

Turning to the King

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Text: Matthew 3:1-12

Series: King of Kings

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Living Hope Bible Church of Roselle, IL

Introduction: Open your Bible to the book of **Matthew**. We are in a series through the book of Matthew entitled: “King of kings!” Today’s message is entitled, “Turning to the King”.

Charla Nash

Just two years ago, we heard the gruesome story of Charla Nash. This Connecticut woman underwent a full face transplant after an attack by a chimpanzee. Whenever I hear of an update I want to see how she’s doing. She says she now has feeling in her face. She’s hoping to get hand transplants now. But there are so many things that cannot be healed. She’ll never be the same. She has to be taken care of in a nursing facility the rest of her days.

The Disfigurement of the Soul

Jesus said, “Don’t fear the one who can hurt the body. Fear the one who has power over your soul’s destiny”. As unspeakably devastating as the disfigurement of the body is, there is a greater disfigurement that I want to speak to you about. It is the disfigurement that sin brings. Sin is more cruel than that monkey. It can leave you disfigured for ever.

Charla Nash’s good news was that due to the advances of modern medicine you can now have a new face and new hands. The message I want to bring to us this morning, is even more profound. God can heal the disfigurement of our soul. God wants to give us a new heart.

Matthew 3:1–12 (ESV), “In those days John the Baptist **came** preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 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.’ ” [ISAIAH 40:3]

4 Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were **going out** to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees **coming** to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is **coming** after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew shows us where Christ is in prophecy. He demonstrates that the events which unfolded around the birth of Christ were designed to bring in the inauguration of YHWH as the King of all kings. In the first two chapters we see...

- Christ is born of a **virgin**.
- Gentile **kings** worship Him.
- He's snatched away to **Egypt**.
- He then returns to Israel into obscurity as a Nazarene – He is the insignificant “Netzerene” or Branch from the Davidic family's cut down stump that is going to bring salvation to us and wash us from our sins (Isa. 11:1 & 53).
- Matthew then brings five prophecies of Christ about four places to announce that the promised Seed of Abraham that would save the world has come. The promised Son of David who would rule the world has come.
- And then in chapter 2 the Apostle Matthew shuts down the narrative for 30 long years until we hear of John the Baptist announcing the beginning of the Lord's ministry.

After the end of 30 long years of silence (only interrupted by Christ's visit to the Temple at 12 years old), we see the curtain lifted. There is a sense of the quickening of the pace in the story.

Exciting and Shocking

There are some shocking and exciting words that are given by John the baptizer. He's dressed a way that identifies him as not just any prophet, but he's harkening back to Elijah. His message is shocking: “Repent!” The place he's ministering is shocking. When you realize what is going on, your breath is taken away. You see the fulfillment of prophecy.

During these 30 years you had the passing of an entire generation. Just like today we can think of people who were in our lives 30 years ago who are no longer with us. So it is in the days of Jesus.

Before Christ begins his work, the great herald must arrive on the scene. Malachi said there must come a New Testament Elijah before the Lord comes. The people knew the prophecy. Several prophets give this prophecy. Matthew does not turn to Malachi 4, but to Isaiah 40 to describe John the baptizer's ministry (cf. *Isaiah 40:3 and in Malachi 3:1 and 4:5–6*).

We see this passage divided into three scenes:

- Scene 1: the **Messenger** of repentance (3:1-4).
- Scene 2: the **Message** of repentance (3:2-10).
- Scene 3: the **Messiah** that we turn to (3:11-12).

I. Scene 1: the **Messenger of repentance (3:1-4).**

Matthew 3:1–4 (ESV), “In those days John the Baptist **came** preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 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.’ ” [ISAIAH 40:3]

The Time John Appears - In Those Days

“In those days” sounds like a very vague time indicator. This is actually a very theologically precise expression if you read the Old Testament prophets. It is similar to the expression “In that day” when they describe over and over again the coming of Christ into the world. So the people of that time when they see that indicator would be on their “tippy toes” eager to see what remarkable thing is about to happen.

So after 400 years of silence – 400 years since the last prophet was on the scene, the New Testament Elijah appears. He is the final prophet of the Mosaic Covenant.

The Place John Appears – The Wilderness [SLIDE]

The forerunner of Christ, the messenger begins his ministry in the wilderness. 3:1, “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea.” Now for many of us the wilderness is a bad place. For some of us it’s a good place. Some of us are more prone to camping than others.

