadership position are no guarantee of inclusion in the arrival of the kingdom.

This is no minor issue for us. To be born into a Christian home is a tremendous privilege. It is a privilege to have Christian parents who attempt to live out a godly lifestyle and who try to guide their children into the kind of life God has intended for us. Christian parents are privileged to have the guidance of Scripture and the Spirit to help them raise their children in the right way.

But Christian parents and children alike need to remember that there are no guarantees. The privilege of a Christian home must be accompanied by accountability. Christian parents must be diligent to lead their children not simply to church activities, but most important to understand what it means to present their hearts to God. And children of Christian families must not bank on the faith of their parents. Each of us will stand alone before God to render accountability with what we have done with our lives.

Also, we who are privileged to be involved in full-time Christian ministry must remember the trap of professionalism that John, and Jesus throughout his ministry, consistently warn against. So I shudder when I recognize the possibility of becoming like those Pharisees and Sadducees who hardened their heart to God through empty religious activities (see comments on 6:1–18). I must open my own heart to God to live in sincerity before him and experience the

ministry of God in my own life, leading me to experience the fruit of a life lived in humble dependence on the Spirit of God.

**Humility.** We must take God's calling on our lives with deadly seriousness, but we must not get caught up with appearances. This third implication surfaces from observing the character qualities of John and Jesus as they fulfill their callings. John not only had a large following; he also demonstrated authority as he rebuked the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. But he did not get carried away with his own importance. He understood clearly his role and knew that there was One coming after him who would be greater, who would have a greater role. John did not balk at being surpassed. Jesus was the greater One, the Messiah, the divine Son of God, who was ready to assume his momentous redemptive role. Yet Jesus assumed a position of subservience as he submitted himself to the waters of baptism by John. He did not balk at appearing lesser.

This is a tremendous lesson on self-understanding in carrying out God's calling on our lives. Neither John nor Jesus got carried away with appearances. They demonstrated strength in carrying out their roles in the plan of salvation, yet that strength also included diminishing the appearance of their own importance. The key word here is *humility*, a term that does not get much good press in our day. We hear much more of *rights*. Perhaps it is not new, because the picture that John and Jesus give every age is the incongruity of their humility relative to the significance of their roles. We do not like to give up our appearance of importance. Thus, John and Jesus give us a powerful example of humility. Knowing God's purposes and not allowing our self-promotion to get in the way enable us to accomplish God's calling for our lives as well.

The one who can make us most uncomfortable here is, of course, Jesus. How hard, really, was it for him to appear humbly at the waters of John's baptism? Did he really wrestle with such mundane things as self-image, and appearances, and his role? I think so. He was that human. All the things that we struggle with, he experienced (cf. Heb 4:14–16). That is why he is our example. That is a key element for his entrance to history. He not only accomplished salvation for us, but he also gave us the model of what a real human life lived in the power of the Spirit is like. This does not in any way diminish his deity. Instead, it gives us a beginning glimpse of what his Incarnation entailed. He laid aside both the glory and the independent exercise of his deity to live a life like you and me. That is why he is the very real, very tangible example of what our lives are being transformed into (see 2 Cor. 3:18).

We can be uncomfortable with such a Savior. We would much rather focus on his strength—as so we shall. But his strength comes from his humble dependence on the same Spirit that you and I depend on. That is the nature of his Incarnation, to which Matthew now turns as he narrates Jesus' entrance into the cosmic battle through his temptations from Satan.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 129–152.

## How did John the Baptist fulfill Isaiah's prophecy "to prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight" (Matthew 3:3)?

The apostle Matthew applies a prophecy from Isaiah to introduce readers to Jesus' cousin [John the Baptist](#): "For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight"' (Matthew 3:3, [ESV](#)).

Matthew's Jewish audience was well acquainted with the scroll of Isaiah and this passage extracted from an extended prophecy about the end-times restoration of Israel ([Isaiah 40:1-45:25](#)).

Matthew confirms that John the Baptist is "the voice" ushering in the beginning of God's glorious future kingdom with the arrival of the King. **John's role was to prepare the way for the King's advent.**

Before John the Baptist was born, an angel of the Lord visited his father, [Zechariah](#), explaining, "Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. . . . He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will

*prepare the people for the coming of the Lord”* ([Luke 1:13–17, NLT](#)).

After the baby was born, Zechariah prophesied, “And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord” ([Luke 1:76, NLT](#)).

Later, [John the Baptist connected the dots between his mission and Isaiah’s prophecy, testifying, “\*I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord,—just as Isaiah the prophet said\*”](#) ([John 1:23, CSB](#)).

John declares that Israel’s long-anticipated Savior is about to step onto the world stage.

Through the testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Zechariah, and John the Baptist himself, God makes it clear that this rugged wilderness preacher is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.



**But how** did John prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight? His nickname—“John the Baptist”—gives us a clue.

**John the Baptist beckoned the Jewish people to repent of their sins and be baptized—an act that outwardly demonstrated the inward dedication of their lives to God through immersion in water.**

**Repentance** is the inescapable beginning of faith, and baptism represented a new way of doing things for the Jews. As a religious practice, baptism was generally only observed by outsiders (Gentiles) converting to Judaism.

To prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight, John needed the Jews to understand that their ancestral heritage would not save them. Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior would require a personal commitment—a turning away from sin and a new life of devotion to God. John’s baptism “called for repentance from sin,” meaning real-life change as well as belief in Jesus Christ

(see [Acts 19:1–7, NLT](#)).

As John encountered Jesus face to face, **he understood that his life mission was to reveal to Israel that Christ was the Son of**

God and their long-awaited Messiah. He prepared the way of the Lord by introducing Jesus as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” and “*the Chosen One of God*” ([John 1:29–34, NLT](#)).

*Because of John’s ministry,  
multitudes of sinners put their  
faith in Jesus Christ*  
([John 10:39–42](#)).

Highways in the ancient world were built for kings to travel. When a king planned to visit a city, it was the custom to build or prepare a road for him and his entourage to use as they approached the city.

The path would be made as straight and level as possible (see [Isaiah 40:3–4](#)).

Isaiah 35:8–10 speaks of “*a highway*” called “*the Way of Holiness*” leading to the city of Zion.

**Holiness is often referred to in the Bible as a straight path** ([Hebrews 12:13](#); [Psalm 5:8](#); [Proverbs 3:6](#); [Jeremiah 31:9](#); [Isaiah 26:7](#)).

John was God's messenger chosen to proclaim the coming of Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah, who is King of kings and Lord of lords. John preached a game-changing baptism of repentance that leads to a life of holiness found only in surrendering to Jesus Christ ([John 14:6](#); [2 Timothy 1:9](#)).

As Christians, we prepare the way for the Lord to enter our hearts by repenting of our sins so that Christ can come in and make straight paths and holy temples of our lives ([Deuteronomy 26:18–19](#); [Ephesians 1:4](#); [2:19–22](#); [1 Peter 1:15–16](#); [1 Corinthians 3:16–17](#); [2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1](#)).

**Ligonier Ministries**

1/17/08

## John Cries in the Wilderness

[Matthew 3:1–3](#)  
[MATTHEW 3:1–3](#)

“This is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight’” (v. 3).

Following Christ’s move to Galilee, Matthew does not give any further details of Jesus’ childhood. Instead, he picks up the story of his gospel three decades after Jesus returns from Egypt, as we learn elsewhere that He is about thirty when He begins His ministry ([Luke 3:23](#)).

The events of [Matthew 3](#) take place around a.d. 27, and Joseph has probably already passed on, as none of the other gospels mention him during Jesus’ adult life. In all likelihood, Joseph has been gone for awhile, with the responsibility to support the family resting on Jesus and His brothers, that is, until His itinerant preaching begins.

Today’s passage depicts John the Baptist’s ministry in the “wilderness of Judea” (v. 1), a region covering the Jordan valley just north and west of the Dead Sea. His message is well-received by the Jews in Palestine, and crowds from all of Judea receive his baptism (vv. 5–6). **Importantly, in John’s day the voice of prophecy has been silent for 400 years according to various extra-canonical writings. When John ministers in the wilderness wearing camel’s hair, the people associate him with Elijah, who acted similarly (1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 1:7–8), and consider John a prophet (Matt. 21:23–27).**

**Through John the people realize that God is speaking to them again.**

In 3:3, Matthew again says prophecy is fulfilled at the coming of Jesus and cites [Isaiah 40:3](#).

**The meaning of this passage for Isaiah's original audience shows us how John fulfills it.**

## ISAIAH 40

is about the restoration promised to the exiled Israelites after they repent.

*A highway for God will be built, and the people will travel back to their land in glory (v. 3).*

**The exiles longed for this day, but the promise of glory did not occur when they returned to Palestine, for the nation as a whole did not repent. In a real sense, life in exile away from the Lord's blessing continued even though many of the people had returned.**

John is the ultimate realization of [Isaiah 40:3](#) because he sets the stage for the Lord's favor to come to the exiles.

Jesus is the way through which God's blessing comes to His people ([John 14:6](#)), and in heralding His coming, John is the road that leads the nation to blessing and thus to God in Christ.

## Coram Deo

John the Baptist was the primary herald of Christ in his day, but the task of bearing witness to the Savior was not laid solely upon him. Jesus Himself commissioned first the apostles, and secondly, the entire church to testify to the grace of God manifest in His life, death, and resurrection.

