LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

Matthew 3 (Part 1) :1-12

John Prepares the Way

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

We're in chapter 3 as we're continuing our third study through the Scripture. Matthew chapter 3, we get to talk about John the Baptist today. You know, we've been dealing with some really cool examples of just godliness, Joseph, and now here we are dealing with John the Baptist. So we're going to read through the first 12 verses and then I'm going to open us up in prayer and then we'll see what the Lord has for us. It says, in those days John the Baptist came preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.

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. 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, yum. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan, confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 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, produce fruit in keeping with repentance, and do not think you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father.

I tell you that out of these stones God could raise up children for Abraham. 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. 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. 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.

Let's stop there and let's pray. Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of your word today and speak to us. Direct our hearts as you would have them to go and enlighten us, Lord, to the purposes that you have for this word and the ministry of John the Baptist. We want to learn, we want to grow, we want

to find things, Lord, from your scriptures that we can apply to our lives. Use this time to speak to your children as a father speaks to a child.

Do this work, we pray, Father God. In Jesus' name, amen. You might have noticed as this chapter gets underway, it begins with the phrase, in those days, and with that simple phrase, we jump about 25 plus years from Matthew chapter 2 into the ministry of Jesus Christ. But before that, Matthew introduces us here to John the Baptist and to the preparatory work of John the Baptist. And it's really important that we understand what John's ministry accomplished and what the basis of that ministry, which is repentance, and we'll get into that, still accomplishes in the life of believers.

I think there's a lot of Christians who have a lot of misconceptions about repentance. I think sometimes we kind of think that repentance is something we do before we come to the Lord. You know, we repent of our sin and then we come to the Lord and then after that we're kind of pretty much done repenting, you know? It's like, well, I repented, you know? It's kind of like, you know, a husband who says to his wife, I said I was sorry last year, you know, what do you want?

You know, sort of a thing. And repentance, though, is an ongoing thing, and it continues to have an ongoing effect. We'll kind of get into that. You know, Matthew just kind of introduces John the Baptist for us, and he just kind of opens the stage, and here's John the Baptist performing his public ministry, baptizing people in the wilderness of Judea in the Jordan River. But it is Luke who gives us some wonderful background about the person of John the Baptist, how he actually came to be in his conception.

You'll remember that John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were a couple who were both godly people. They were of the Levitical line, meaning that they were descendants from the tribe of Levi, and that meant that Zechariah was a priest, or he had a role in the priesthood. He was not the priest, he was just one of the priests, and so it was his time to, by lot, to go in and burn incense in the temple. And so he's in there, and the people are all outside, and they're praying, and they're kind of waiting for him to come out, as was the tradition. But he kind of got waylaid inside the temple, because an angel appeared to him.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah in there, and he started telling him things like, I just want you to know here, Zechariah, that God has heard your prayer, and your wife, who has never been able to have a baby up to this point, is going to have a baby. Now, you got to understand that that's typically good news for a couple, and particularly back in those days, when having a baby was such an enormous thing, and a woman who didn't have a baby was considered to be under the curse of God. But for Zechariah, this was weird news, because he and his wife were well past childbearing years. I mean, Elizabeth was, for all

intents and purposes, an older lady, and getting pregnant, by natural means, was completely out of the question. And so he wonders about this whole message that the angel is bringing, and even doubts.

And I love what the angel says to him, you know, after Zechariah's like, how in the world? I don't get this. And by the way, you say God's heard my prayer. I stopped praying that prayer a long time ago, you know? But yet, God says, you know, I'm going to do this for you, through this angel.

And Zechariah is like, I don't know, I'm, you know. So the angel says to him, he says, dude. Well, he didn't say dude, but that would have been a great thing to say. Don't you agree? Dude, I am Gabriel.

I stand in the presence of God. And, you know, compared to me, you're kind of like a dweeby lewzoid. But I got some really, I have some really good news here for you, but you didn't believe it. So because of that, you are going to be unable to speak for a period of time. So from that point on, Zechariah was unable to utter a sound until after John was born.

Interesting, the circumstances around that are that they were giving him his name. And of course, all the neighbors and friends, relatives are there. And they say, what's his name going to be? And Elizabeth says, his name's going to be John. And everybody's going, John, there's no John in the family.

