

PREPARING A PEOPLE FOR THE LORD

MATTHEW 3:1-12 • TV-029B

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By

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“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

I’m speaking on the subject: **“PREPARING A PEOPLE FOR THE LORD.”**

Now, I’m going to read from the book of **Matthew**, the book of **Luke**, and the book of **John**. But I want you to turn to the **book of Matthew**. We’re going to be looking at **chapter 3 of Matthew** in just a few moments.

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But let me make a few comments before we get to the text. Now, John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. He was sent as the last of the Old Testament prophets to announce the coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer.

John wrote this about him, **John 1:6-8**; *“There was a man sent from God whose name was John. And the same came for a witness of the Light (that’s with a capital L; that’s speaking of Christ) that all men through Him might believe: He was not that light but he was sent to bear witness of that Light.”* He came as the forerunner of Christ. He came to bear witness of Christ. He came to announce the coming of Christ.

Now in **Luke chapter 1:17**, Luke said this about John the Baptist; he was sent not only to announce the coming of Christ, not only as the forerunner of the Saviour to bear witness of the light but he was sent, *“To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

John the Baptist was sent to prepare a people for the Lord. That’s what it said. He came crying; *“Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make His paths straight.”* Now that’s what Luke said. *“He was sent to prepare a people for the Lord.”*

Now that may seem to you like a strange expression and you may say; “Well preacher, that hardly sounds like a Gospel expression or an expression of grace” and we’re prone to set it aside at first examination, and say there is no preparation needed for coming to Christ:

**“Just as I am without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me
And thou bidest me come to thee
Oh Lamb of God I come.”**

Is there no preparation needed for coming to Christ? Well; let us look at this a moment. *“He was sent to bear witness of the light.”* Luke said, *“To prepare a people for the Lord.”* That’s what he says plainly, to prepare; *“He came in the spirit and power of Elias to prepare a people for the Lord.”*

And I believe that this, right here, is the missing note in evangelism and preaching today. This is the missing note.

This is the cause of so many false professions of religion. This is the cause of the absence of true saving interest in Christ, people who have religion but who do not have a real, personal, saving, interest in Christ and a vital union with the Son of God because we have omitted the ground work.

We have omitted the foundation work and we’ve tried to build a hope for eternity and a hope for eternal life on a fleshly and not a spiritual foundation. This is the missing note in present-day preaching.

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You hear the preachers; they are all crying; “Believe, believe, believe,” and very few are telling us what to believe. They’re crying for us to “come to Jesus, come to Jesus,” and they’re not talking about the preparation that is necessary for coming to Jesus, that which John talked about.

I’m going to show it to you now in a few moments. John came to announce Christ. And we’re doing that. But he came to prepare a people for the Lord.

Now my friends, any farmer knows this; you’ve got to go out with a plow and a disc and break up that hard, fallow, ground, before you can sow seed. You don’t just go out and throw seed on unprepared soil and expect to have a harvest.

And I’ll tell you that the Holy Spirit is going to have to break up the hard, fallow, ground, of our hearts before the seed of God’s Word is going to bear any fruit. *“The sacrifices of God are a broken heart.”*

Do you know anybody that’s got a broken heart? *“The sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit, a humble spirit.”* Where are the humble spirits among the proud, religious, people of today? Why, there’s more pride in religion than there is in any other single profession. The fig-leaf apron of self-righteousness is going to have to be stripped off before almighty God is going to bring the robe of Christ’s spotless righteousness to cover our nakedness. That’s right!

And the sinner is going to have to be slain by the law before the Gospel is going to bring him life. Paul said, *“When the law came, sin revived, and I died.”*

There’s not going to be a resurrection until there’s a death. There’s not going to be any grace till there’s some judgment. And men will not come unto Calvary until they have been to Sinai.

We are ministers not only of the Gospel; we’re ministers of the law. And a man who doesn’t know how to minister the law doesn’t know how to minister the Gospel. That’s what’s missing.

These so-called houses are being built on the shifting sand of humanism and fleshly excitements. There’s no digging deep, preparation work, and ground work, to get under the rock that that foundation might be laid.

A wise man will spend as much time on the foundation as he does on the house because when the wind of trial, cares, riches, and persecution comes, that house has got a foundation to stand.

The old idols (the objects of worship) have got to be torn down. And adoration has got to be dethroned before Christ is going to sit on the throne and reign as Lord and Master. He’s not going to take his place beside these other idols.

Somebody says, “Let Jesus come into your heart.” There’s going to have to be some preparation made.