***Our witness will only be effective if, as with John, the surrounding culture sees that the church is different. Is your manner of life different than that of an unbeliever's? - R.C. Sproul***

# John the Baptist: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

by John MacArthur

*November 30, 2022. This blog was originally posted in March, 2016. —ed.*

After recounting John’s incredible birth, the biblical record quickly moves forward to the beginnings of his ministry. **He lived much of his life in the obscurity of the Judean desert before the word of God came to him initiating his prophetic ministry when he was about thirty years old (Luke 3:2).** At that time, he suddenly “appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” [\(Mark 1:4\)](#).

John was a study of contrasts in every respect—from his prolonged isolation to his abrupt public appearance, from his rugged wilderness life to his dramatic preaching and baptizing ministry. He was born to a woman who could not have children. He came from a line of priests, but ministered as a prophet. And he reached Jewish society by removing himself from it.

Both his training and his ministry took place in the unpopulated desert. That might seem like an odd place for the forerunner of the Messiah to set up his headquarters. But it fit perfectly with God's plan. **John was not sent to the royal courts of the ancient world to announce the coming of the King of the universe. From an obscure family, with a strange lifestyle, he established his ministry squarely in the middle of nowhere.**

But all of that was purposeful, a radical approach intended to awaken the people from their spiritual slumber and call them out of the dead legalism of their religious practices.

Constantly flowing crowds from Jerusalem and Jericho, driven by both curiosity and conviction, came out to hear the eccentric prophet preach. There in the desolate sands, removed from the distractions of the city and the oppression of the religious leaders, people were able to carefully ponder the powerful truths John was proclaiming.

John's message was as startling as his physical appearance. He claimed to be the true messenger from God, but was not like the well-mannered, soft-spoken, and richly adorned Pharisees and Sadducees.



John's scratchy camel's hair cloak, plain leather belt, and diet of locusts and wild honey served as a metaphoric and stinging rebuke to the leaders of Israel's religious establishment.

Like the Old Testament prophets before him, everything about John's strange behavior was intended as an object lesson for God's chosen nation. He was not calling others to live or dress as he did, but he was calling people away from liturgically dressed hypocrites who were leading people to hell.

### **The Kingdom Is at Hand**

As the preacher privileged to announce the arrival of the Messiah, John's calling was more lofty and sacred than that of anyone who had come before him. His was the first prophetic voice to echo throughout the Judean hillsides since the prophet Malachi went silent four hundred years earlier.

Though his story is told in the gospels, John was the last of the Old Testament prophets. As such, he was given the privileged responsibility of both announcing the Messiah's coming and declaring His arrival.

Like his predecessors, John faithfully pointed people forward to Christ, but unlike the other Jewish prophets, he lived to see the fulfillment of his words.

In [Matthew 11:9](#), Jesus separated John from the noble prophets before him by saying he was **“more than a prophet”** because—as the Lord went on to explain—he was the divinely appointed messenger foretold in [Malachi 3:1](#).

John’s mission had been prophesied **some seven hundred years earlier** by Isaiah: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight’” ([Matthew 3:3](#); cf. [Isaiah 40:3-4](#)).

He was preparing the hearts of the Jews for the coming of their long-awaited King. After millennia of anticipation and prophetic promises, *John was selected for the unparalleled privilege of being the Messiah’s personal herald.*

In the ancient near east, the coming of a monarch was usually preceded by the appearance of a herald who announced the king’s imminent arrival and made final preparations for his stay. Along with the herald, a delegation of servants would be sent ahead of the royal caravan in

order to remove any obstacles in the road and make sure the way was ready for travel.

Thus, the herald's responsibility was two-fold: to proclaim the king's coming and to prepare the way for his arrival.

**Those two components defined the privileged ministry of John the Baptist.**

*But John did not serve merely a human king. He was the forerunner of the King of kings. As such, he did not clear debris from literal roads; rather, through his Spirit-empowered preaching on repentance and faith, he sought to remove the obstacles of unbelief from the hearts of sinful men and women.*

He challenged the hypocritical self-righteousness of first-century Judaism and called people to repent and live a life of holy faith and obedience. In this way, they would be prepared for the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom.

John's ministry is described **as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness."** To all who would listen,

his thundering words reiterated one simple message: **“Repent!”** (Matthew 3:2).

The Greek word for *repent* entails more than mere sorrow or regret. It means “to change the mind and will” and encompasses the idea of turning around and heading in the opposite direction. Repentance does not refer to just any change, but to a change from sin to righteousness. It involves sorrow over sin, but goes beyond that to produce both changed thinking and the desire for a changed life (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10).

John declared that if the people would turn from their rebellious pride and embrace a life of wholehearted obedience, they would be ready for the Messiah.

**John’s message shocked the Jewish people, who assumed they were already included because they belonged to God’s chosen nation.**

By ethnicity, they felt assured of a place in the kingdom of heaven, such that repentance was not necessary for them. On the other hand, the neighboring Gentile nations had no such privilege. John confronted that false notion head on, boldly declaring, “Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham” (Matthew 3:9). To the self-righteous Israelites who heard, John’s point was unmistakably clear: they were in the exact same condition as the

unbelieving Gentiles—spiritually dead, like stones. Unless they repented and were converted from sin to righteousness, they would not inherit eternal salvation. Instead, they would be judged. **Being Jewish—and religious, at that—counted for nothing before God but greater judgment.**

John's mandate was urgent. The coming of the King was imminent. In spite of their religion, the people's hearts were hard and cold.

So **John confronted them with fiery passion and unabashed directness. Now was not the time to mince words.**

*He challenged the people to turn away from the ritualism, superficiality, and hypocrisy of their external ceremonies, traditions, and laws. He called them away from the establishment, into the wilderness, to a place where they would not have gone unless they were serious about repenting.*

He exposed the false pretenses of the religious leaders with vivid warnings, and he challenged the people to demonstrate their

repentance in practical ways, like caring for the needy, working with integrity, and showing love to others ([Luke 3:11-14](#)).

He preached with such conviction and authority that some who heard him thought he might actually be the Messiah himself. But John quickly dismissed such misguided rumors. **When questioned by the priests and Levites who had been sent from Jerusalem to ask his identity, John replied, “I am not the Christ” ([John 1:19-20](#)). He likewise told the crowds, “I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” ([Luke 3:16](#)).**

## John knew his position and his task.

Thus, he never sought honor for himself, but only for the One whose coming he proclaimed. From childhood, John had undoubtedly been told many times of the angel’s announcement of his birth and his calling—a purpose he never compromised or manipulated for his own gain.

### **The Sign of Repentance**

**Though he ministered out in the wilderness, John’s preaching had a dramatic impact in the cities of Israel. According to Matthew’s account, “*Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins*” ([Luke 3:5-6](#)).**

Multitudes traveled to hear him preach, and many were convicted of their sin and baptized as a symbol of their desire for repentance and readiness to receive the Messiah.

**Unlike Levitical ceremonial washings, which involved repeatedly washing the hands, feet, and head to symbolize the need for continual purification from recurring sin, the baptism of John was a one-time event.**

The closest parallel, in the Jewish practices of that day, was a ritual not intended for native Israelites at all—the baptism of Gentile proselytes upon their entrance into Judaism.

That parallel would not have been lost on the Jews to whom John preached. **Those who were truly repentant needed to recognize that rather than being superior, they were no better than pagan non-Jews, spiritually speaking.**

**Even though they were Abraham's physical descendants, until they repented, they were complete outsiders to God's kingdom. In order to symbolize their recognition of that reality, John called the Jews to be baptized in the same way as a Gentile proselyte.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Mark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

(Adapted from **Twelve Unlikely Heroes**.)

## Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(3) **This is he.**—The words are those of the Evangelist, not of the Baptist, though the latter also used them to describe his own office ([John 1:23](#)). In each case the reference shows how strongly the great second part of Isaiah had impressed itself on the minds of men. To the Baptist, brooding over the sins of his people, and the long-expected consolation of Israel, there had come “the word of the Lord” ([Luke 3:2](#)), bidding him identify himself with that “voice of one crying in the wilderness.”

Historically, the connection of the opening chapters of this part of Isaiah with the protests against idolatry ([Isaiah 40:18-24](#); [Isaiah 41:7](#); [Isaiah 44:9-20](#)), and with the name of Cyrus ([Isaiah 44:28](#); [Isaiah 45:1](#)), shows that the prophet blended his glorious visions of the ideal polity of the future with the return of the exiles from Babylon. The return came, and the ideal was not realised. The kingdom of heaven seemed still far off. Now, the Baptist came to proclaim its nearness.

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**—The imagery is drawn from the great strategical works of the conquerors of the East. They sent a herald before them to call the people of the countries through which they marched to prepare for their approach. A “king’s highway” had to be carried through the open land of the wilderness, valleys filled up, and hills levelled (the words used are, of course, poetical in their greatness), winding bye-paths straightened, for the march of the great army. Interpreted in its spiritual application, the wilderness was the world lying in evil, and the making low the mountains and hills was the bringing down of spiritual pride. When the poor in spirit were received into the kingdom of heaven, the valleys were exalted; when soldier and publican renounced their special sins, the rough places were made plain and the crooked straight.