Why would you name the kid John? Isn't he going to be, you know, Zech Jr. or something like that? And the Lord opened up Zechariah's voice. He says, his name is going to be John.

And he begins to just praise the Lord. It's just one of the most amazing, glorious, effervescent, just praises that you'll read in the Word of God. It really is a very neat thing. So, you know, neat circumstances regarding, you know, John the Baptist and how he came about. Well, now we fast forward in the chronology of events here in Matthew.

And they're now both grown men. And the ministry of John is going on, and the ministry of Jesus is about to go on. And so it says to us in verse 1 that, in those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Your Bible may say, at hand, if you have a different translation here this morning. The word repent, the message of repent, that was John's message.

I mean, he had basically kind of a one-string guitar, if you will. He only played one song, you know, one tune. It was, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. And I think, once again, as I said before, I think that there's some misunderstanding about what repentance is. As I said, some people think it's just something you do once at the very beginning.

Others, people, think that if the definition of repentance is basically being sorry for your sin. But did you know that the word, at least in the the word that is given to us in the scripture, which is metanoia in the Greek, the word repent is not a feeling word. It's an action word. And so repentance is not about how you feel, whether you feel bad about things. Repentance is what you're doing, right?

It literally means a change of mind that follows with action All right, actually the Apostle Paul Talked about this and gives us some great insights into this in 2nd Corinthians Chapter 7 verse 10 up on the screen. It says godly sorrow brings repentance and That leads to salvation and it leaves no regret But worldly sorrow brings death now think about this if repentance is sorrow and sorrow is repentance This verse doesn't make sense because then it would say it would basically mean godly sorrow brings sorrow So you see repentance is not sorrow again repentance is Action that results from godly sorrow when you are truly Sorry before God for the things that you've done it leads to repentance Which is a change of mind and the action that follows that change of mind notice though that Paul says in this verse There's such a thing as worldly Sorrow, and you know worldly sorrow is it's just being sorry that You got caught I'm sorry that I hurt your feelings. I'm sorry that I can't do this anymore I'm sorry that you know, you're such a wimp and you're so you know, whatever. I'm sorry I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

I'm sorry Don't you see my tears? But it's it's not a true godly sorrow Which understands that it's my sin that breaks the heart of God? that leads to repentance which is a change of mind and action, all right, so You need to understand that it's it's a very important thing for us to understand He goes on here in verse 3 and it says this is he and this is speaking now of John this is he who was spoken of through the Prophet Isaiah and then he goes on to quote Isaiah a Voice of one calling in the desert prepare the way for the Lord make straight paths for him What exactly does that mean to prepare the way for the Lord make straight paths? We don't we don't really Use those terms today, but they were used a lot back in John's day and Here's here's here's what it's all about you and I take for granted things like good roads for the most part We go out we get in our car if I'm gonna go to Boise I know that I'm gonna hop on the freeway and that's a good stretch of road and I can scoot along at the speed limit and just do you know, it's gonna be it's good a good road and and it's well maintained and It's nice and wide with good shoulders and we just come to expect that and when we don't get good roads, you know We usually complain about it. Well back in John's day Good roads were a premium.

The Romans did put in some construction related to roads and they did a fairly good job but they weren't well maintained and Here's the deal Whenever a king was going to pass through an area on what they referred to as the Kings Highway They would put the word out there would be a call that would go out among the people and They would say to the people in that area. Listen, the king is coming Prepare the

way prepare the road and that meant go out there and do what you have to do to get the road fixed up So that the king can pass Easily, so there's no problem for the king coming prepare the way make sure that the the way is prepared now What this is people is a word picture about our hearts the road that he's talking about here Preparing the road and preparing the way means preparing your heart for the king. You don't want there to be any barriers for the king You don't want any problem for the king to be able to get to you and do that work in your heart that he wants To do you know, but there are things that do get in the way From the king being able to come and do his work So the call goes out prepare the way make straight the path for the king because he's coming Well, what kind of things do we need to do in preparation? Well, we're gonna see here in just a little bit exactly what those are in just a few verses And and and I think you're gonna be amazed at this Construction this road construction that God wants you and I to do and to maintain in In our hearts to make sure that we are prepared for the Lord and you know preparation is a huge thing you guys It's it's all it's it remains. It starts at the beginning and it goes on Have you ever thought about preparing your heart for like coming to church on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night?