- The Wilderness: a New Beginning [SLIDE]

But this is not a simple geographical marker. This place is a prophetic flag, a kind of a prophetic trumpet that sounds that something truly remarkable is taking place. This is not just any barren wilderness. There is a river here. In the Old Testament, the wilderness is often a place of renewal and repentance.

- The Wilderness: a Place Where God Talks to His People

The wilderness is a place of hope where God talks to Israel. We find God renewing Israel in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. It is in the wilderness that God formed them into a people and a nation. So in the Jewish mind, the wilderness is a place of new beginning. It is the place historically where Jehovah meets with His people. It is the place where the Old Covenant was ratified, and God placed His loyal love [hesed] upon the people who came to Him by faith. The wilderness is a place of renewal.

And yet, if you read your Old Testament, most of the people did not come to the Lord by faith, so they are cast off. They are utterly destroyed and carried off and enslaved by the nations (Assyria, Babylon, the Medo-Persians).

The wilderness where John is pictures a place of hope and urgency. According to Matthew there were multitudes coming out to John, very likely tens of thousands of people covering the mountainsides of in the Judean wilderness. Picture the hills like a great amphitheater so that John’s voice carried to them. This is a very, very special place. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about this event. One of them is in the book of Hosea.

- The Wilderness: A Door of Hope

In Hosea 2, the prophet speaks of this wilderness as a door of hope.

Hosea 2:14–15 (ESV), “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I will give her her vineyards and make

the Valley of Achor [NEAR JERICHO WHERE ACHAN DIED] a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.”

God says “A day is coming when I’ll open a door of hope in the wilderness”. I’ll not leave you in Egypt or in the Valley of Achor where Achan died outside of Jericho. I’m bringing you to the wilderness to make a covenant, like a marriage contract, with you. I want you to be my people!

- The Flowering of the Wilderness

A constant theme in Isaiah is that God’s new work of blessing was going to begin in the desert. Matthew of course quotes Isaiah 40:3 about the voice coming out of the desert, preparing the way of YHWH Himself to meet with His people there in the wilderness.

The Old Testament is filled with pictures of the wilderness flowering and blossoming – where that which is dead begins to live!

Isaiah 41:18-19, “I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. 19 I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together.” So God promises to make the barren desert a fertile place! God promises to bring springs in the desert and forests and gardens. A place of death becomes a place of life!

- God’s New Work Begins in the Wilderness

Isaiah continues in chapter 43:19 – God says He’ll do something new in the history of redemption, and it will begin to spring forth in the wilderness.

Isaiah 43:19–21 (ESV), “Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

20 The wild beasts will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches,
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,

to give drink to my chosen people,
21 the people whom I formed for myself
that they might declare my praise.”

- God’s New Work Begins in the Wilderness

Isaiah makes it even clearer in chapter 44:3 that the preparation work of God’s Spirit being poured out will begin in that Judean wilderness.

Isaiah 44:3–4 (ESV), “For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;

I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,
and my blessing on your descendants.

4 They shall spring up among the grass
like willows by flowing streams.”

The Way John Appears – A Garment of Camel’s Hair

We’ve seen...

- the **timing** of John’s appearance – it was a **prophetic** time
- the **place** of John’s appearance – it was a place of **renewal**.

Now we see...

- the **way** John appears.

John: Appears as the Forerunner of the Messiah

Matthew 3:3 (ESV), 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.’ ” [ISAIAH 40:3]

Back in **Matthew 3:4** we read Matthew telling us, sort of casually... **Matthew 3:4** (ESV), “Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.”

John’s Appearance is Unusual for Two Reasons

This description of John is remarkable because he is both **priest** and **prophet**.

1. John is a **Levite** – of the **priestly** line – who would normally be ministering in the Temple, and...
2. John is not only a Levite, but he is the long awaited **prophet** that would come in the power of Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6; 2 Kings 1:7-8).

John the Baptist: A Levite

When you think about the fact that John (according to Luke) was a Levite, of the priestly lineage of Aaron, it is striking. Here is John who would have normally been enrolled as a priest in the Temple and eventually minister in the Temple and have the high privilege that Zechariah had (cf. Luke 1:5). This is what you expect.

Yet what you get is a man who is not in the Temple or even near the Temple. He is out in the wilderness. It is jarring. We don’t know why he did not accept the normal pathway of a Levite, but instead withdrew to the wilderness.