It is probable that the stress thus laid upon “the way of the Lord,” in the first stage of the Gospel, led to the peculiar use of the term “the way” by St. Luke, to denote what we should call the “religion” of the Apostolic Church ([Acts 9:2](#); [Acts 18:25-26](#); [Acts 19:9](#); [Acts 19:23](#); [Acts 22:4](#); [Acts 24:14](#); [Acts 24:22](#)).

## Benson Commentary

[Matthew 3:3](#). *For this is he*, &c. — These may be the words of John himself, (comp. [John 1:22-23](#)), but it is more likely that they are the words of the evangelists; *spoken of by the Prophet Esaias, saying, The voice*, &c. — Isaiah, in the passage referred to, [Isaiah 40:3](#), &c., is to be understood as speaking first, though not principally, concerning the Jews returning from the Babylonish captivity, as appears from the preceding chapter. As, however, the prophet intended, under the emblem of that deliverance of God’s people, to shadow out a redemption of an infinitely higher and more important nature, the evangelists, with the greatest propriety, apply his words to the opening of the gospel dispensation by the preaching of John, and to the introduction of the kingdom of the Messiah, who was to effect a much greater deliverance of the people of God, Gentiles as well as Jews, from the captivity of sin, and the power of death. And the same thing



may be affirmed concerning many other passages of the prophets. See notes on [Isaiah 40:3-4](#). This expression, *The voice of one crying*, is as much as to say, *A herald is at hand proclaiming*. The word *crying*, implies that John's testimony concerning Christ was uttered, not secretly, negligently, or doubtfully, but openly and publicly, freely, expressly, and resolutely, with a fervent spirit, and an audible, or strong voice. *In the wilderness* — These words are generally considered as connected with the preceding, so as to signify that John preached in the wilderness of Judea; and some interpret the expression figuratively as well as literally, and by *the wilderness of Judea*, understand the desert state of the Jewish Church at that time, destitute of religious culture, and the trees and fruits of righteousness. But Bishop Lowth connects Isaiah's words with the following clause, and translates them, *A voice crieth: In the wilderness prepare ye the way of Jehovah*, which he thus interprets: "The prophet hears a crier giving orders, by solemn proclamation, to prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness; to remove all obstructions before Jehovah marching through the desert; through the wild, uninhabited, and unpassable country;" the idea, he thinks, "being taken from the practice of the eastern monarchs, who, whenever they entered upon an expedition, or took a journey, especially through desert countries, sent harbingers before them to prepare all things for their passage, and pioneers to open the passes, to level the ways, and to remove all impediments." Thus John the Baptist, the harbinger of Christ, who was *God manifest in the flesh*, is sent to prepare his way before him, by calling the people to repentance and to faith in him, their great Redeemer and Saviour. *Make his paths straight* — The paths of our God. Remove all obstructions out of his way, particularly all sin and unbelief, all carnal desires and worldly views, affections, and expectations, that your Saviour and your King may have a ready passage, and free access to your hearts, and may there erect his spiritual kingdom of *righteousness, peace, and joy in*, and by, *the Holy Ghost*; and may rule your lives, your whole conversation and conduct by his righteous and holy laws. Though this could only be done by divine grace, and it is grace which prepares for further grace, yet as man must concur with God, and *be a worker together with him*, John with propriety calls on the people thus to prepare the Lord's way, that his grace might not be received in vain. The words imply that they were unprepared for receiving the Messiah and his salvation, which indeed they were in every sense, being neither in a fit disposition to relish, or even understand, his doctrine, to be convinced by his miracles, receive his Spirit, follow his example, rely on his mediation, or become his subjects. An earthly, sensual, and devilish disposition had taken possession of their minds and hearts, even the whole spirit of the world, and obstructed the entrance of Christ's spiritual kingdom into them and among them. It was necessary, therefore, that these hinderances should be removed out of the way, that they might become the true people and followers of the Messiah.

### **Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary**

3:1-6 After Malachi there was no prophet until John the Baptist came. He appeared first in the wilderness of Judea. This was not an uninhabited desert, but a part of the country not thickly peopled, nor much enclosed. No place is so remote as to shut us out from the visits of Divine grace. The doctrine he preached was repentance; Repent ye. The

word here used, implies a total alteration in the mind, a change in the judgment, disposition, and affections, another and a better bias of the soul. Consider your ways, change your minds: you have thought amiss; think again, and think aright. True penitents have other thoughts of God and Christ, sin and holiness, of this world and the other, than they had. The change of the mind produces a change of the way. That is gospel repentance, which flows from a sight of Christ, from a sense of his love, and from hopes of pardon and forgiveness through him. It is a great encouragement to us to repent; repent, for your sins shall be pardoned upon your repentance. Return to God in a way of duty, and he will, through Christ, return unto you in the way of mercy. It is still as necessary to repent and humble ourselves, to prepare the way of the Lord, as it then was. There is a great deal to be done, to make way for Christ into a soul, and nothing is more needful than the discovery of sin, and a conviction that we cannot be saved by our own righteousness. The way of sin and Satan is a crooked way; but to prepare a way for Christ, the paths must be made straight, Heb 12:13. Those whose business it is to call others to mourn for sin, and to mortify it, ought themselves to live a serious life, a life of self-denial, and contempt of the world. By giving others this example, John made way for Christ. Many came to John's baptism, but few kept to the profession they made. There may be many forward hearers, where there are few true believers. Curiosity, and love for novelty and variety, may bring many to attend on good preaching, and to be affected for a while, who never are subject to the power of it. Those who received John's doctrine, testified their repentance by confessing their sins. Those only are ready to receive Jesus Christ as their righteousness, who are brought with sorrow and shame to own their guilt. The benefits of the kingdom of heaven, now at hand, were thereupon sealed to them by baptism. John washed them with water, in token that God would cleanse them from all their iniquities, thereby intimating, that by nature and practice all were polluted, and could not be admitted among the people of God, unless washed from their sins in the fountain Christ was to open, Zec 13:1.

### **Barnes' Notes on the Bible**

The prophet Esaias - The prophet Isaiah. Esaias is the Greek mode of writing the name. This passage is taken from [Isaiah 40:3](#). It is here said to have been spoken in reference to John, the forerunner of Christ. The language is such as was familiar to the Jews. and such as they would understand. It was spoken at first with reference to the return from the captivity at Babylon. In ancient times, it was customary in the march of armies to send messengers, or pioneers, before them to proclaim their approach; to provide for them; to remove obstructions; to make roads, level hills, fill up valleys, etc. Isaiah, describing the return from Babylon, uses language taken from that custom. A crier, or herald, is introduced. In the vast deserts that lay between Babylon and Judea he is represented as lifting up his voice, and, with authority, commanding a public road to be made for the return of the captive Jews, with the Lord as their deliverer. "Prepare his ways, make them straight," says he. The meaning in Isaiah is, "Let the valleys be exalted, or filled up, and the hills be levelled, and a straight, level highway be prepared, that they may march with ease and safety." See the notes at [Isaiah 40:3-4](#). The custom here referred to is continued in the East at the present time. "When Ibrahim Pasha proposed

to visit certain places on Lebanon, the emeers and sheiks sent forth a general proclamation, somewhat in the style of Isaiah's exhortation, to all the inhabitants, to assemble along the proposed route and prepare the way before him. The same was done in 1845, on a grand scale, when the present sultan visited Brousa. The stones were gathered out, the crooked places straightened, and the rough ones made level and smooth." - The Land and the Book, Vol i. pp. 105, 106.

As applied to John, the passage means that he was sent to remove obstructions, and to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah, like a herald going before an army on the march, to make preparations for its coming.

### **Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary**

3. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying—(Mt 11:3).

The voice of one crying in the wilderness—(See on [1213]Lu 3:2); the scene of his ministry corresponding to its rough nature.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight—This prediction is quoted in all the four Gospels, showing that it was regarded as a great outstanding one, and the predicted forerunner as the connecting link between the old and the new economies. Like the great ones of the earth, the Prince of peace was to have His immediate approach proclaimed and His way prepared; and the call here—taking it generally—is a call to put out of the way whatever would obstruct His progress and hinder His complete triumph, whether those hindrances were public or personal, outward or inward. In Luke (Lu 3:5, 6) the quotation is thus continued: "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Levelling and smoothing are here the obvious figures whose sense is conveyed in the first words of the proclamation—"Prepare ye the way of the Lord." The idea is that every obstruction shall be so removed as to reveal to the whole world the salvation of God in Him whose name is the "Saviour." (Compare Ps 98:3; Isa 11:10; 49:6; 52:10; Lu 2:31, 32; Ac 13:47).

### **Matthew Poole's Commentary**

It is not much material whether we understand these words as the words of the evangelist concerning John, as it should seem by [Mark 1:3](#) [Luke 3:4](#), or the words of John himself, for he thus spake, [John 1:23](#). As the words of the prophet they are found [Isaiah 40:3](#). The words are judged literally, but typically, to concern Cyrus and Darius, and either these princes, who were instrumental in the restoring of the Jews to their liberty from the captivity of Babylon, or those prophets who encouraged them to their return, or upon their return to build the temple and city. But they are confirmed by all the four evangelists, [Mark 1:3](#) [Luke 3:4](#) [John 1:23](#), to have a special relation also to

John the Baptist, who was to come more immediately before Christ, and with the fervency and in the spirit of Elias, [Luke 1:17](#), crying,

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.** As the harbingers of great princes are sent before them to call to persons to remove things out of the way which may hinder their free passage, so John was sent before this great King in Zion, now coming forth to show himself, and to set up his kingdom in the world; to cry fervently to all people, by a true and timely repentance, to cast off those sinful courses, and to reject those false opinions, of which they were possessed, the holding of and to which might hinder the progress of this spiritual kingdom.

