1.

Introduction

1.

Greatest Prophet of the OT

1.

Who was the greatest prophet in the Old Testament? God said Moses was greater than other prophets because Moses spoke to God face to face, and that the Messiah would be a prophet like Moses. God worked truly great and powerful miracles through
Elijah
and
Elisha
.
And the grand and terrifying messages of the major prophets
Isaiah
,
Jeremiah
,
Ezekiel
, and
Daniel
inspire awe because they are full of God's grace and glory. But Jesus said that until His day
"
there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.
" (
Matt. 11:11
)

2.

What made the prophets of the OT great was not first Moses' position, Elijah's miracles, or Isaiah's
message
, but rather it was God Himself. Moses' position was to be close to
God
, Elijah's miracles were
God's
works, Isaiah's message was the word of

God
. So why is John the Baptist greater than any prophet of the OT? Because John prepared the way for Jesus Christ. It is not primarily John who is great, but Jesus Christ. In Christ God
came near
, He
worked
, He
spoke
, more than you've ever seen before!

3.

Jesus Christ came once, and He will come again. How do you respond to His first coming? How will you respond to His second coming? John the Baptist still tells you today, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
"

4.

Outline. In the passage before us Matthew shows you true repentance in vv. 1-6, and false repentance
in vv. 7-12.

1.

True Repentance vv. 1-6

2.

False Repentance vv. 7-12

3.

Body

1.

True Repentance vv. 1-6 In vv. 1-6 we learn true repentance by observing John's message, John's role, and John's results.

1.

John's Message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." vv. 1-2

1.

True repentance came by means of John's message.

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Matt. 3:1-2

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1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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Repent. John's message was simple: "Repent!" To repent means to turn from sin and self to God and obedience. The Thessalonians were a clear example of repentance when they " turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. " (**1 Thess. 1:9**) The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*.

meta
means "after," and
noia
means "thought." Matthew Henry says, "Bethink yourselves; ‘Admit a second thought, to correct the errors of the first—an afterthought. Consider your ways, change your minds, you have thought amiss; thing again, and think aright.'"
[1]

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Kingdom of heaven. Take note of the reason to repent: the kingdom of heaven in its natu re
and its
imminence
. John's reason is similar to the reason for Jonah's message in the OT. Jonah said, "
Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown!
" (
Jon. 3:4
) John says "
The kingdom of heaven is at hand!
"

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Its nature. What kind of kingdom is "the kingdom of heaven?" It is not an earthly, political
kingdom, as Zealots among the Jews thought, and as Dispensationalists think today. Rather, it is a
covenantal
kingdom—
heavenly in its origin
,
spiritual in its essence
,
redemptive in its purpose
, and
earthly in its consequences
. God is the Lord of the covenant, and Jesus Christ is Lord. God said "
I am a great King
"
(Mal. 1:14)
and Matthew declares from the beginning to the end of his gospel that as the promised Messiah Jesus Christ is the promised King of the Jews; the King of God's people. "
The kingdom of heaven is at hand

," because Jesus is the King! When the King comes, the kingdom is here.

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Its imminence. God is coming, so true repentance is the only right response. He is the final judge of all men, who knows all things and from whom there is no escape. But He is not only your judge. He is also your Savior. Christ is the only one who can save you from your sins, and the grace He provides in salvation is abundant and free. Jonah preached only God's judgment with no mention of God's grace,, and to our surprise the people repented. But John preached both God's judgment and His grace. The kingdom God had promised through so many ages, the kingdom when God would once again rule and defend His people, when God would forgive them of their sins and make them holy in their conduct, that kingdom is here! All of God's grace is just around the corner. And if you don't repent, you will miss it.

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John's Role: Preaching Prophet vv. 3-4

1.

We see John's role in vv. 3-4. John's role was to preach, in order to "prepare the way of the Lord." As such John was a pr ophet after the pattern of the prophets of the OT. In v. 3 we learn that God foretold John's preaching in Isaiah 40, and in v. 4 John's clothes and food illustrate his similarity to the OT prophets.

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3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight." 4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

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The foolishness of preaching. You should recognize in John what Paul calls the foolishness of preaching
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Clothing.

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You can see it in John's food and clothing. John wore the clothes and ate the food of a man living off the land. To those in the city John is a mountain man, a bohemian, and he should remind you of the outlandish things God called His prophets in the OT to do to get His people's attention. Elijah "wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist" (**2 Kings 1:8**), called down fire from heaven, parted the water with his cloak, and in his cloak Elisha healed a leper and raised the dead. Jeremiah bought a field during a siege, Ezekiel made a model of Jerusalem under siege, laid on his side for forty days, shaved his head and burned his hair, packed his bags for exile and dug through the wall of his house for all to see, set up signs pointing the king of Babylon to Jerusalem.

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Preaching.

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-

John's striking clothing marks him as a prophet like Elijah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. But John did not perform signs and miracles. John preached.

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Like the foolishness of the signs performed by the prophets, God used John through the foolishness of preaching
. John was the son of a priest and so was a priest himself. Shouldn't he be performing sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem? But here he is in the wilderness, among country folk, crying out to

them a message you wouldn't believe. "God is coming, and He will travel through here. Get ready; He's coming!" And the people would ask, "Why here? Why now?" No man will know the day or the hour; He will come like a thief in the night.
John preached not because he was a wise man, but because God told John God was coming
. Noah built a boat in the middle of the country side with no rain in sight, and the people said "You're crazy, Noah!" Moses went to the most powerful man in the world and said, "
Let my people go.
" "You're crazy, Moses." Jonah said "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed." "You're crazy, Jonah." But God has spoken, and he will bring it to pass. In
Malachi 3:1
God said "
Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will
suddenly
come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.
"

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The necessity of preaching. You should also recognize in John the necessity of preaching . You will not repent unless God tells you to do so.