John’s Food

And we expect John’s food to be that which comes from the altar in Jerusalem. He eats no peace offerings – no cuts of **sirloin** or **lamb**. His food is locusts and wild honey.

John’s Clothing

And we expect John to be dressed like one of the priests. They had a very particular outfit they were to wear. **Leviticus 16:4** describes the fine clothing of the priests of Israel: “He [the priest] shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments.”

Yet we do not see John finely dressed. He is dressed as if he were impoverished. He is dressed not in the priest’s fine linen, but in the prophet’s mantle. ***He is not dressed as one celebrating the obedience of the people, but one that is protesting the direction of the nation.***

He is one who has withdrawn from the Temple to the wilderness to prepare the way for YHWH to come. Even his clothing proclaims his protest.

John's Clothing: Signaling the Coming of Elijah

John's clothing also points to his withdrawal as a **priest**, but to his enlistment as a **prophet**. During the time of John's preaching there is a heightened interest in the prophet Elijah and in his promised return. The description of John wearing "a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist" (**Matthew 3:4**) is identical to the description of Elijah in the book of the Kings of Israel.

We see the long awaited coming of Elijah as said in **2 Kings 1:7-8**, "He said to them, 'What kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?'" **8 They answered him, 'He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist.'**" And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite." So John, just like Elijah, has a vestal robe of hair and a thick leather belt.

Elijah and John's Sudden Appearance

There is no doubt that the Apostle Matthew when writing knew that John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. No doubt he also knew John's birth narrative that Luke records. But why is John the Baptist just suddenly appearing on the scene? He wants to paint John as the Prophet Elijah who suddenly appears in Israel.

Elijah's arrival in Israel is jarring. He's is kind of a minor Melchizedekian figure. Elijah has no genealogy. He just comes out of nowhere. He is "Elijah the Tishbite". That's all we know.

John Preaching by Elijah's Hometown & Place of Translation to Heaven

[SLIDE - MAP]

Tishbe is a little town in Gilead by the Jordan River-in the Jordan Valley. It's near the place where John is baptizing and where Elijah at the end of his ministry was taken up in a chariot of fire. Elijah has a short ten year ministry. And just as suddenly as he appears, he disappears in a chariot of fire likely with a myriad of angels who are like flames of fire. John is actually preaching in the very region by the Jordan River where Elijah was born and was taken up in a chariot of fire.

Last Chapter of OT: Elijah Will Return – Malachi

The people had been looking for Elijah. You see the Old Testament closes in a way that promises some sort of return of Elijah before the Messiah actually comes.

You remember the prophecy in **Malachi 4:5** (ESV), "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes." John came intentionally likening himself to Elijah. It wasn't just his food and clothing. It was the very place he was ministering. The very place that John ministers is the place the Jews expected Elijah to return because it's the place near Tishbe, and it is the place where Elijah was carried up in a chariot of fire. After 400 years of silence you can imagine the excitement in the Judean populace.

They must have said, "We haven't had a prophet in a while".

"Yeah, well, there's a prophet out there. Word's out. He's out there."

"Well, describe him to me. What's he look like?"

"Well, he's wearing a hairy garment."

"Yeah."

“Yeah, and he’s got a thick leather belt.”

“Really! That’s just like Elijah! Well, where’s he at?”

“He’s in the Jordan Valley, by the Valley of Achor at the Jordan River”.

“Well, that’s where Elijah was taken up”.

The Power and Spirit of Elijah

Wow! That sounds like Elijah has come! The people knew when Elijah appeared, the coming of the Messiah would also appear. So the people were looking for this prophet Elijah. And here John was ministering in the power and spirit of Elijah. He dresses like Elijah. He’s preaching on Elijah’s home turf.

Matthew Henry said, “No place is so remote as to shut us out from the visits of Divine grace.” God wants to visit you with His divine grace.

Transition: So we have heard the **messenger** of repentance. Now we turn to hear the **message** of repentance.

II. Scene 2: the Message of repentance (3:2-10).

Matthew 3:1–2 (ESV), “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

1. First we hear John’s actual **message** (2)
2. Then we get a glimpse of John’s **hearers** (4-10)

John’s Message

Repent, the Kingdom is About to be Inaugurated

This is a typical theme of the prophets. All the prophets tell us to repent. Prophets are sent out to rectify and reconcile the people to God. That is always the prophetic message. But John adds something jaw dropping. He says, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (3:2). The idea is that the Kingdom prophesied in the prophets is on the very cusp of inauguration. We’re going to see that this new kingdom is going to replace the old kingdom of Israel. The kingdom is going to be for the “Jew first” but it’s now going to include the “Greek” as well. All nations are going to be grafted into this kingdom.