### **Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible**

For this is he that was spoken of,... These are not the words of the Baptist himself, as in [John 1:23](#) but of the Evangelist, who cites and applies to John a passage in the Prophet Isaiah, [Isaiah 40:3](#) and that very pertinently, since that "chapter" is a prophecy of the Messiah. The consolations spoken of in [Isaiah 40:3](#), were to be in the days of the king Messiah, as a writer of note (y) among the Jews observes. The Messiah is more expressly prophesied of in [Isaiah 40:9](#) as one that should appear to the joy of his people, and "come with a strong hand", vigorously prosecute his designs, faithfully perform his work, and then receive his reward; he is spoken of under the "character" of a "shepherd", who would tenderly discharge the several parts of his office as such, which character is frequently given to the Messiah in the Old Testament: now the person spoken of in [Isaiah 40:3](#) was to be his harbinger to go before him, proclaim and make ready for his coming; and what is said of him agrees entirely with John the Baptist, as the character given of him,

the voice of one crying, lowing like an ox; which expresses the austerity of the man, the roughness of his voice, the severity of his language; that he called aloud and spoke out, openly, publicly, and freely; and that he delivered himself in preaching with a great deal of zeal and fervency. The place where he preached was "in the wilderness", that is, of Judea, where he is said before, in [Matthew 3:1](#) to come preaching. The doctrine he preached was,

prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight, which is best explained by what is said before, in [Matthew 3:2](#)

repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The Lord whom ye have sought, the Messiah whom you have expected, is just coming, he will quickly appear; prepare to meet him by repentance, and receive him by faith, relinquish your former notions and principles, correct your errors, and amend your lives, remove all out of the way which may be offensive to him. The allusion is to a great personage being about to make his public appearance or entrance; when a harbinger goes before him, orders the way to be cleared, all impediments to be removed, and everything got ready for the reception of him.

## Expositor's Greek Testament

[Matthew 3:3](#). οὗτος γὰρ ἐστίν, etc.: the evangelist here speaks. He finds in John the man of prophecy who proclaims in the desert the near advent of Jehovah coming to deliver His people. He quotes *Isaiah* only. Mark ([Mark 1:2](#)) quotes *Malachi* also, identifying John, not only with the voice in the desert, but with Elijah. Isaiah's herald is not merely a type of John in the view of the evangelist; the two are identical. The quotation follows the Sept[12], except that for τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν is substituted αὐτοῦ. Note where Matthew stops. Luke, the universalist, goes on to the end of the oracle. The mode of introducing the prophetic citation is peculiar. "This is he," not "that it might be fulfilled". Weiss (Meyer) thinks this an indication that the passage is taken from "the apostolic source".

[12] Septuagint.

## Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

3. *by*] See note on ch. [Matthew 2:5](#).

*by the prophet Esaias*] The reference in [Isaiah 40:3](#) is to the promised return from Babylon. A herald shall proclaim the joyous news on mountains and in the desert through which the return should be. This incident in the national history is transferred to the more glorious deliverance from bondage and to the coming of the true King.

*The voice*] The message is more than the messenger, the prophet's personality is lost in the prophetic voice.

*make his paths straight*] The image would be familiar to Eastern thought, a Semiramis or a Xerxes orders the mountains to be levelled or cut through, and causeways to be raised in the valleys.

## Bengel's Gnomon

[Matthew 3:3](#). Οὗτος, κ.τ.λ., *this*, etc.) There are many circumstances recorded in the New Testament, which had been predicted in the Old.—γὰρ, *for*) The reason why it was necessary that John should thus arise at that time (as is described in verses 1, 2), was, that it had been so predicted.—φωνή, κ.τ.λ., *a voice*, etc.) See Gnomon on [Luke 3:4](#). "A voice," *i.e.*, "it is *a voice*."—βοῶντος, *of one crying*[117]) *i.e.*, of John. An analogous phrase occurs in [Romans 10:15](#), viz., οἱ πόδες τῶν εὐαγγελιζομένων, *the feet of them that preach*.—ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, *in the wilderness*) Not in the temple, or the synagogues. Some construe this passage thus, "*Prepare ye in the wilderness*, etc," because the accents[118] in the original Hebrew of Isaiah require it to be so construed

there. But if such had been the evangelist's meaning, he would subsequently have expressed, in equivalent terms, the parallel phrase *בערבה*, *in the desert*. [119] As the passage stands, the expressions, "*preaching in the wilderness*," in [Matthew 3:1](#), and "a *voice of one crying in the wilderness*," in [Matthew 3:3](#), correspond with each other. It comes to the same thing: for where there is the voice, there also are the hearers who are commanded to prepare the way, and there is the Coming of the Lord. St Matthew, also, in ch. [Matthew 4:15](#), contains something different from the Hebrew accents.—Cf. Gnomon on [Hebrews 3:7](#).—*τὴν ὁδὸν*, *the way*) There is one primary *way*, and this includes many *tracks*, *τριβους*.—*Κυρίου*, *of the Lord*) The Hebrew *יהוה*, *Jehovah*, for which the Hebrews of later ages substituted *אדני*, *Adonai*, is rendered by the LXX. *ΚΥΡΙΟΣ*, *Lord*. In this passage Christ is intended. The appellation *Κύριος*, *Lord*, when applied to Christ in the New Testament, has various meanings, according to the variety of circumstances, times, and speakers. In passages quoted from the Old Testament it frequently corresponds to the names *יהוה* and *אדני*, of which the one expresses His majesty as the Son of God, the other, His glory also as the Messiah. Men amongst whom He walked addressed Him thus with various purport, according to the various extent of their faith. From that time forward, the apostles, and the faithful in general, frequently employed this appellation with reference to His dominion and authority over His own followers, and over all things beside, even in His state of humiliation, [120] but rather in His state of exaltation: in which cases the pronoun "*my*" is sometimes added, which is never joined with the tetragrammaton *יהוה*.—*εὐθείας*) *straight*.

[117] "Clamantis"—*crying out*, uttering with a loud voice—not *weeping*.—(I. B.)

[118] See p. 132, f. n. 5.—(I. B.)

[119] In [Isaiah 40:3](#), the passage stands thus: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God;" where the phrases, *in the wilderness*, and *in the desert*, are in parallelism to each other.—(I. B.)

[120] "Exinanitionis;" literally, *of being emptied out*: a phrase of frequent occurrence, suggested by the words in [Php 2:7](#), *ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε*, *He emptied Himself*—rendered in E. V., *made Himself of no reputation*.—(I. B.)

### **Pulpit Commentary**

Verse 3. - *For*. The reason for John's appearance and proclamation lies in prophecy. *This is he that was spoken of* (*οὗτος γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ ῥηθείς*). In [John 1:23](#) the following quotation is uttered by the Baptist himself, and some commentators have supposed this to be the case also here. But

(1) this is against the parallel passages in Mark and Luke.

(2) The form of the expression in John arises directly from the context.

(3) In the Baptist's mouth the neuter (τοῦτο... τὸ ῥηθέν) rather than the masculine would have been more natural. The expression is doubtless that of the evangelist, suggested to him by John's own utterance, the "is" (ἐστίν) expressing John's permanent character. Contrast εἶχεν ἡΐν, (ver. 4) of his clothing and food. **[He that was] spoken of.** The expression means, not a mere reference found in Isaiah, but the absolute content of the prophet's words. The utterance of God by means of the prophet is - John the Baptist. **The Prophet Esaias; Isaiah the prophet** (Revised Version); the commoner Greek order (but cf. [Luke 4:17](#)). **The voice**, etc. (except "his" for "our God," from the LXX. of [Isaiah 40:8](#)). The Hebrew probably joins "in the wilderness" with "prepare ye," but St. Matthew with "crying" (cf ver. 1, "preaching in the wilderness," as probably the LXX.) In Isaiah the original meaning of the passage was probably, "prepare for the return to Jerusalem." The figure is that of the common and necessary process in semi-civilized countries of repairing roads before a great personage comes along them. Zechariah had; years before, applied the similar expression in [Malachi 3:1](#) to his son ([Luke 1:76](#); cf. [Mark 1:2](#)). (For a metaphor like in kind, but with contrasted meaning, cf. [Galatians 5:7](#), ἐκόπτειν, breaking up a road to render it impassable.) **Paths** (τρίβους). According to Philo, the word is equivalent to "a carriage-road" (ἰππήλατος καὶ ἀμαξήλατος ὁδός, **vide** in Wetstein). It is thus equivalent to the Hebrew (**m sillah**, "a highway," "a made road"). Possibly the plural was employed by the LXX. rather than the singular of the original, from their interpreting the passage, not of the return of the Lord to Palestine, but his coming into many hearts. Matthew 3:3



The  
**FLOW**  
Adult CURRICULUM

#47

Proclaiming The Gospel (No matter what!)