Or have you ever thought about preparing your heart to read your Bible? I? Mean preparing your heart you ever thought about that one of my kids recently said to me, you know If I just take the time To ask the Lord Lord speak to me through your word today when he when we you know when the Bible gets open Just speak to me if I just take that little bit of time to pray I get so much more out of the text then just kind of randomly pulling my Bible now It's time for my morning devotions, you know All right we're gonna know and I start reading and and and if you ever come to church on a Sunday and and you kind of walk away and you're just kind of like unmoved and Then you come back on a different Sunday and you walk out and you're like, wow God just really challenged my heart. Did you ever stop to think that maybe? And I'm not trying to justify myself Maybe it wasn't me.

Maybe it's you Maybe it was your heart because you know I've learned something over the years that whether I do an okay job at sharing the Word of God or whether I do a really Lousy job at sharing the Word of God. I've learned that the Holy Spirit is not limited by me I've learned that when people come together and they have a heart that's prepared and ready to receive from God the Holy Spirit's gonna provide What they want what they need You know despite the job that I do particularly in fact I've I tell you I can't tell you in 21 years how many times I've walked off this platform and I've just like I've gone well Fire me God. I mean I am that was the worst message I've ever heard and I did it, you know I preached it and it was the worst one I've ever heard And and it never fails I'll get an email I'll get a note from somebody and it's so humbling Somebody will say Oh Paul You were reading my mail in Sunday's message. It just Flattened me. I mean God just hit me between the eyes.

That was the best message I've ever heard You know, I'm going what did you go to the wrong church? You know, I don't think you were at Calvary Chapel because my message stunk No, but the Holy Spirit See when the heart is prepared when the heart is longing to receive when the heart is open to receive don't you know that God is going to be faithful and So we're gonna talk as we get into some of these verses about what that preparation is and kind of you know What it looks like but first here in verse 4 It says John's clothes were made of camel's hair and he had a leather belt around his waist You're probably not going to find that at any stores today or his food choices either Locusts and wild honey. Do you know that that was eaten by poor people? That was kind of a poor man's diet and That was basically because John lived out in the wilderness. He lived on the land and There's another reason though Matthew is giving us this description of John the Baptist in this way It's because he wants to make the connection for you and I that this man looks very similar to the Old Testament prophet Elijah and there's a connection you see between John the Baptist and Elijah Remember I was telling about how the angel appeared to John the Baptist's dad Zechariah, well, he made a statement about Zechariah or excuse me about John and I'll put it up on the screen here for you It goes like this it says Luke chapter 1 verse 17 It says and he will go on he's telling Zechariah about his son to come and he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah and here's what he's gonna do he's gonna turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the Disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous and he's gonna make ready a people look at this prepared for the Lord There's John's ministry to prepare the way right for people to hear the Word of God, but notice here John the Baptist is going to come in the spirit and power of Elijah well, what's what is the spirit and power of Elijah?

These guys were both Confrontational men who stood for righteousness and weren't afraid to call it the way they saw it I don't know if you'd necessarily want John the Baptist as your pastor necessarily, but I'll tell you one thing. He isn't gonna mince words with you I mean this guy confronted the common people this guy confronted the religious elite Which we read here and we'll look at again and he is also later on in his ministry going to confront Herod King Herod and he's gonna end up in prison because of it and eventually he's gonna get his head lopped off Because of that same Confrontational sort of a ministry that God gave this man to simply say to people that's wrong That's wrong. You know, you shouldn't be doing that. Well, Elijah had much the same ministry during the Old Testament It was very confrontational And so forth. Well, we read here in verse 5 if you look with me there the people went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan and Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Now, let me just explain a little something about water baptism. First of all, water baptism, the word baptism comes from a Greek word which goes like this, baptizo. It's kind of similar, but the word actually has a meaning, and it means to dip or to immerse, okay? Sprinkle baptism, which has made its way into the church over the centuries, really has no biblical foundation because the word baptize means to dunk, okay? That's literally what the word means.