Repent for the Day is Here!

John is saying what all the prophets of the Old Testament said over and over and over, except they said, “Repent for the day is coming”. John says, “Repent for the day is here!” The Messianic kingdom is about to be inaugurated. Repent! Get ready!

John preached with an urgency that none of the prophets could have preached. John’s cousin is Jesus the Messiah. Israel would not get another chance. The Gentiles are going to be brought into the Kingdom, but the Messiah must first be presented to Israel. This is the generation upon whom the “ends of the age” had come.

The Picture of the Woodsman

You can see the image in verse 10 that “the ax is laid to the root of the tree’. So God brings us the picture of the woodsman with the ax in his hand, and he’s sizing up the tree. God is like the woodsman about to cut the Old Covenant way of doing things down. Within another generation there will be no Temple, no priesthood as they know it, no more prophets. The Messiah has come and he eclipses all the prophets. So there is this urgency. Israel’s existence has reached it’s climactic point. The whole thing is about to be cut down. This new Messianic kingdom is already beginning to be on the scene.

Isaiah’s Herald

Matthew makes an editorial comment from the Prophet Isaiah about this one who is preaching – he is heralding a message. He’s not in a dialogue. The word is karouso – John is the ambassador for the king. His message is not up for debate. The Apostle Matthew makes this clear. He quotes Isaiah 40:3 – this is where the prophet Isaiah uses the image of a return from exile.

Matthew 3:3, “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.’ ” [ISAIAH 40:3]

YHWH is Coming!

Now the prophecy says that the messenger is going to announce the coming of God. Here in Matthew 3:3 it is the normal use of *kurios* for God or Lord, but in Isaiah 40:3, the tetragrammaton [MEANING “FOUR LETTERS”] – God’s covenant Name, YHWH – is used. There is no question that this is a prophecy of Yahweh coming to meet His people in the wilderness [John’s wilderness] to begin something entirely new. YHWH initiates a new Exodus, this time not out of the slavery of Egypt, but out of the slavery of sin.

Isaiah’s Prophecy

Listen to Isaiah’s prophecy. This is written to them after 39 chapters of judgment and wrath declared against Israel. YHWH has made His case – He’s dealt with their practices, their thoughts, their vile sins, their trust in the nations instead of Him. YHWH has made a lawsuit against Israel and brought out the evidence that these people were wicked and vile in their hearts and they need to repent.

Isaiah 40:1–5 (ESV), “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.”

The idea is that God has already paid DOUBLE – more than enough – for Israel’s sins. She is MORE than pardoned. Then we read about this herald.

Verse 3 continues: “A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

John is the herald, the new Elijah that is making an announcement. Here it is: “YHWH is coming to lead them out of exile!!”

Immanuel, God with Us has Come

We have the omniscient birds-eye view from this side of prophecy. So Matthew in chapter 1 has already told us that there has been a child, born of the virgin who is human like us, but He is also YHWH – He is Immanuel, God with us. He is born in Bethlehem, but He is also the omnipotent God that is everywhere present ruling the universe. He has come to lead His people out of their spiritual Egypt, their spiritual bondage into the new Canaan, the new freedom from sin's slavery. And God, YHWH, our Immanuel is going to lead the procession.

You look at Isaiah 40, and we see the glorious things that are promised. It's a wonder our hearts don't fail us for joy at what is written there. What does Isaiah say?

The Spiritual Topography Levelled

The people in the Jordan Valley that John was speaking to knew of this prophecy. God was the One who was going to come. And there is this monumental coming. Look at Isaiah 40:4, "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain." What is the LORD saying?

He's saying the topography is going to be leveled. He's not speaking of physical mountains, although the day will come when the mountains reel like an intoxicated man and the stars fall from the sky. No, this is a prophecy that the spiritual topography is going to be leveled. Not that there's going to be geographic upheaval, but that the crooked places of our hearts will be made straight, the valleys raised up, and the mountains lowered down, and God's going to walk. God's going to have His way over us. He's going to have total control. And what is He going to do in that day? He's going to comfort us. He's going to remind us that our sins have been MORE than paid for.

