

“THE VOICE OF THE PROPHET”

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2009

TEXT: MATTHEW 3:1-17

INTRODUCTION:

For over 400 years, the nation had not heard the voice of a prophet. Then John appeared and a great revival took place. Consider four facts about John.

1. Prior to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, we read of the work of John the Baptist...
 - a. Who preached in the wilderness of Judea - Mt 3:1
 - b. Who at first had a very successful ministry - Mt 3:5-6
 - c. Which was later cut short by his imprisonment - Mt 4:12
2. Though John's work was short-lived, it was clearly important...
 - a. Each of the four gospels preface Jesus' ministry with that of John's
 - b. His ministry prepared people for what was to come

[If we seek to understand the message and ministry of Jesus Christ, we must start with the one who was sent to "prepare the way of the Lord". In this study we shall begin by observing what we can regarding...]

I. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

A. HIS MESSAGE...

1. A call to repentance - **Mt 3:1-2**
 - a. Lit., "a changing of the mind"
 - b. Which change prompts one to turn from sin and turn to God
 - c. Prompted by sorrow for one's sins, manifested by a zealous desire to do what is right -

“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.” (2Corinthians 7:10-11)

2. A proclamation of the coming "kingdom of heaven" - **Mt 3:2**

- a. The term "kingdom" in Jewish thought meant "rule, reign"
- b. The phrase "of heaven" implies the source of such rule; other gospel writers use "of God" -

14 “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”” (Mark 1:14-15 NKJV)

- c. The rule or reign of God was about to be manifested in a special way; it was "at hand" (near)

B. HIS PURPOSE...

1. To fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah - **Mt 3:3**
 - a. Which was to "prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" - Isa 40:3
 - b. I.e., to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah
2. To fulfill the prophecy of Malachi - **Mt 3:4**
 - a. Concerning the sending of Elijah - cf. Mal 4:5-6
 - b. John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah", not that he actually was Elijah - cf. Jn 1:19-23 (cf. Mt 3:4 with 2Ki 1:8)

-- As the angel told Zacharias, his son John was to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" - Lk 1:16-17

CONCLUSION

1. The ministry of John the Baptist was an important one...
 - a. To "prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight"
 - b. This he did by preaching the same themes, letting people know what to expect -- Of course, there was more, as John was to actually identify the Messiah to Israel
2. But when Jesus began preaching, people were more likely to:
 - a. Repent of their sins
 - b. Answer the call to be baptized
 - c. Accept the good news concerning the kingdom ...for John had been preaching such themes in the wilderness of Judea!
3. In a sense, John's message is still needed today...
 - a. There are many who turn the message of Jesus Christ into some sort of "easy-believism"
 - b. But John reminds us of the need to bear fruits in keeping with true repentance

As Jesus would say later, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Lk 6:46). Are you showing true acceptance of Jesus as Lord by doing the things He says?

a. This did not rule out Jesus baptizing in water, or that His disciples would.

- 1) Indeed, Jesus did baptize in water, via His disciples - Jn 4:1-2
- 2) He later commanded water baptism in the Great Commission, which His disciples carried out - Mt 28:19-20; Ac 2:38; 8:35-38; 10:47-48

b. But Jesus would also baptize with the Holy Spirit, as promised - cf. Ac 1:4-5

- 1) Which occurred at Pentecost - cf. Ac 2:1-21
- 2) The result of which affects all who are saved - Tit.

3:5-7

-- Yes, John "indeed" baptized with water (as would Jesus), but John prepared the people for a work Jesus would do that went far beyond what he was doing!

2. He spoke of Jesus as One who would separate the "wheat" from the "chaff" - **Mt 3:12**

- a. Jesus' work would divide the good from the bad - cf. Mt 13:47-50
- b. His work would even cause division within one's family Mt 10:34-39

-- From what John said, we can expect that the effect of Jesus' work would sometimes cause division, not peace!

3. He spoke of Jesus as administering judgment - **Mt 3:12**

- a. Jesus later depicted Himself as judge - Mt 26:31-46
- b. He spoke of how His words would judge us in the last day - Jn 12:48

-- It is true that Jesus came the first time to save the world, but He is coming again, this time to judge the world! - 2Th 1:7-10

16 "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children," and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:16-17 NKJV)

C. HIS SUCCESS...

1. People from Jerusalem, all Judea, etc., went to him - **Mt 3:5**
2. They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins- **Mt 3:6**
 - a. For he preached a baptism of repentance - Mark 1:4a
 - b. A baptism for the remission of sins - Mark 1:4b

D. HIS CHALLENGE...

1. When people came to be baptized, he expected to see fruits in keeping with true repentance - **Mt 3:7-8**
 - a. He expected compassion for the poor - Lk 3:10-11
 - b. He expected honest business dealings - Lk 3:12-1
 - c. He expected fair treatment, contentment with one's wages - Lk 3:14
2. He told them not to trust in their heritage or ancestry **Mt 3:9**
 - a. It was not enough to be Jews, descendants of Abraham
 - b. God could just as easily raise up children to Abraham out of stones
3. He warned them that the time of judgment was near - **Mt 3:10**
 - a. The "ax" (God's judgment) was at the root of the trees
 - b. That which did not bear good fruit would be cut off cf. Ro 11:11-23; Jn 15:1-6

11 "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Romans 11:12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! 13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. 15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." (Romans 11:11-23 NKJV)

E. HIS PROMISE...

1. One mightier than he is coming - **Mt 3:11**
 - a. Yes, John did indeed baptize with water with repentance
 - b. But one (Jesus) was coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire!
2. Whose work would be to separate the wheat from the chaff - **Mt 3:12**
 - a. Using a "winnowing fan" (the Holy Spirit? Jn 16:7-8; 12-13)

b. And burn up the chaff with "unquenchable fire" (the Judgment? cf. Mt 13:30)

[We can learn more of the ministry of John the Baptist by studying the other gospels, but what Matthew records is sufficient to make several observations about how he was "Preparing The Way Of The Lord"...]

A. JOHN PREPARED PEOPLE FOR JESUS' MESSAGE...

1. John preached a call to repent - **Mt 3:2,8**
 - a. Jesus did the same during His earthly ministry - Mt 4:17; 9:13; 11:20; 12:41
 - b. Jesus expected the call to repentance to be proclaimed in His name to all nations - Lk 24:46-47
 - c. And so His apostles proclaimed the need to repent - Ac 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 20:20-21; 26:19-20

-- Unless we heed to the call to repent, we have not begun to understand nor act upon what it means to be true disciples of Jesus Christ!
2. John proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, that it was near - **Mt 3:2**
 - a. This was the same message proclaimed by Jesus - Mt 4:17; cf. Mk 1:14-15
 - b. By His disciples, in the Limited Commission - Mt 10:7
 - c. The theme of the kingdom was an important part of the gospel following the Great Commission - Ac 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23

-- What came to be taught concerning the kingdom, we shall consider in another lesson; but it was "at hand" during Jesus' earthly ministry, and in existence following His ascension to heaven - cf. Col 1:13; 1Th 2:12; Re 1:9

B. JOHN PREPARED THE PEOPLE FOR JESUS' WORK...

1. He spoke of Jesus as One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit - **Mt 3:11**