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And then hands full of fleshly sacrifice and human works are going to have to be emptied. We are going to have to drop these things and be able to say with the song writer:

**“Could my tears forever flow?
Could my zeal no respite know?
These for sin could never atone
Christ must save and Christ alone
In my hands no price I bring
Simply to the cross of Christ I cling.”**

We’re going to have to open these hands. We’re not coming to God with a clenched fist; we’re coming with an open hand and an open heart and an empty handed.

We’re going to have to preach so that sinners will lay down their weapons of warfare. We’re going to have to preach so that all the fleshly foundations are swept out from under a fellow. He has nothing to cling to and to rest upon and build upon and hope in except Christ, “Lord save me or I perish.” That’s right!

Isaiah 55:7 said; *“Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord.”* Why? *“Our ways are not God’s ways and our thoughts are not God’s thoughts.”*

And that’s what we’re going to have to work on in our preaching. We’re going to have to work on man’s ways until he sees the error of them and he’s willing to lay them down. We’re going to have to condemn even a man’s thoughts till he sees the evil of them and lays them down. *“Our ways are not His ways.”*

Our wisdom is foolishness to God. Here we bring our wisdom and we think it’s something. God says; *“It’s all foolishness. Except you be converted and become as a little child”* and that’s a place we don’t relish too much is it? *“Except you become as a little child.”*

We think the gifts of God are on the higher shelves and the more degrees we get and the more credentials we get and the more prominence we get and the more personal dignity we get the higher we climb. That’s not so! *“Except you become as a little child. You’re not even going to enter the kingdom of God.”* That’s what He said.

Preparing a people for the Lord and you want to know what’s missing? I’ll tell you what’s missing; it’s not what men are saying, it’s what they’re not saying; here is what they’re leaving out, they’re leaving out the ground work, the foundation work.

And I’m going to point out six things that are necessary in preparing a people for the Lord. I hope you’ll listen to this message carefully:

First of all: We prepare a people for the Lord when they’re made by the Spirit of God through the message, through the preaching, to realize their sins!

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Now, turn to **Matthew 3** and let's look at several verses, **verse 6 of Matthew 3**. Now this is John's message. John came to announce the coming of the Lord and to prepare a people, to receive Him. And he says in **Matthew 3:6**: "*And they came and they were baptized in the Jordan confessing their sins.*"

Now I don't know my friends what it'll take to convince you (that's right, you), that you're a sinner. I don't know what it'll take to convince you that you're a fallen son of Adam, that you are a fallen daughter of Adam; that you are in the sight of God, ungodly, unclean, depraved, wretched, and fit for hell, needing forgiveness and needing cleansing.

I don't know what it'll take to convince you. You may never be convinced. You may perish defending, as Job did for a long time, your righteousness and say, "I won't give it up." But I'm telling you this; as clear and as plainly as I can tell you.

"Christ came into the world to save sinners, (not righteous people, not moral people, not religious people, not good people, not folks who do the best they can) He died for the ungodly." Christ said, *"The Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost."*

The Pharisees were criticizing Him for eating with Publicans and sinners. And our Lord knew their thoughts and He said; *"The well do not need a physician but they that are sick. Now you go learn what that means."*

And then He told them what He meant; He said, *"I'm come, not to call the righteous (folks that think they're righteous) but sinners to repentance. I'm come to call sinners to repentance."*

Paul said; *"This is a faithful saying, (this is a true saying). It's worthy of acceptance by all (all men); Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I'm chief."* And then in **Romans 5:6** the Scripture says, *"Christ died for the ungodly."*

Our Lord's words of forgiveness; they were always for sinners, the harlot, the Publican, the thief. Our Lord's words of condemnation were always for the religious. He said, *"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; you make clean the outside of the cup while within you're full of extortion and excess. Publicans and the harlots enter heaven before you. You're going to find yourselves shut out and them in the kingdom of God rejoicing in the mercy and grace of God."* Oh the painfulness of Holy Spirit conviction. Oh the painfulness of seeing ourselves as God sees us, but oh the necessity of it. Oh the painfulness of seeing our thoughts and imaginations and sin as God sees them.

And let me tell you something; sin is not only the presence of hate; it's the absence of love. That's right! Sin is not only to take what's not yours but failure to give what is yours. Sin is not only to do evil; it's to know good and do it not.

Sin is not only an act of the hand; it's a thought of the heart and oh the painfulness of it. But oh thank God when a man sees it. But that's the first thing. That's the first foundational work.

