

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 20

THE PREPARATION



MATTHEW; LUKE; JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“The devil said to him, ‘I will give you their splendor and all this authority, because it has been given over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. If you, then, will worship me, all will be yours.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

—Luke 4:6-8



JOHN PREPARED THE WAY

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 3:1-12

CONTEXT

Following the close of the Old Testament's inspiration and revelation, God was silent for over four hundred years. Then the angel Gabriel appeared to an old priest in Jerusalem and a young girl in Nazareth, informing them that God had not forgotten His promises. Decades later, John the Baptist, the surprise son of the priest, went into the wilderness to call people to repentance to prepare the way for the Messiah, the miraculous son of the young girl.

KEY CONCEPT

Following Jesus requires confession, repentance, and yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.

As you examine Matthew 3:1-12:

- Notice that John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah by calling people to repentance.
- Reflect on John's humility in pointing toward Jesus, who was more powerful and more worthy.



TIMELINE

John the Baptist Is Born to Prepare the Way for the Messiah (Luke 1:57-80)

SESSION STUDY:
John the Baptist Calls People to Repentance in Preparation for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

Jesus Is Tempted in the Wilderness (Luke 4:1-13)

Jesus, the Son of God, Is Born and Grows in Favor with God and Man (Luke 2:1-52)

John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Mark 1:1-8
- Day 2:** Luke 3:1-14
- Day 3:** Luke 3:15-20
- Day 4:** Matthew 3:1-6
- Day 5:** Matthew 3:7-12
- Day 6:** Psalm 139



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 3:1-6

CONFESSION, REPENTANCE, AND BAPTISM ARE PART OF A BELIEVER'S JOURNEY.

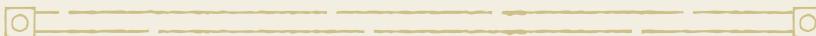
Circle the ways people demonstrated their repentance in this passage.

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" **3** For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight! **4** Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5** Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, **6** and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"The force of that verb, repent, is no mere hat tip to the holiness of God with a mere acknowledgment of one's sin. The call here is to radical conversion—to turn from sin and intoxication with this world and direct one's soul and heart to the things of God."¹

—R. C. Sproul (1939–2017)



John the Baptist's words in Matthew 3:1-2 were both earth-shattering and life-giving. The news of Jesus's arrival was more than a mere announcement; it was a call to respond. The moment had arrived; the long-awaited Messiah had come to save God's people from their sins. What was required now was the people's earnest confession and their heartfelt repentance.

John's message was plain in its content yet rich in meaning and context: "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (v. 2). John urged God's people to "repent," or "turn away," from their old, sinful ways of living. Jesus's arrival signified the in-breaking of God's kingdom predicted by Old Testament prophets centuries prior (v. 3). What is more, the coming of the Messiah represented not only a new chapter in redemptive history but also a new way of life for those who will trust and follow Him.

Why should repentance be a response to hearing the news of God's kingdom coming near?

John the Baptist was unconventional in his style of dress and dietary habits (v. 4). Yet in keeping with a pattern held throughout the Scriptures, God chose and used this unlikely individual to do

incredible things for His kingdom. John announced the arrival of the Messiah, and as droves of people began responding favorably to his message, he ministered to them, baptizing them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins (vv. 5-6).

GOSPEL CONNECTION

John was the prophesied messenger calling out in the wilderness, preparing hearts to repent and believe in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

In our day, the content of the gospel message and the urgent call to repentance remain the same. First John 1:9 reminds us that if we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us. In addition, we observe in Matthew 3 a precursor of the pattern new believers follow. After confessing our sins and trusting Christ for salvation, we follow through with Christian baptism, outwardly professing to the world what God by His Spirit has accomplished inwardly (Acts 2:38).

What is the relationship between repentance and confession of sins?

PERSONAL PREPARATION

MATTHEW 3:7-12

THOSE WHO TRUST IN JESUS WILL BE GIVEN THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Underline words or phrases that underscore the seriousness of John the Baptist's message.

7 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. **9** And don’t presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. **10** The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. **11** I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing shovel 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 fire that never goes out.”

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

BAPTISM: Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper.



Not all who responded to John's message responded in faith. The Pharisees and Sadducees were groups of Jewish religious leaders who prioritized strict adherence to the written law and often opposed the work of Jesus's followers. When the groups arrived to observe John baptizing new followers, John immediately addressed their insincerity and questioned their motives.

These groups were well-studied in the Scriptures and came from rich religious traditions. They also were intrigued by the excitement surrounding John's announcement. Yet they were not truly sorrowful over the sinful condition of their hearts, nor did they genuinely desire to turn from their sin and place their faith in the coming Messiah. Their sin included pride and a lack of love for those less fortunate. John warned the groups not to assume their religious tradition and lineage would save them from God's impending wrath (vv. 8-9). They would need to demonstrate a true change of heart, evidenced by the "fruit" of changed lives (v. 8), even though from the outside it may have seemed like were God-fearers.

Why should we not minimize the severity of sin (especially ones surrounding the corruption of the heart), and God's response to it?

As has been demonstrated throughout the Scriptures, God will not be mocked, nor does He deal gently with those who come to Him dishonestly. John reminded the two groups of this fact and pointed to the greater story unfolding around them. There was no question: God will judge those who remain unrepentant in their sin (vv. 10,12). The need of the hour—this very hour—is the need to turn from sin and turn to Christ.

But John's ministry was a precursor to the ministry of someone even greater who had now come—Jesus, the promised Messiah. While baptism with water, performed by John, served as an outward sign of inward change, faith in Jesus results in God granting to believers the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (v. 11). In contrast to outward conformity and external conditions, it is the presence of the Spirit and His "fruit" in one's life that characterizes true belief.

What "fruit" would you expect to see from a believer in Jesus because of the Holy Spirit's presence?



GROUP EXPERIENCE



PREPARING FOR JESUS

*Using Matthew 3:1-12, write down ways John prepared the people for Jesus.
Reflect on how preparation of our hearts matters when approaching God.*

MATTHEW 3:1-2

MATTHEW 3:5-10

MATTHEW 3:11

MATTHEW 3:12

What are ways we can assess the condition of our heart so that we can repent of what might be corrupted there?



Key Concept: Following Jesus requires confession, repentance, and yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.



HEAD

What are some obstacles that may keep people from repenting of their sin?

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Read and pray through Psalm 139. Reflect on all the grace and care the Lord has shown you throughout your life. Then pray for God's insight into all the ways you need to repent and obey Him.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



HEART

How will you pray for the Lord to change your affections so that you love Christ more than your sin?



HANDS

What steps will you take to repent of and combat sin in your life?