It was used in many applications for just dunking something in the water. Baptism was not unheard of at this point in Israel's history. They did have many ceremonial washings, as you know, but water baptism by immersion was frankly something that the Jews practiced for Gentiles who were wanting to join Judaism. In other words, if a Gentile who was referred to as a God-fearer wanted to be considered a Jew from a religious standpoint, that Gentile would be baptized by immersion in the water, and it was usually something they did by themselves. And then they were, and then of course they got to keep the law and all these other things, they weren't able to be considered a God-fearing Gentile who practices Judaism.

So here comes John the Baptist, and he's asking people to do something that they only really did with Gentiles, okay? So he's coming along and he's saying, hey, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, believe the good news, turn from your sin, and then be baptized. Whoa, stop the train here. Be baptized?

That's what we do to dogs. That's what they call Gentiles, by the way. The Jews refer to them as dogs. We baptize the dogs when they want to come and get saved, but we, what are you talking here? John carried on, you know, to be baptized by John in the Jordan as a Jew.

Now think about this, you're a Jew, right? Putting yourself in their position. That to you is like admitting, I'm no better than a Gentile. That is a very humbling sort of a posture for you to take, because Jews are basically raised with the idea that God made Gentiles to stoke the fires of hell. He uses them as kindling, and if he wants to heat up the fires, well, you just make a few more Gentiles.

Throw them in there. That's all they're good for, for the most part. Truly, that's the way, essentially, the Jewish mindset was. And so for them to humble themselves and submit to this rite of water baptism was a powerful statement that they are making about themselves. I'm no better than that Gentile over there, and I need to be forgiven, all right?

Well, so that humility, that contrition, that brokenness is what John's ministry was attempting to accomplish. That's what he was doing, and it was that attitude of brokenness and humility that effectively allowed John's ministry to be accomplished, because we read an amazing Scripture, and I've shared this

with many of you several times along the years, but it's just, it really is amazing. I'll show it to you here. It's from Luke chapter 7. Look at this.

It says that all of the people, all of the people, even the tax collectors, and they were considered probably even a little bit lower than a Gentile, but when they heard Jesus's words, they acknowledged that God's way was right on. Why? Because they'd been baptized by John. But the Pharisees, the religious elite, the experts in the law, what did they do? They rejected God's purposes for themselves, and again, why?

Because they had not been baptized by John. Isn't that an amazing passage? But you know what it tells us? It tells us what humility does to the human heart. Listen, people, the waters of baptism do not have some mystical, magical properties to make you open to God.

It's not water that makes the difference. It's the attitude of the heart going into the water, saying, I need forgiveness. I am lost. I need a Savior. I need God in my life.

Okay? Well, these people, the people that were willing to walk in that attitude, they were baptized by John, and as a result, when they heard Jesus speak, they were like, yeah, absolutely, He is right on. But the people who refused water baptism, or shall we say, who refused to humble themselves, to break their heart before God, and did not confess their need of Him, they were like, yeah, this is Jesus's character. He's a jerk. You've got to kill the guy.

That's literally the position they took, because pride held them fast, and pride was the issue. Christians, do you know that pride can continue to be the issue even with a born-again Christian? I mean, we can come to the place of accepting Jesus as our Savior. We can come to a place of humbling ourselves and saying, I need forgiveness. I need Christ in my life.

I need a Savior. And I can be born again. I can be saved, and then I can be walking with the Lord for a period of time, and I can still harden my heart. You know? I can still do that, and so can you.

To continue to have that openness to hear God's voice, we need to continue to humble ourselves before God. Have you ever wondered why God allows you sometimes to really fall down and skin up your knees and your hands and, I mean, scrape your nose in life, metaphorically speaking? Because God knows that when we biff it, and I mean really bad, and we humble ourselves because we've messed things up, we are going to be so much more open to His Word. You know, I've got this weird thing I need to confess to you. Probably some of the most intimate times of fellowship that I've had with God are right after I've made some of my worst mistakes, truly.

I mean, I've absolutely done the dumbest, most ridiculous things that you can imagine one person doing, and just really royally messed things up, and, you know, came to realize it, came to God and said, I am such an idiot. And it's like the Lord just rushes. He rushes to your side and just wants to have fellowship with you. And suddenly there's this connection with the Lord that I've been missing because I've been walking through life acting like I got life kind of dialed in, you know? I kind of got this thing all worked out and sorted and so forth, and here we go, you know, sort of a thing.