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That's what John did in preparing a people for the Lord; they came confessing their sins. It is a universal confession; *"All have sinned and come short of God's glory."*

Secondly: We prepare a people for the Lord when the Holy Spirit condemns their religious offices and their religious work as so many filthy rags!

Now this may hurt you but will you listen? In **Matthew 3:7:** *"And when John saw the Pharisees; (that was the religious leaders, officers, teachers, preachers, and Sadducees) he said to them, O ye generation of vipers; who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*

John picked out these renowned, scholarly, moral, leaders, and called them, *"A generation of snakes."* Now I'm sure that this was, to most people, very disrespectful and shocking. And I imagine that he lost many of his people in his audience because they were appalled at his uncharitable attitude and his harsh words.

But John is preparing a people for the Lord. He's not preparing for himself or his personal glory. He's not seeking men's praise. He's preparing a people for the Lord.

And he's trying to show these people that being a preacher, and being a deacon, and being an elder, and being a Sunday school teacher, and praying long prayers, and reading a daily Bible reading, and tithing and giving alms and studying doctrine, wouldn't save them. That's what he's saying to these people; salvation is a heart work. It's a new birth.

Paul (Saul of Tarsus) was a religious man. Listen to Paul; *"I was circumcised the eighth day of the tribe of Benjamin. I was a Hebrew of Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness of the law I was blameless. But all these things that at one time were gain to me, (important to me, everything to me); I counted them but dung, nothing, that I may win Christ and be found in Him."*

My friend; your early training, your godly parents, your infant sprinkling, your conformation, your daily catechism, your adult profession, your adult baptism, your good works, and all your prayers, are not going to put away your sins. Now that's so; *"It is the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son that cleanseth us from sin."*

And all of your religious offices and works and service to God, will do you no more good than all the blood that was shed on Jewish altars which God said, *"Cannot put away sin."* Christ must save and Christ alone.

**"I once was lost but now I'm found
By God's grace I'm heaven bound
But my only plea, my only hope, my only plea
Is that when He died He died for me."**

And we prepare people for the Lord when we cause them to empty their hands of any hope but Christ Jesus, not their religious works.

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Also; now you listen to this in **Matthew 3**; we're still there, **verse 9**. This is John's message. He's preparing a people for the Lord. And in doing so they confess their sins; they recognize their sins; he condemns their religious offices and works, he says they're nothing.

Thirdly: And then in preparing a people for the Lord the Holy Spirit turns their eyes away from their denominational heritage, their tradition, and their ancestors to Christ

Listen to **Matthew 3:9**; and John said to them; to these religious officers, leaders, and preachers; he said; "*You generation of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*" Now listen to the next verse: "*And think not; (He went on, to say within yourselves) we have Abraham to our father. God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*"

As soon as this maverick; do you know what a maverick is; that's an unbranded calf and this was an unbranded preacher. Nobody could claim John the Baptist. Who wanted him? He was an unbranded prophet, an unbranded preacher. He belonged to God; he didn't belong to anybody. He's God's servant.

And when he started preaching this message of the cross and of salvation by grace and of salvation by blood; they said, "We don't have to listen to you. We've got Abraham as our father. We don't have to listen to you; we've got Abraham."

And John destroyed their confidence in their religious ancestors and denominational privileges and religious heritage. He says; "There's no glory in boasting of having Abraham in your house and lineage unless you've got the faith of Abraham."

Somebody said one time, "People who brag about their ancestors are like turnips; the best part is under the ground." Thank God for Luther, thank God for Calvin, thank God for Knox, thank God for Wesley and thank God for Spurgeon.

But I'm telling you; the faith of these men will do you no good if you do not have for yourself in your heart the faith of Christ Jesus. "*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth and believe in thine heart God hath raised Him from the dead thou shalt be saved.*"

Fourthly: We prepare a people for the Lord when we preach to them that salvation is a heart work!

Now look at **Matthew 3:10**; we're going right down the line. This is the next thing John said; he said: "*Every tree, (down to the last part of **verse 10**; see it), every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is going to be cut down.*"

What's he saying here? He's saying that this religion which does not produce the fruit of the Spirit is not true, and that's what we've got today; we've got a loose religion that gives a man a hope of eternal life. He never worships God. He doesn't love God's Word. He doesn't love

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God's people. He has no joy in his heart. He has no evidence of faith. He has no grace. He's got no humility.