All that's based on our response to Him. What ought our response be? John heralds his message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Repent for God Himself has come – the end of the ages has begun. \

Repent!

- God calls "all men everywhere to repent".
- He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all men should come to repentance".
- God has "no delight in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways" (Ezekiel 33:11).

God Delights in Mercy

This was John's message. It is the culmination of all the prophets. When you read God's lawsuit – His prosecution of Israel in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, you are almost dizzy with the wrath of God. But God does not delight in this wrath. He delights in mercy.

So, we heard John's message: Repent! YHWH is leading you out of your spiritual Egypt. He's going to level your hearts!

Now let's consider...

John's Hearers

The Teaming Multitudes

We read back in **Matthew 3:5-6**, “Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were **going out** to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

The people were coming in droves – teaming hoards of people going out to be baptized, confessing their sins. We learn from John’s Gospel that people came from very far away – as far as the very edge of Israel in Galilee near the Gentile territory. There is this great response.

There were thousands and tens of thousands!

The Nature of the People’s Repentance

Consider that the people came out from everywhere to John, and verse 6 says, “they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

What is this Baptism?

We learn from antiquity that when Gentiles would come to faith, they would be publicly purified with water – with an open confession of their repentance and a confession of faith in YHWH. They would denounce their former ways and confess their trust in the LORD.

It is unlikely that this is the only thing John has in mind. You know that John, being raised in a priestly household, with his father Zechariah a priest in the Temple, John would have known about the ritualistic cleansings. Pretty much everything had to be cleansed if it was going to be used in the service of God.

The New Covenant Cleansing

What John is pointing to though, is something greater than the Old Testament washings. He is likely going back to Ezekiel 36:25–27, which instead of the INSTRUMENTS being cleansed, God says, pointing to this NEW COVENANT, that the PEOPLE will be cleansed with water. Look at Ezekiel 36 if you will.

Ezekiel 36:25–27, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

Something Radical!

This is something radical that John is doing! He’s basically renounced the old way of doing things. He’s not in the Temple, but in the wilderness. He’s put aside his priestly garments for the mantle of a prophet. He’s calling the people to come out and get ready for something new. The King is coming! His kingdom has begun!

The Nature of the False Repentance

Consider the nature of false repentance. There was this religious formalism going on. The Pharisees and Sadducees (about 5% of the population) had come out, not FOR baptism, but TO baptism. They were coming not for REPENTANCE, but SURVEYLANC. Let's read about it.

Matthew 3:7–10 (ESV), “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’”

The tree of Israel's Old Covenant worship is about to be cut down. YHWH is here. Get ready! Repent. He's going to cut you down.

How Do We Repent?

“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.” (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

TURN from SIN – there is a deep sorrow, but repentance is far more than sorrow.

1 – FORSAKE sin *completely*, “repentance...without regret”. There is no regret from being totally delivered from the sin. There is a desire to get rid of the sin completely. It is not enough to take responsibility for the sin and own it and confess it. It must be *completely forsaken*. “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Pr. 28:13).

2 – FORSAKE sin *immediately*, “what earnestness”. Godly repentance doesn't play around with sin and make excuses to deal with it another day. Paul observed this in the Corinthians when he said, “see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you”. There was a sincere and urgent desire to be radically in getting rid of the sin immediately.

3 – CONFESS of sin / coming clean, “what eagerness to clear yourselves”. Godly repentance produces and **“eagerness to clear”** yourself by taking complete responsibility for sin. It's not my parent's fault, not my spouse's fault (if married), not because I'm Irish or African or Asian. It's not because I was abused or maltreated or hurt. My sin is my responsibility. I own it. It is a disgrace to God and no one made me do it. I chose to sin against the beauty and holiness of God. David did not duck responsibility for his sin. He cried, “I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.” (Ps. 51:3, KJV).

4 – HATE for sin because it violates God's glory, “what indignation”. Godly repentance brings an **“indignation”** or hatred toward sin because God's glory has been violated. It is not just bad because it affects me, but it is an insult to God's holiness. John Bunyan said, “Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love”. David confessed, “Against you, you only, have I

sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps. 51:4).

TURN to GOD

5 – FEAR God and His holiness, “what fear”. Godly repentance brings a deep **fear** of God and a profound realization of His presence and nearness. With the Holy One being so near to such a sinful creature, there is a very real fear of God that builds and takes hold of the heart. Isaiah confessed, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5).