Well, you know, what a lie. We just need to constantly stay soft, don't we, before the Lord. We need to constantly just stay humble. Say, God, you know, every day we ought to say to the Lord, I can't do it, but you can. I am unable to accomplish this life that you want me to live, but you can do it in me and through me and so forth.

That's how it's going to get accomplished and so forth. So along come the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Look at verse 7. It says that when he saw these Pharisees and Sadducees coming where he was baptizing, he said to them, you brood of vipers. That's like saying, you know, you snake in the grass.

You know, who told you to flee from the coming wrath? Do you know that to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, that idea of fleeing from the coming wrath was as foreign to them as any possible thought could be foreign? They didn't think there was any wrath to flee from. You know why? They were that prideful element we've been talking about, who were comforting themselves with the law.

I have the law of Moses, and I keep the law of Moses perfectly. And what wrath? Why would God pour out his wrath on me? I am the righteous of God. I mean, that was the attitude of these guys, you know?

And John recognizes it. So you ask the question, what are they doing? What are they doing where John is then? Why did they come out where John was baptizing? Oh, that was just the MO of the Pharisees and religious leaders.

They love to do things for a pretense. And if there was a crowd, they were going to be there. And if there was something that God was genuinely doing, they're going to come, and they're going to pretend like they're getting involved because that's what we do. We're all into PR, and we're the religious and righteous of God. And so, you know, and so they thought, well, you know, there's these huge, ginormous crowds that are coming out to hear John and get baptized.

We better get out there too. So they come out, and they're, you know, plodding along, and John recognizes them, I mean, right off the bat. He goes, what... What are you doing here, you snakes? And believe me, that's what they were.

I mean, they were snakes. They were venomous snakes. And then he says this, listen, if you're here, I just want you to know what's going on here. There's repentance going on here in this place. And if you're going to come, you can't just play the game.

And then he says to them this, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. In other words, don't come and just repent in words. Let's see it in your life. Let's see a genuine work of the change of mind and moving toward God, moving away from sin. Let's see it.

Because remember what I said, repentance is an action word. It's not a feeling word. So John is challenging them. Let's see some actions behind your words. Well, they don't have any of that going on in their lives.

And so these are the kind of guys though that John went around offending. And they were really not the people you wanted to offend. The religious leaders had a lot going for them. The Pharisees were kind of the religious authorities. The Sadducees held a more political role in Israel.

And they were kind of the movers and shakers along those lines. And these were not the kind of guys you really wanted to upset. But John just comes out and lays it out because he knows something. He knows that they are trusting in a false hope. And that false hope is this, people, that you can be good enough to go to heaven.

How do people go to heaven? How do they get to heaven? How do they qualify to go to heaven? You know what the Pharisee would have said? Keep the law.

Well, if you translate that in today's language, that is, be a good person. How do you get to heaven? Well, you have to be a good person. And you better just hope that on the day that God weighs your good deeds with your bad deeds, you better hope that the good outweighs the bad. And if they do, wonderful.

You're in, you know, and it's all a good thing. And if you're not, well then, sorry, Charlie, you're heading the other direction. Do you know how popular that view is today? Do you know how many Pharisees there are in the world today? And they're not Pharisees, they don't have long cloaks, and they don't do all the things that the other Pharisees did, but they still believe that you have to be good enough.

And so they go around and they try to live the Christian life. They're trying to be good enough. They're trying to impress God, so that at the end of days, hopefully the good will outweigh the bad. Do you know that's a false hope? And John confronted it.

Listen, your only hope, he said, is to repent and turn to God and trust Him for what He wants to do in your life. Forgive your sins and give you new life and new hope. Do you remember the Apostle Paul was once a Pharisee? Here's the man who wrote the majority of the New Testament, and he is such a man of grace, such a man understanding the mercy of God, and yet he was once a Pharisee. He was one of them.

He was a man who believed, I can be good enough. I can keep the law. But guess what? He ran into Jesus one day on the road to Damascus. And this is after Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, but he still meets the glorious Jesus, and he's blinded by that meeting.