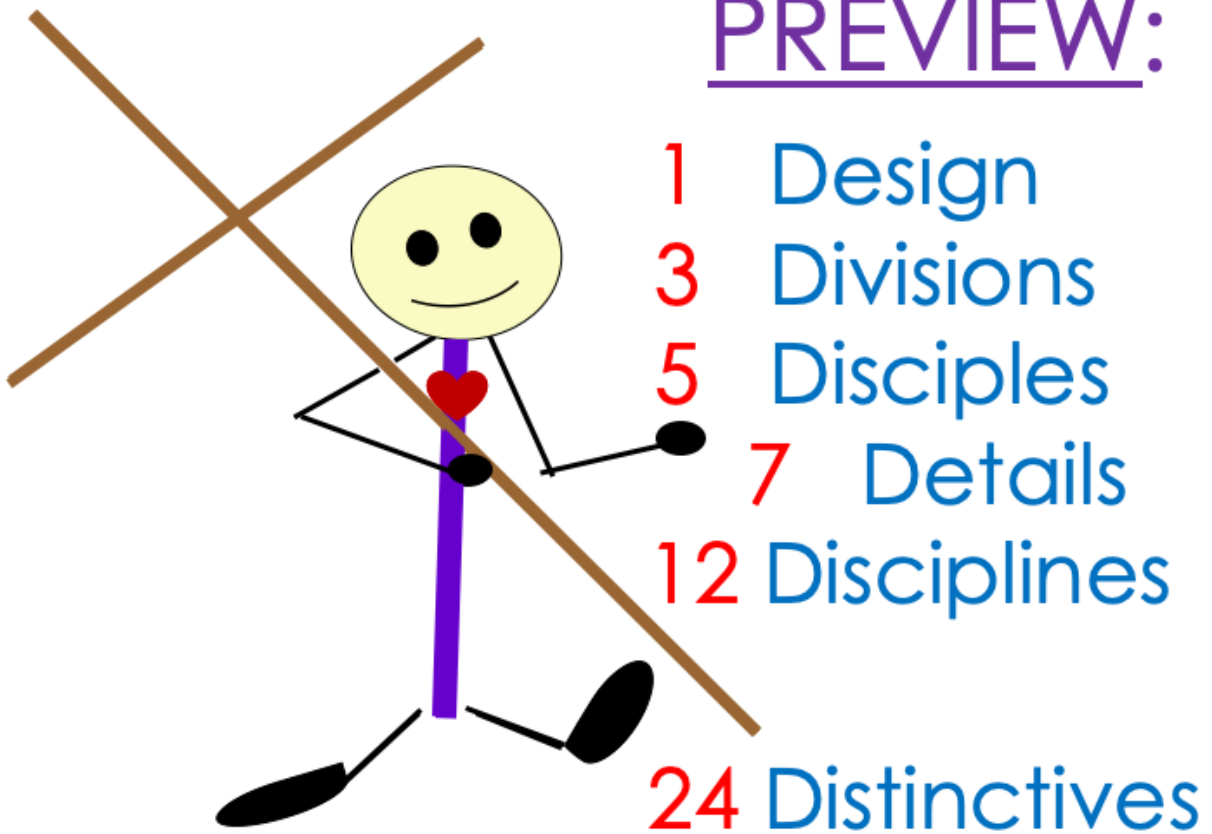
Mark 16:15

(Come And See Christianity book page 110)

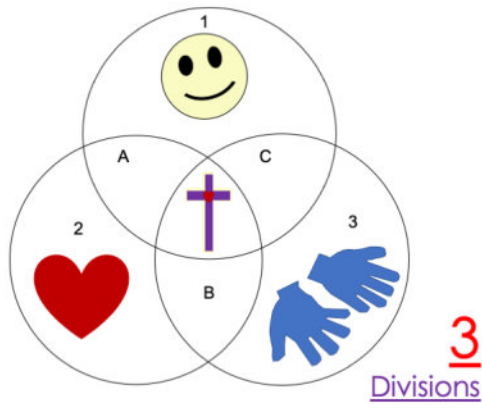


# The FLOW

## PREVIEW:

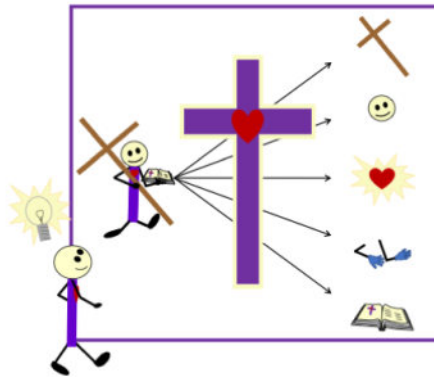


SECTION SIX: 12 Disciplines



**The Disciple's "Hands"** put into **action** the **truth** & **love** of God's Word, God's will, & God's ways. In short, when **each Christian's Head, Heart, & Hands** are united in purpose & power, the family of God is **living** as the **Body of Christ!**

## 24 Family Distinctives:

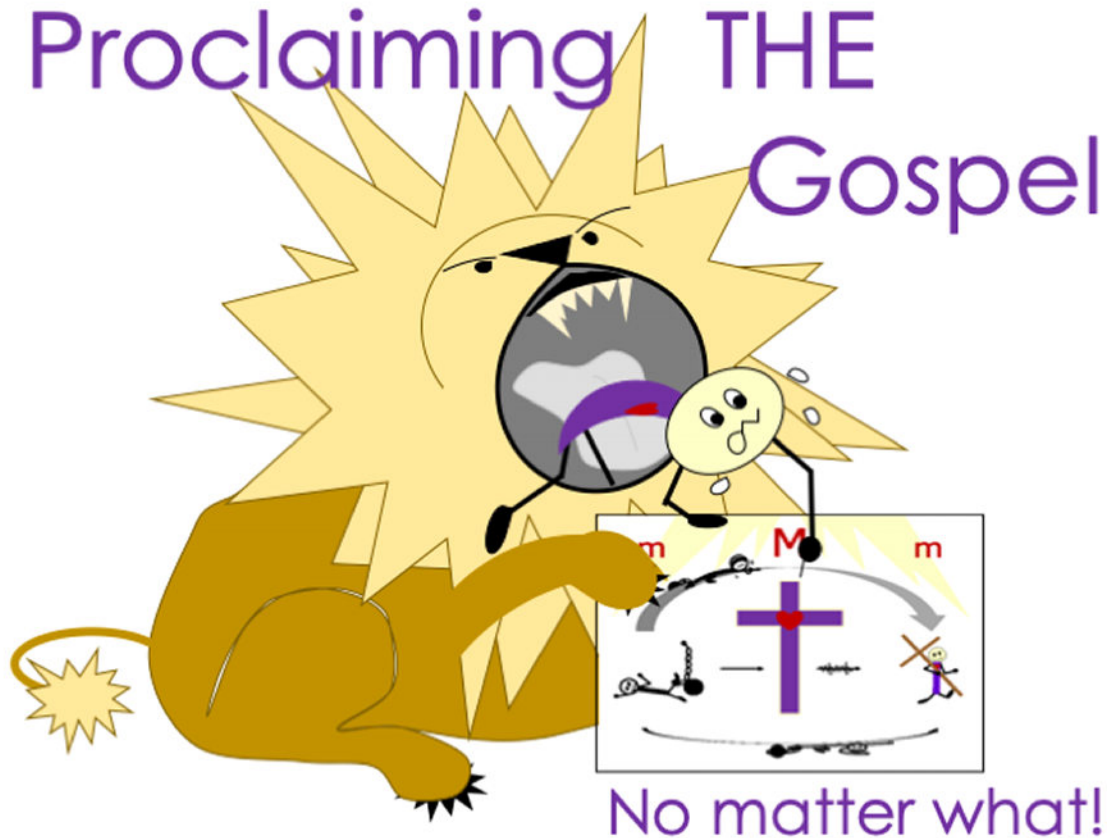


## **24 DISTINCTIVES:**

The “distinctives” are a family portrait... When you add God’s Word, God’s Spirit, God’s Truth, God’s love, and God’s people all together, the distinctives are what **we look, love, & live like :-)**

We are...

# Proclaiming THE Gospel



INTRO:

As we begin to **see the beautiful, biblical portrait of Christ's faith-filled family** defined and described by God's Word, will, and ways, it is critical to remember that the Holy Bible is to ALWAYS BE our ultimate source, authority, and interpreter in ALL things pertaining to one's understanding of reality and application of truth in love.

**Remember,**  
**The biblical Church is Christ's missional family...**  
**Moreover, God's Word reveals our Father's will and His family's ways.**

### [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Here are ***24 defining & describing HANDS-on DISTINCTIVES of Christianity:***

True Christians are biblically, miraculously, intentionally, missionally, and imperfectly...