6 – LONG for God and restoration, “what longing”. Godly repentance brings a profound **longing** to be restored to an intimate relationship with God. David said, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation” and “renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:12, 10). There is a fear in cleaning up the mess of sin, but the desire to enjoy intimacy with God far outweighs the fear. Restoration may entail making things right with others by confessing, making restitution (if something was taken), asking for forgiveness. This can be debilitating to think about, but there must be a sincere willingness to do whatever it takes to make things right before intimacy with God is restored.

7 – PLEASE God, “what zeal”. Godly repentance brings a **zeal** and enthusiasm to do whatever it takes to please God. This is a God-centered enthusiasm for surrender!

8 – BOW to God – His grace is costly, “what punishment”. Here we see that God’s grace is costly! Godly repentance brings a shocking realization of God’s mercy that allows us to avert God’s wrath. It is only because of the mercy and good pleasure of God that He grants a reprieve from my just sentence to eternal punishment for my sin. I have violated His holiness and in exchange His dear Son has received my just penalty. By faith, I receive costly grace. With brokenness and joy I receive the costly gift of God’s steadfast and loyal love. Through repentant faith I trust that God has blotted out my sins, and I access His full favor and abundant mercy and grace.

Repentance literally means to have a transformation of your mind. It always results in fruit in the life – there is always a transformation of life.

Renouncing Allegiance to Sin

So repentance is to renounce sin once and for all. To be done with it, and to give God the total control of your life. This is what this new Covenant is all about. It’s what the Kingdom is all about. You’d better get ready, because the Messiah is here. The end of the age is upon us! He’s about to cut down the old manner of doing things.

Matthew Henry said this of the word repentance: “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.” In other words, John is saying: Consider your ways, change your minds. Your thoughts are out of line! Change your thinking. Denounce you former ways.

Giving Our Allegiance to King Jesus

It is a great encouragement to us to repent; repent, for your sins shall be pardoned and blotted out.

Transition: So now we come to the One we are to turn to.

III. Scene 3: the Messiah that we turn to (3:11-12).

John now introduces the Messiah. John told the crowds – There is one coming who is greater in position and who has a greater baptism.

A GREATER Position: Not Worthy to Be His Slave

Matthew 3:11 (ESV), “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.”

First John says, “He’s mightier than I...I’m not worthy to carry his sandals”. All the people knew that John was a great prophet. Yet we don’t hear much of John. Jesus said he is the greatest of all the Old Covenant prophets. That means he’s GREATER than Elijah. Yet we hear of no miracles. All we hear from John is: “That He might INCREASE, and that I might DECREASE”. John seems insignificant because He lived in the INTENSE light of the Sun. The stars and moon are bright until the Sun comes out.

So John says I’m not worthy to carry His sandals. In the Near East the roads were dusty, and if you were of any means you would hire a servant. You would walk in the door and someone would carry away your sandals and wash your feet. John is essentially saying, “This one is so great I am not worthy to be a slave that washes His feet”.

A GREATER Baptism: Baptism with the Holy Spirit

Matthew 3:11b (ESV), “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. John washed them with water, a symbol that God would cleanse them from all their sins. The only way someone is admitted to the fellowship of the Holy God is if He is washed from his sins in the fountain Christ was about to open, Zechariah 13:1 (ESV), “On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.” We see Calvary here in this fountain.

The Last Day

We see finally the GREATER judgment. John describes what all the people knew of – that great and final day of judgment. What a mercy it is to get us ready for the judgment. God’s made a fountain of mercy for us. Will we let go of our self centered lives – our bitterness, our contentions, our envy, our jealousy, our self-centeredness? Will we repent and turn to the beauty of His holiness?

Matthew 3:12, “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

His Threshing Floor

John leaves us with a warning for those who know the truth. God is coming to take the true believers who are compared to wheat. He’s going to shake them out and the chaff is going to be consumed by fire.

Conclusion: May God give us His grace to turn to the King of kings with all our heart. There is hope there! There is a fantastic promise of change.

The Door Cracked Open

When you consider John's message, what is shocking is this. He announces that "The Kingdom has arrived". In the Old Testament that means the sky is falling and God is going to cleanse the earth. John says, Christ's winnowing fork is in his hand. The door of to the judgment chamber has not yet slammed shut. He's leaving it open so that you can come.

Come today and repent! Christian, renew your first love. If you are here and lost, come to the fountain of mercy! Come and repent and trust the Savior today!