He's a proud, arrogant, covetous, evil, person. Nobody can get along with him and they say, "He is on his road to heaven; he is eternally secure, he is saved." No he's not either! John said, "That's not so!"

He said, "*A tree that does not bring forth fruit; it's going to be cut down. The ax is going to be laid to the root.*" Over and over again the Scripture declares that fruitless religion is nothing but a tree with only leaves and God curses it.

What is the fruit that John is talking about here, the tree that doesn't bear fruit? Well turn to **Galatians 5:22-23**; this is it, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*"

If these fruits are not evident to some degree; I'm not saying that all of God's people are mature, fruit-bearing branches that bring forth the essence of matured fruit in all seasons. I'm saying there's evidence of the presence of that fruit and it will be there in degrees. "*And we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

But a man who professes to be a tree or a branch that is connected with the True Vine, Christ Jesus, and bears no fruit; why John said, "It's not so; it'll be cut down and cast into the fire."

You see, this foundational work; it's got to be done or men are going to come and hear us say; "Don't you want to go to heaven? You don't want to go to hell. Walk the aisle; shake my hand, and your saved. I will meet you in the Promise Land. And they go off saying, "Well there's nothing to this. I'm fixed up."

But there's nothing there. And what's wrong is there's no foundation work. There's no preparation work. John didn't do that. He came to prepare a people for the Lord.

And we prepare a people for the Lord when we shut them up to a Holy Spirit conviction and Holy Spirit awakening and Holy Spirit teaching.

Now listen to **verse 11 of Matthew 3**; John said, "*I baptize you with water but He that cometh after me who was before me, whose shoes I'm not worthy to tie; He's going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*"

John says, "I preach to you. I exhort you and I warn you and I plead with you. I'll baptize you but only the Holy Ghost can bring you to Christ."

**"Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove
With all thy quickening power
And kindle a flame of holy love
In these cold hearts of ours**

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**See how we labor here below
Fond of these trifling toys
Our souls how heavily they go
To reach the heavenly joys.”**

God the Holy Ghost has to do for you what I can't do. I can preach to you and I'm going to. I can tell you the truth and by God's grace I'm going to try to. But only God can quicken you. Only God can convict you of sin. Only God can reveal the words of this Book, only God, the Holy Ghost.

It will just be words on paper to you till the Holy Spirit makes it life. Only the Holy Spirit can convince men of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Only the Holy Spirit can take the things of Christ and show them to you.

Only the Holy Spirit can give you eyes to behold the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ and ears to hear His voice and a heart that beats in tune with Him. Only the Holy Ghost can do that. Preachers can give you religion. They can give you professions. They can give you experiences. Satan can give you experiences. Satan can give you feelings, feelings sometimes of joy. But only the Holy Spirit can reveal Christ. And He's the one whom to know is life eternal.

And then last of all; we prepare a people for the Lord when we point them to Christ the substitute, the sacrifice.

When all this work is done, when a man is convinced of his sins and he's laid down all of his fleshly works and he's disowned any hope as a result of his ancestry and the Holy Ghost is come and plowed up the field and torn off the fig-leaf aprons and stripped him and knocked his foundations of flesh out from under him and he's got nowhere to turn. He's without help, he's without hope, and he's without God; old John turned and said, "*Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,*" all the sin of all who believe.

There's your hope:

**“Turn your eyes on Jesus
Look away from yourself
Turn your eyes on Him
Look full in His wonderful face.”**

But you're not ready for that message until you've heard this other message. You're not ready for the shoes of Christ Jesus till you've been stripped of your own rags and your own robes of righteousness. You're not ready to cling to Him till you've thrown off everything else.

But the true messenger; he sees Christ for himself. And the true messenger; he declares Christ to be sent of God, the Lamb of God. The true messenger declares Christ to be the substitute. He taketh away our sins because He took them in His own body on the tree. He bore them and he paid for them. "*And by His stripes we are healed.*"

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And he declares Christ to be the only object of faith. I pray to God that we might in this day experience a revival but we're not going to have a true revival. We may have a religious excitement and religious commotion and religious emotion but we're not going to have a true revival, a return to God, till we get back to the message of this Book!

Until we preachers start, not looking always for a harvest, but somebody goes out as Paul did, and does some plowing and some watering with tears and some tearing down of the old false foundation and pushing out of the rubbish. And some sinners start crying; *"Men and brethren; what shall we do?"*

We're telling people what to do before they even ask us. You don't hear anybody asking for help do you? *"What must we do?"* And when we start doing this ground work we're going to hear those voices, *"What must we do?"*