1. *Responding to grace*
2. *Repenting of sin*
3. *Trusting the Bible*
4. *Obeying God's Word*
5. *Growing in Christ*
6. *Living Spirit-led*
7. *Praying for guidance*
8. *Following by faith*
9. *Dying to self*
10. *Carrying our cross*
11. *BE-ing The Church*
12. *Loving one another (truly loving one another)*
13. *Equipping the saints*
14. *Exemplifying supernatural unity*
15. *Ministering as ambassadors*
16. *Discerning matters shrewdly*
17. *Worshipping God vertically*
18. *Experiencing Him horizontally*
19. *Proclaiming the Gospel (no matter what)*
20. *Fishing for men*
21. *Making disciplined warriors*
22. *Winning spiritual warfare*
23. *Loving our King*
24. *Serving His kingdom*

PRAYER:

LORD, we seek to bless You with all that is within us. Help us here, we pray, to be that blessing as we come to better understand You and Your eternal truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Help us to see with Your eyes and love with Your love, all that You would reveal to us through Your Word, Your will, and Your ways. May we grow in our grasp of Your realities, Your means of restoration, and Your mission of reproduction. In the holy name of Jesus, we pray. Amen and Amen

## CONTEXT:

### Macro

**This lesson marks another major transition point** in our curriculum's eye-opening explanation of Christianity. By way of review, we began in Section One with the reality of Almighty God having 1 Divine DESIGN (also known as a biblical worldview and the eternal application of Jesus Christ's Gospel). In Section Two, we addressed the 3 DIVISIONS (Head, Heart, and Hands) that make up the "being" in every human being. Next, in Section Three, we demonstrated how Christianity accounts for, defines, and describes all of humanity, every person, past, present, and future. We noted that all people can be identified as one of the 5 DISCIPLES – Lost, Lover, Learner, Leader, or Lifer. Moving forward, Section Four revealed, engaged, and explained the 7 fundamental DETAILS of God's Divine DESIGN... because **we all need to know what we need to know**. To be more specific, those seven truths are: The Foundations, The Framework, The Facts, The Fight, The Faith, The Family, and the truth about Forever.

Then, in Section Five, which we just completed, our focus shifted from HEAD based truths to 12 HEART shaping exercises or disciplines - each having the potential to strengthen one's personal relationship with Christ, His Church, and their collective mission: bringing God glory by finding & growing more glorifiers.

We used the acronym **J.E.S.U.S.'S. P. S.W.O.R.D.** to outline and harmonize a biblical, missional, and intentional methodology for growing in God's love - & His loving witness. The 12 HEART DISCIPLINES are: **J**ournaling... **E**ating-nothing (fasting)... **S**cripture-intake... **U**nderstudy of Scripture... **S**tewardship... **S**olitude... **P**rayer... **S**erving... **W**orshipping... **O**utreach... **R**elationships... and **D**evelopment.

Now, our curriculum and study will transition to The HANDS. This is where **Christians demonstrate to the world that Christ is in their worship & witness**. Whereas our time spent in the HEAD sections (1-4) focused on the truths that Christians need and seek to LEARN, and our concentration on the 12 HEART DISCIPLINES of section 5 helped us to grow in God's LOVE, our sixth and final section will **walk through the 24 DISTINCTIVES, which explain & exemplify how Christians are to faithfully LIVE... and fully BE The Church... together** – all by God's grace & ALL for His glory!

God's Word puts it this way:

***"Let us not love with word and tongue but in action and truth."*** – 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:18

*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47](#)praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. – Acts 2:46-47*

## I. **DISTINCTIVES are FRUIT:**

It is important to realize that God's miraculous and authentic **Christian DISTINCTIVES are the FRUIT of saving grace and faith** (Ephesians 2:1-10). As Jesus described in John 15, people can do nothing outside of their abiding in Him and obeying His Word, will and ways. In short, there will be no fruit unless one remains attached to and provided for by the true Vine and divine Root. With that said, a cautionary note is worth sharing here, beware the counterfeits that abound around the world. ***Plastic fruit is deceptive vs. DISTINCTIVE!***

### Galatians 5:22-25

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*

## II. **DISTINCTIVES are FAMILY:**



DISTINCTIVES, by definition, are those “distinguishing characteristics that are notable for having a special quality, style, and/or attractiveness” (Dictionary.com).

When it comes to God's family, the true Church, each Christian and their individualistic DISTINCTIVES are as unique as their potential. At the same time, in the same way that a billion unique snowflakes can be combined to make a single snowstorm, or countless swatches of scrap fabric can be sewn together to make a single quilt, so it is with God's family. The LORD creates His Christian family with a both/and combination of DISTINCTIVE uniqueness, as well as DISTINCTIVE love and defining unity.

**Christianity's DISTINCT family (ecclesia) has a DISTINCTIVE unity (koinonia).**

*“By this all people will know that you are My disciple, if you have love for one another.”*  
– John 13:35

*“The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.”*

*- Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

### III. **DISTINCTIVES are WITNESS:**

The most biblical and healthy understandings of Christianity will include an embrace of two overarching and DISTINCTIVE purposes. Namely, per God’s Word, will, and ways, every Christian has received miraculous, saving grace, as well as the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to:

1. Bring glory to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,  
**do all to the glory of God.***

2. BE Christ’s witness.

Acts 1:8

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, **and you will be My witnesses** in Jerusalem (locally), and in all Judea and Samaria (regionally), and to the end of the earth (globally).”*

**God’s DISTINCTIVE people have been filled with His Holy Spirit for the express purpose of living DISTINCTIVE lives.** When the world sees the LORD’s loving family living out their divinely empowered and God-honoring worship, work, and warfare, the resulting fruit will serve as a faithful witness, built with supernatural, grace-based, and missional DISTINCTIVES.

*“God created me—and you—to live with a single, all-embracing, all-transforming passion—namely, a passion to glorify God by enjoying and displaying his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life.”*

*- John Piper*



## The Christian Distinctive

What distinguishes Christianity from all other religions is that it is a *revealed* religion. Christianity is not about our search for God or our means of finding him. Christianity is not a religion that works its way upward. It is all about God coming to us — God in grace making himself known to us and making a way for us to enjoy fellowship with him.

And so, at the very heart of Christianity is, simply, a message — a message from God to us about what he has done to bring us to himself.

If Christianity is distinctively revealed religion, then it is also uniquely *authoritative*. It does not offer itself as the best and highest of human thinking about God or even the best or most successful of human efforts to know God. It professes to be nothing less than the unique word from God, his very own self-disclosure and the record of the actions he has taken in Jesus Christ to bring us into fellowship with himself.

One of Rudyard Kipling's characters declares, "The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone; He don't obey no orders unless they is his own." That is to say, human religions lack authority — they form their own ideas and "discover" their own beliefs.

By contrast the Christian is "under orders," because unlike human religions, Christianity is a revealed religion — divinely revealed. We Christians are not our own touchstone of truth, and we do not confuse our ideas about God with His own self-revelation. We learn truth about God not from "inner lights" within ourselves but from God's own objective Word.

And apart from this external authority, there is no Christianity. This, at bottom, is Christianity's leading distinctive.

And so, we **Christians prize Scripture as God's Word. We joyfully submit to it. And we enthusiastically proclaim its message of grace in Jesus Christ to the world.**

- Dr. Fred Zaspel

Micro

*The most important personal aspects of PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL are believing, loving, trusting, feeling, obeying, & abiding in & by it.*

*Go into ALL the world and proclaim The Gospel...  
- Jesus The Christ*

***"The biblical preaching of Christ is the whip that flogs the devil.  
The biblical preaching of Christ is the thunderbolt, the sound  
of which makes all hell shake.  
- Charles Spurgeon***

*Proclaiming THE GOSPEL to a lost world cannot be just another activity to add to the church's crowded agenda. It must be central to who we are.  
It forms our identity.  
- Francis Chan*

Message

**"PREACH YOU CHRIST, AND CHRIST, AND CHRIST, AND CHRIST,  
AND NOTHING ELSE BUT CHRIST."**

When Charles Spurgeon surveyed the preaching of his own day, he lamented that, "There is very much rubbish about, brethren." Now, after a century and a half, his observation appears equally penetrating and applicable. Spurgeon advised pastors to, "Preach you Christ, and Christ, and Christ, and Christ, and nothing else but Christ." When opposition arose, his response was simple, "Let the dogs bark, it is their nature to do so. Go on preaching Christ crucified."

...In Spurgeon's view, for a sermon to be "true preaching," it must include "adoration of God by the manifestation of his gracious attributes." Preaching was the PROCLAMATION of God's GOSPEL "which pre-eminently glorifies him." Spurgeon also believed that to hear true preaching was "an acceptable form of worship to the Most High," and was perhaps "one of the most spiritual in which the human mind can be engaged." For Spurgeon, to preach Christ was to preach "the glory of heaven conjoined with the beauty of earth," and to extol "the perfection of humanity united with the glory and dignity of Deity." In his view, the job of the preacher was simple and direct because, "We are mirrors reflecting the transactions of Calvary, telescopes manifesting the distant glories of an exalted Redeemer." As a result, he declared that "The nearer we keep to the cross, the nearer I think, we keep to our true vocation."

Furthermore, Spurgeon believed the best preachers were men who knew *“the ins and outs of a sinner's heart,”* men who could *“talk from experience instead of from theory.”* Preachers were meant to imitate Christ whose preaching was *“meant for the worst of men.”* Preaching was to be clear, cut to the heart, and not be encumbered by human speculation. Spurgeon believed that, *“A true servant of Christ must never try to let the people see how well he can preach.”* Rather, preachers must preach Christ so simply that the hearers *“cannot misunderstand him even if they try to do so.”* Indeed, the sermon had to be clear and Christ centered because *“it must not be tolerated that Christ should be unknown through our silence, and sinners unwarned through our negligence.”* After all, it would be a tragedy for, *“the sheep [to look] up to the shepherd, and not [be] fed.”*

Spurgeon loved to preach the gospel. Indeed, He always believed *“The world need still be told of its Saviour, and of the way to reach him”* and so he never tired of telling the Old, old story. In honor of Spurgeon's legacy as the “Prince of Preachers” here are twelve of his quotes on preaching/proclaiming.