And from that day forward, Paul has a whole different understanding of where the law comes into play. And he realizes, I can't keep the law and neither can you. And he wrote about it. He actually wrote about it in the book of Romans. Let me show you a passage from Romans 3.

Love this verse or this passage. Now we know, Paul says, that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under it, under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore, look at this and don't miss it, no one will be declared righteous in his, meaning God's sight, by observing the law. Rather, through the law, we just simply become conscious of sin. Why did God give the law?

So that we would know how much we fall short of it. That's why he gave it. It's like, I've mentioned this to you guys many, many times, the law is like your bathroom scale. You hate that little device, don't you? But have you ever noticed that it can do nothing to help you lose weight?

All it can do is tell you how much weight you have to lose. Right? And in some rare cases, how much you need to put on, but we don't want to talk to you people. You just go off and be by yourself. But the scale can't do anything to help.

It's just a measuring stick. It just helps you figure out how far you have to go. The law of God that is given in the Old Testament is to be used that way, as a measuring stick. So when you read the law, when you read the Old Testament, I hope that you come away with the attitude of, whoa, no can do. I can't do that.

I just can't. I know that I'm going to mess up. I know it. I look at the law. Man, that's perfection.

I can't do that. Perfect. The law just did exactly what it was supposed to do in your life. And that's what Paul is saying to the Romans. Nobody is going to be declared righteous in God's sight by being a good person.

Nobody. The only way that we can be forgiven of our sin is to receive what Jesus did on the cross for us when he paid that penalty. That's the only way. It's the only possible way that you can be saved. All right?

Okay. He goes on here. Verse 9. And do not think to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. I tell you that out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham.

You know what he's saying here? The Jews believed that because God considered Abraham a righteous man and because they were his descendants, they thought that God would view them as righteous people too because they were sons of Abraham. And they actually trusted in that. It was kind of their spiritual get out of hell free card. And they waved it around whenever anybody talked about, hell, I got to get out of free card, and it's because I am in the lineage of Abraham.

You want to translate that today? It's somebody who comes to you and you start talking to them about the things of the Lord and they go, well, I was raised in a Christian home. That means nothing as far as your eternal salvation. You can be raised in a Christian home and still reject what Christ did on the cross. The point isn't how you were raised necessarily.

The point is what are you doing with Jesus right here, now, today? Have you received him as your savior? There are no get out of hell free cards that you and I can flash apart from accepting the work of Jesus Christ on the cross on our behalf. And so he says, don't rest in the fact. Do you know that the Jews actually believed that Abraham himself would stand guard at the mouth of hell and would turn away any Jew who might have gotten lost and was wandering down around that area and say, no, he's one of mine.

They really believed that. They thought just by virtue of being a Jew that they would be snatched from hell. That was their ticket out. So John is confronting that. And then he says in verse 11, he says, I baptize you with water for repentance.

But after me, and this is John's focus. He's always putting the focus on Jesus. But after me will come one who is so incredibly more powerful than I am. I am not even worthy to carry this guy's shoes. And you know what?

Yeah, sure. I baptize you in the Jordan. Wonderful. You know what, though? The one who's coming after me, he's going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

When I dunk you in the Jordan, I'm baptizing you in water. Yeah, but just wait. The one who's coming after me is going to baptize you with fire. And so John is using the words of comparison to exalt the ministry of Jesus. It's kind of John's way of saying, guys, don't make a big deal about me.

I'm just the forerunner. That's all. Don't go looking at me. Look at Jesus. I am just sitting here baptizing people in water.

The one who will come and baptize with the Holy Spirit is coming after me. He is so amazing, so powerful. I don't even deserve this role that God has given me. And so he makes this mention here about how Jesus will come and he will immerse people. Remember, that's what baptism means.

He will immerse people in the Holy Spirit, and he will immerse people in fire. And you know, fire is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. Do you remember when the disciples were all together on the day of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit fell upon them, and they began to speak in languages they'd never learned before? Praising God and so forth well it says that the people who looked upon them saw these little flames of fire Above their heads that would have been a strange look I mean, it's like everybody kind of had their own personal little BIC You know sort of a sort of a going on you know above the head sort of a thing But it was it was a supernatural thing that was going on because God was making a connection Between the Holy Spirit and what was happening there on the day of Pentecost But you see fire is also a picture of purification and Judgment God uses fire in our lives too. Doesn't he it's the fire of purification and That's what you know.

