



Daily Devotionals

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MATTHEW 3:1-12 TRUE PREPARATION

¹ In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

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

⁴ John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

True preaching is prophetic because it proclaims the truth about God. The prophet is simply the voice of God, for prophecy is God’s words in the prophet’s mouth. In reality, not all preachers are prophetic, but all prophets preach. For John as the forerunner of the Messiah the pulpit was the wilderness because the wilderness belongs to no man but to God. John also was a prophet of the mold of Elijah – a voice from the desert; a figure dependent upon God even in his dress and diet. However, he was also more than Elijah because he was not only announcing God’s ways to Israel, but he was heralding the coming of God himself into the world.

John the Baptist’s call to prepare was not that the people of Judah should open the gates of Jerusalem and gussy up the Temple. Neither did he call for people to prepare a great festival nor to become his followers and a holy sect of Jews. In a humility equal to his surroundings, John pointed only to the One who was to come – the long awaited Messiah. Likewise he proclaimed a humble, even humiliating plan of preparation. His call was that the people should repent, not just privately but repent and be publically baptized. The contrast between John and the religious leaders of Israel was stark to the point of being opposite. They were proud of their position and wielded their religious influence with flare. They lived in the respected society of men and dressed in finery in order to call attention to themselves. They were quick to proclaim Abraham as their father and flaunt the privilege of being God’s chosen leaders of his chosen people. Like the bite of the viper their example and teaching was a fatal poison to the people.

The only antidote to the poison of false teaching and selfish ambition was then and is now true repentance. If Jesus is to dwell with us and we are to be led by his Spirit, then we must make room for him by cleaning out the clutter of self-centeredness and sin. Without repentance we are simply replacing the “Abrahamic pride” of the Jewish leaders with the “Christian pride” of proclaiming that we are of Christ when we only believe in a Christ of our own construction. It is a poison that can only be removed by repentance.

Almighty God, by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was...sent to prepare the way of your Son our Savior by preaching repentance: Make us so to follow his teaching and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and, following his example, constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (modified from BCP, p. 241)

Chuck+