1. *“Let the sun stop shining, and we will preach in darkness. Let the waves stop their ebb and flow, and still our voice shall preach the gospel.”*
2. *“My Master always went where He was most wanted-among the chief of sinners, and you know his preaching. It was a preaching that was meant for the worst of men.”*
3. *“Keep the word of God, and the word of God will keep you.”*
4. *“No reason exists why the preaching of the gospel should be a miserable operation, either to the speaker or to the hearer.”*
5. *“It must not be tolerated that Christ should be unknown through our silence, and sinners unwarned through our negligence.”*
6. *“True Gospel preaching does not decry holy living; nay, it sets up the highest possible standard and declares the way to reach it.”*
7. *“When a man has been in the fire, and has the smell of it still upon him, he is the one to warn others not to meddle with fire.”*
8. *“I love to preach a gospel of which I feel the sweetness in my own soul.”*
9. *“If you cannot catechize your own heart, and drill a truth into your own soul, you do not know how to teach other people.”*
10. *“I am determined, as far as ever I can, to preach the gospel plainly and simply, so that everybody may understand it.”*
11. *“If we are to see the church of God really restored to her pristine glory, we must have back this plain, simple, gospel-preaching.”*
12. *“Never was man blamed in heaven for preaching Christ too much.”*

**- Drew Tillman**

BIG IDEA: **PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL (No Matter What!) embodies the Christian's Christ-like and Christ-centered mission, method, and message, with the "no matter what" clause serving as an inspirational reminder & test... of both the PROCLAIMER's passion AND perseverance.**

PREVIEW:

1. PROCLAIMING
2. THE GOSPEL
3. NO MATTER WHAT!

TEXT:

**Mark 16:15**

*"Go into ALL the world and proclaim the Gospel..."*

## 1. PROCLAIMING

Illustration:

***The best preachers/proclaimers are plagiarists.  
All they do is tell people what God has already said.  
- Thabiti Anyabwile***

***The greatest aid to worship is the explanation of Scripture.  
- John MacArthur***

***"We complain today that ministers do not know how to preach; but is it not  
equally true that our congregations do not know how to hear?  
- J.I. Packer***

Explanation:

**Mark 16:15**

***Go into ALL the world and PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL!  
- Jesus The Christ***

***PROCLAIMING is a word of forceful nuance.*** By itself, even before a proclamation's subject matter is identified, the generic act of PROCLAIMING is taking relatively aggressive action, assuming a certain degree of authority, and displaying purpose-filled assertiveness.

***PROCLAIMING is biblical. PROCLAIMING is bold.  
PROCLAIMING is gentle. PROCLAIMING is respectful.  
PROCLAIMING is obeying. PROCLAIMING is missional.  
PROCLAIMING is loving. PROCLAIMING is needed.***

When it comes to authentic Christians and Christ's true Church, to be sure, like the command to "*Declare*" in Titus 2:15, PROCLAIMING is not sheepish whispering. Think about it... while PROCLAIMING may not be for the lukewarm or the faint of heart, faithful & forceful PROCLAMATION is the Messiah's mandated methodology; thus, PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL – NO MATTER WHAT is joyfully embedded in Christianity's missionary manifesto.

**1 Peter 3:15**

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

Application:

**1 Corinthians 1:17**

*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

*"If I had only one sermon to preach, it would be a sermon against pride.  
– G.K. Chesterton*

*The test of a preacher/proclaimer is that his congregation/hearers go away saying not, 'What a lovely sermon/message,' but, 'I will do something!'  
– Francis de Sales*

***"The Bible does not say that we should aim at numbers,  
but rather urges us to faithfully PROCLAIM God's  
message in the boldness of His Holy Spirit.  
This will build God's Church God's way."  
– Jim Cymbala***

## 2. THE GOSPEL

Illustration:

*We are not called to proclaim philosophy and metaphysics, but the simple gospel. Man's fall, his need of a new birth, forgiveness through atonement, and salvation as the result of faith, these are our battle-ax and weapons of war.*

*- Charles Spurgeon*

Explanation:

Today, when obnoxiously lost souls and misguided church-goers reference THE GOSPEL; tragically, there tends to be a disturbingly-casual, deceptively-tamed and troublesome portrayal that is nothing less than an a Christ-less betrayal of THE GOSPEL's miracle, Messiah, and mission. What is being championed today, in far too many cultural, attraction model churches, is a counterfeit gospel that lacks the authentic's priceless value, eternal virtue, and grace-based, blood-bought victory.

***THE GOSPEL cannot be down-graded, declawed, or domesticated!***

Therefore, as healthy, biblical Christians, Christ's true Church family is called, commanded, and commissioned (John 20:21 and Matthew 28:18-20) to faithfully take and teach the defining, describing, and distinguishing truths that lovingly explain and exemplify the "THE" in THE GOSPEL... to ALL the world (Mark 16:15).

***To be clear, THE GOSPEL is not just a gospel!***

To be more specific, the Holy Scriptures put forth THE GOSPEL from cover to cover and with many different contexts. Here is a small sampling. The Almighty's first recorded proclamation of THE GOSPEL is found in Genesis 3:15, before Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden. The most memorized and widely shared pronouncement of THE GOSPEL comes from John 3:16, where Jesus was rebuking (John 3:10) one of Judaism's leading teachers. Continuing on, arguably, for many, the Apostle Paul's corrective letter to the church in Corinth offers the most succinct sharing of THE GOSPEL (see 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:3-4).

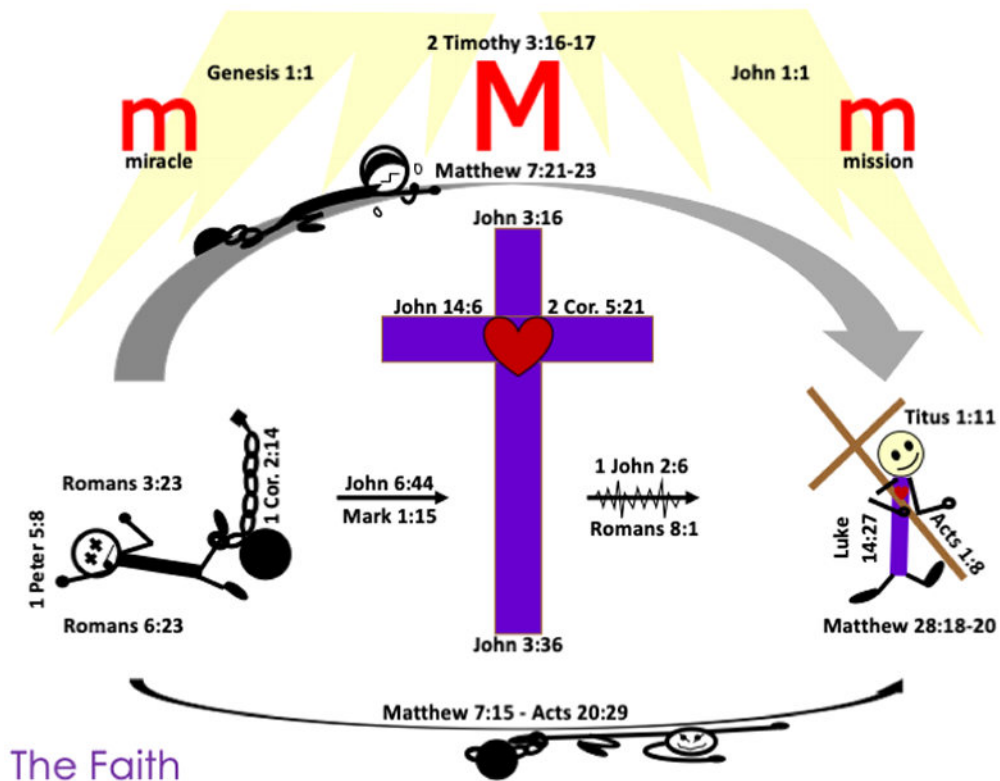
With that said, while fully affirming ALL of the aforementioned texts, this author's most frequent go-to passages tend to be: John 3:3, coupled with John 3:16, and John 3:36... By using a single chapter, three verse, 1-2-3 approach, it quickly helps people to see, per 2 Timothy 3:16-17, that: 1). EVERYONE needs a miracle. 2). ONLY The MESSIAH can give/gift that specific miracle. And finally... 3). those who profess to "believe," MUST, by

definition, OBEY God’s Word, will, and ways. (Reader, rest assured, both John 14:15 & Matthew 28:19 undergird and galvanize these GOSPEL applications).

Perhaps the most comprehensive expression of THE GOSPEL is found in Ephesians 2:1-10. These verses represent Ephesians 4:15’s “truth in love,” the truth that Jesus said in John 8:32 “will set you free.” From this loving vantage point and perspective, it is easy to see the inspiration and theological support for our Stickman Gospel (a visual & biblical GOSPEL explanation that is also known as “The FAITH” in our Come And See Christianity curriculum).

Everything needed to move forward will come into focus through a careful UNDERSTUDY of the text... To that end, Ephesians 2:1-10 lays out a clear and definitive outline: **miracle, Messiah, mission.** “You were dead in your sins (v.1)... but God, rich in mercy (v.4)... you were saved by grace through faith (v.8)... NOT by your good works (v.9)... but rather FOR good works (v.10).”

Before transitioning to the NO MATTER WHAT! portion of this lesson, the reader is encouraged to pray and study, asking the LORD to help him/her to see and understand the often overlooked, yet missionally key relationship between THE GOSPEL’s sovereign grace and human responsibility (read also John 6:44 with Mark 1:5... as well as Romans 8:1 coupled with 1 John 2:6).