That's what the Holy Spirit's doing in your and my life There are things that are going on in our lives that aren't as they should be and what does he do he sends the fire? Of his wonderful glorious presence, but you know what then what that fire does it burns? It burns and it burns away the garbage and the chaff and and and and the stuff like that in fact That's the next picture that John gives here in verse 12 He says his winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor Gathering his weed into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire now This was a word picture that the people of his day would readily understand But today, I don't know if anybody here has ever threshed wheat I At least in the way that they used to do it back in those days. I sure haven't Let me show you a picture though. I actually found a picture on the Internet of Someone from you know they didn't have cameras back then so this is a recreation But in fact I think this guy has ten issues on but anyway forget that is this is it's a fairly accurate picture of what?

threshing did because they would take this winnowing fork which was very similar to a Pitchfork and they would stab it into the the the grain which included the stock and the husk and everything else And they'd throw it up in the air And they would usually by the way get up onto a hilltop to do this where the winds would blow and the wind would take the lighter Chaff and blow it in the wind it would kind of blow it away And the heavier wheat kernel would just fall to the ground until after he had winnowed or threshed This this wheat he'd have sitting down here Just the the kernel of wheat now Jesus is using this word picture to describe separation and Do you know in the kingdom of God? There's always separation? He says there's a separation that is not unlike a man threshing the wheat Allowing it to go up in the air so that the the kernel falls, but Jesus used other Stories or parables of separation He said the kingdom of God is like a man a fisherman who goes out and throws his net out in the water And he pulls the thing in and then he separates the good fish from the bad, and he throws this away But he brings in the ones he's going to use Separation Jesus told about the fact that the Good Shepherd will one day separate the sheep from the goats the sheep who are the children of God those who have embraced the work of the cross to those who have Rejected the work of the cross again the idea of separation, okay? This thing is going to be going on, but the picture of fire comes into this too because what would happen after threshing? Was they would burn the rest they'd burn the part that was unusable it was fuel It was you know the husk and the stock and stuff like that it was burned in the fire Now we're not talking about pruning here.

We're talking about destruction True destruction I want to I want to end this morning with by showing you a wonderful prophetic passage That actually in one prophetic view gives you a picture of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ Written you know It hundreds of years before either of them were born upon the earth really is but again it speaks of this idea of Fire and judgment and so forth it's from Malachi chapter 3 It goes like this see I will send my messenger. That's John first of all Who will prepare the way? before who me Then he says Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple the messenger of the covenant That's now Jesus remember He came to inaugurate a new covenant whom you desire will come says the Lord Almighty But then it asks this question but who can endure the day of his coming who can stand when he appears for he will be like a refiners fire or a Wanderer's soap once again some interesting sort of metaphoric pictures word pictures of that process of separation that process of Cleansing and so forth now. I want to just end by answering This simple question that is posed in this prophecy for Malachi and that is who can endure the day of his coming Who can do that who can endure the day of Christ coming I? May and let me answer that now for you all those Who are in Christ and what I mean by that those who have embraced?

the cross The work of the cross what Jesus did on the cross for you He died in your place, and if you will embrace that call it your own Receive it as your own you can stand the day of his coming because you are going to be forgiven Do you know it's it boggles people's minds, but do you understand Christians that when the Lord returns? He will not bring up one single solitary sin in your life not one if He even lifts up one sin mentions one thing you ever did wrong then his death on the cross wasn't enough to cover it all But when he said on that cross it is finished. He meant it It was finished completely totally 100% and it is such a glorious Wonderful thing to be able to say I can stand the day of his coming I will stand the day of his coming not because I'm a good person not because I am virtuous not because I've done things, right I've been a mess up from the word go that I am gonna stand in the day of his coming Because Jesus Christ has cleansed me of all my sin. He has washed me He has renewed me. He's filled my life with every good thing Why just because I received what he did on the cross?

that Is the essence of what it means to be a born-again believer? It's not a person who does things that are good. It's a person who has accepted the only one who is truly good Let's stand together You