Application:

***Accept, apply, & BE Christ's ambassador of Ephesians 2:1-10.***

*"You will receive power when My Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will BE My witnesses... locally, regionally, & globally"(Acts 1:8). Consequently, **NO EXCUSES!** "You have received everything you need for life and godliness" (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:3). Moreover, "You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength" (Philippians 4:13). Therefore, "guard your life & teaching/doctrine. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:16). Then, with "constant rejoicing" (1 Thessalonians 5:16), "Go make disciples of all nations... teaching them to **OBEY EVERYTHING** that I have commanded..." (Matthew 28:19-20). All the while, abide in (John 15:5-6) the defining words of our LORD Jesus: "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:19... also James 4:4). And again, from the mouth of our LORD, "Unless you are willing to pick up your cross daily and follow Me, you cannot be my disciple" (Luke 9:23 & 14:27). Now go! "As the Father has sent Me/Jesus, so now I send you" (John 20:21). Finally, as you go, remember to "pray without ceasing" (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:17), always praying missionally and selflessly, like Jesus in John 17:20-23:*

*20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, **so that the world may believe that you have sent me.** 22 The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as you loved Me.*

*Those transformed by THE GOSPEL are compelled to proclaim THE GOSPEL.*

***Every saved Christian on this side of heaven  
owes THE GOSPEL to every lost sinner this side of hell.***

*- David Platt*

*Justification by faith alone is not one doctrine among others. It is THE GOSPEL.*

*- Albert Mohler*

***"The preacher is not a chef, he's a waiter. God does not want you to make the meal; He just wants you to deliver it to the table without messing it up. That's all.***

*- John MacArthur*



### 3. NO MATTER WHAT!

Illustration:

***“If Jesus preached the same message ministers preach today,  
He would have never been crucified.”***

*- Leonard Ravenhill*

**Joshua 1:6-9**

*6Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”*

***“The martyrs did not die because they believed THE GOSPEL,  
they died because they PROCLAIMED THE GOSPEL!***

*- David Platt*

**Romans 1:16**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile*

***The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.***

*- Tertullian*

*We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.*

*- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*The badge of courage does not require that we walk through something dangerous. It simply requires that we continue to share God's love whenever and wherever we are.*

*- Tom White (The Voice of the Martyrs)*

Explanation:

### ***No matter what means... NO MATTER WHAT!***

In Acts 1:8, the original Greek word that our English Bibles translate as ***“witnesses,”*** is the same root word from which we get the term ***“martyrs.”*** Mind you, our contemporary dictionaries define *“martyr”* as *“anyone who willingly endures great suffering or death on behalf of a belief, principle, or cause.”* When we combine Acts 1:8 with Christ’s call for all of His followers to *die to self* (Galatians 2:20) and *daily carry their own cross* (Luke 9:23 & Luke 14:27), along with 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:20’s description of all Christians as *“Christ’s ambassadors,”* those whose privileges and responsibilities warrant their constant wearing of, per Ephesians 6:10-20, *“the full armor of God,”* we begin to sense and see the intensity with which the Christian call comes.

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:8 alerts the Christian to *“Beware! Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for souls to devour.”* 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:14-15 goes even further, warning us: *“Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...”*

Do not miss the directness that is designed into the Christian’s DNA... Jesus was being very clear, NO MATTER WHAT - the privileges of BE-ing a Christ-follower come with the responsibilities of actually following Christ. Everyday... all day... biblical believers are being sent out onto the mission field *as sheep amongst wolves*; consequently, we will need to ***“BE as shrewd as serpents, while remaining as gentle/innocent as doves”*** (Matthew 10:16). Life will be hard and messy. No doubt, it will be impossible to live well on our own... or in our own strength. But praise God, no true Christian will ever BE alone again! We have each other, God’s faith family, to *bear one another’s burdens* (Galatians 6:2), *to sharpen one another’s witness* (Proverbs 27:17), to do life together, to the glory of God (Acts 2:41-47). And... as good as that is... there is even more. According to Jesus in His last words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, for every genuine, GOSPEL believer, our Creator, Christ, and King has promised *“to be WITH YOU ALWAYS, even to the end of the age.”*

***The Christian’s ‘NO MATTER WHAT!’  
is grounded in and secured by Christ’s ‘ALWAYS WITH’ promise...  
which is a part of the Christian’s PROCLAMATION of THE GOSPEL,  
the Great Commandments, and the Great Commission.***

*Proclaiming the gospel is not an activity in which we periodically engage.*

*- David A. Bednar*

Application:

*God of our life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down; when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies grey and threatening; when our lives have no music in them, and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, run our eyes to where the skies are full of promise; tune our hearts to brave music; give us the sense of comradeship with heroes and saints of every age; and so quicken our spirits that we may be able to encourage the souls of all who journey with us on the road of life, to Your honour and glory.*

*- Augustine*

***Love God, Love People, Serve the World***

***Find the Lost, Grow the Found***

***PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL***

***NO MATTER WHAT!***

***Amen & Amen***

**Matthew 9:37-38**

*Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

***We are so utterly ordinary, so commonplace, while we profess to know a Power the Twentieth Century does not reckon with. But we are "harmless," and therefore unharmed. We are spiritual pacifists, non-militants, conscientious objectors in this battle-to-the-death with principalities and powers in high places. Meekness must be had for contact with men, but brass, outspoken boldness is required to take part in the comradeship of the Cross. We are "sideliners" -- coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. The world cannot hate us, we are too much like its own.***

***Oh that God would make us dangerous!***

***Those warriors who advance on their knees will never retreat.***

***- Jim Elliot***

*In Christ, troubles are turned into triumph, so in Him we look at what is coming as the times of the greatest triumphs the world has ever known! The conclusion of all things is that we win! The cross will prevail. This is the foundational truth that all of our understanding of these times must be based on. There will be no retreat in those who walk in the true light. When you open your shades at night, darkness does not come in and flood the room. Rather the light shines out into the darkness because light is stronger than darkness. The darker it becomes, the brighter our light will be. Where sin abounds, grace will that much more abound.*

*- Rick Joyner*

***Suffering inflicted on Jesus by others had the appearance at least of being involuntary. The sufferings of Gethsemane, deep in his soul, could touch him only because he willed it, to give us courage in our own fears, to set us an example, to merit for us the grace needed in our own interior conflicts.***

*- Ralph Gorman*

*Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones.  
And when you have finished your daily task,  
**go to sleep in peace. God is awake.***

*- Victor Hugo*

*We can walk without fear, full of hope and courage and strength to do His will,  
waiting for the endless good which He is always giving as fast as  
He can get us able to take it in.*

*- George Macdonald*

*Beloved, I say, let your fears go, lest they make you fainthearted. Stop inspiring fear in those around you and now take your stand in faith. God has been good and He will continue to manifest His goodness..... Let us approach these days expecting to see the goodness of the Lord manifest. Let us be strong and of good courage, for the Lord will fight for us if we stand in faith.*

*- Francis Frangipane*

CLOSE:

Notice here, at the close of this lesson, how our Come And See Christianity curriculum has come full circle, back to our beginning. By PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL, while learning, loving, and living out its miraculously missional privileges and responsibilities – NO MATTER WHAT, we are demonstrating to ourselves, our loved ones, and the world at large our witness... our all-in, HEAD, HEART, and HANDS devotion to God and His 1 DIVINE DESIGN, as defined and described in His Word, will, and ways.

**Matthew 28:18-20**

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

*"If we are desensitized to the horror of sin,  
then we will be desensitized to the glory of righteousness.  
- Thabiti Anyabwile*

*"Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen. They alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.  
- John Wesley*

**For What?**

*The true follower of Christ will not ask,  
"If I embrace this truth, what will it cost me?" Rather he will say,  
"This is truth. God help me to walk in it, let come what may!"  
- A. W. Tozer*

***We all like to call the nation to repentance,  
but what about calling the Church to repentance?  
- John MacArthur***

*Our working is not added to God's working.  
Our working IS God's working.  
- John Piper*

*It is no use walking anywhere to preach...  
unless our walking is our preaching.  
- Francis of Assisi*

**So What?**

*What is the chief end of preaching? I like to think it is this:  
It is to give men and women a sense of God and His presence.  
- Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

***Courage is contagious.***

***When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.***

*Down through the centuries in times of trouble and trial God has brought courage to the hearts of those who love Him. The Bible is filled with assurances of God's help and comfort in every kind of trouble which might cause fears to arise in the human heart. You can look ahead with promise, hope, and joy.*

*- Billy Graham*

*Hope has two beautiful daughters Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain unchanged.*

*- Augustine*

**Now What?**

**2 Timothy 4:5**

*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

*Even a coward can praise Christ, but it takes a man of courage to follow Him.*

*- Anonymous*

**Matthew 7:7**

*As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'*

**PRAYER**

Dear heavenly Father, thank You so much for the Truth and Love of Your Word, will, and ways. Please help us to absorb and apply ALL that You have shared and commanded in the Bible. May our heads be infilled with Your defining Scriptures, for the express purpose of informing, inspecting, and inspiring our sanctified hearts and serving hands.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen and Amen

Support Sermon:

*"Evangelism's Troubling Clarity"*

Matthew 3:1-2

April 14, 2024

Sermon Series: mMm - miracle, MESSIAH, mission