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Preaching proclaims the truth of God's word which you wouldn't know unless God said so. " The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
" (
1 Cor. 1:18-19
)

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In order to truly repent, you need the preaching of God's word. You need to hear the gospel of faith in Christ and repentance from sin, for there is no other way for men to be saved. " ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' 14 But how are they to call on him

in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?
" (
Rom. 10:13-14
)

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Preaching directs you to turn to Christ, which is at the core of true repentance. Preaching directs you to turn to Christ, not merely to turn from one evil deed only to replace it with another evil deed. But to truly turn from sin to new obedience to God, because you turn to the Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the kind of repentance the Thessalonians had, when scripture says they "
turned from idols to serve the living and true God,
and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
"
(
1 Thess. 1:10
)

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John's Results: True Repentance vv. 5-6. In vv. 5-6 we see the results of John's preaching—God brought His people to
true repentance
. John performed no outward miracles like Elijah, but through him God began a spiritual miracle greater than any He had done before—the spiritual restoration of His people to Himself.

1.

5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

2.

True repentance involves confessing your sins and asking God to wash them away, which is symbolized in baptism. God promises that if you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to

forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. (**1 John 1:9**)

3.

False Repentance vv. 7-12. In vv. 7-12 God warns us against the false repentance of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

1.

The Pharisees believed God's word to a "T," and even added to God's word by adding laws to guarantee they wouldn't come close to breaking God's law. They were legalists—all law and no grace. The Sadducees were looser in their interpretation of scripture, and didn't believe in miracles or the resurrection. They were liberal theologians—fake grace and no law. And these Pharisees and Sadducees want John to baptize them.

1.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

2.

8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

3.

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. John warns us against three evils of false repentance. First, he says bear fruit in keeping with repentance .

1.

Fruit. The fruit of good works is the outflow and so the evidence of true repentance. The Pharisees and Sadducees claimed to be heeding God's word and

repenting of their sin. But they did not actually repent, which was plain in the fact that they did not confess their sins, and they had no fruit of good works. When you repent, you change your mind, but that must also make you change your ways.

2.

"**You brood of vipers!"** John calls them "You brood of vipers!" This means "You little snakes!" You are sons of the Serpent. Sons "of your father the Devil," as Christ called them in John 8. Beware lest you be one who "cannot bear to hear" God's word, and cannot bear good fruit, because though you wear sheep's clothing, inwardly you are an unregenerate wolf. In your heart of hearts, are you one of the Devil's snakes, or are you one of Christ's sheep? "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (**Matt. 7:21**)

3.

"**Who warned you?"** John asks them "Who warned you?" Was it Satan or God? Who are you listening to? If you knew it was God who commands you to repent, you would do it. But you don't listen to God. Who do you listen to?

4.

"**Flee from the wrath to come"** John says the Pharisees and Sadducees are "flee[ing] from the wrath to come." Just like snakes hiding in a brush pile flee from the flames when it is set on fire, so false repentance flees the pain of God's judgment but not the evil of one's own sin. Do you flee from your sin to God your Savior, or do you flee from God's wrath to find comfort in a different sin?

5.

"Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

6.

Don't claim to be righteous, but confess your sin. Second, in vv. 9-10 John commands you, don't claim to be righteous, but confess your sins . John says,

1.

9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

2.

Even though Job was the most righteous man of his day, God found fault with him for this reason: "he justified himself rather than God." (**Job 32:2**) Exactly what the Pharisees did. "God can't reject us because He chose Abraham and Abraham's descendants. That's us! And if everyone is coming to be baptized—if that's God's plan—then we want it too!" If everyone confesses their sins when we get together and pray, then I'm going to do it too, whether I mean it or not. Do you remember when Jesus told you what is wrong with this kind of repentance? " 10 Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.
" (
Luke 18:10-14
)

3.

When you repent of your sins, don't claim to be righteous, but confess your sins.

4.

The Power of Jesus Christ. Last, John tells you of the power of Jesus Christ. False repentance doesn't stand a chance against the wrath of Jesus Christ.

1.

10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

2.

11 I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

3.

12 His winnowing fork 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 unquenchable fire.

4.

The trees that do not bear fruit are unbelievers, and the fire into which they will be thrown is the everlasting conscious torment of the fire of Hell. And because Jesus has come you are already on the way there. The axe is laid to the root of your tree. Will Jesus take you to be His own, or will He cast you away? Today is the day of salvation. The time to repent is now.

5.

False repentance doesn't stand a chance against the power of Jesus Christ. That's the bad news. But the good news is that if you truly repent, your sin doesn't stand a chance against the power of Jesus Christ. Christ makes men holy by His Holy Spirit. He does it today. John the Baptist didn't live to see the day when God would pour out His Holy Spirit on the church, but God did it at Pentecost and now when He takes hold of you by His Holy Spirit at your conversion, and when He convicts you of "sin, righteousness, and judgment" **(John 16:8),** and when you repent today,
your sin doesn't stand a chance
. He will "
gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.
" Do you belong to Jesus Christ? Have you repented of your sins? If so you have Christ's

reassurance that "
27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
" (
John 10:27-28
) You may say, "I don't want to repent today." If you are His sheep, He already has a hold on you, and He will bring you to repentance whether you like it or not. Your sin doesn't stand a chance. Take heart in that. Remember that He leads you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake, and what brings Him glory is also for your good. His goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. But they come through the path of true repentance.
"
God commands all men everywhere to repent.
" (
Acts 17:30
) That means the Pharisees, and that means you. -"
The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
" (
1 Cor. 1:18
) Do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ? Will you repent of your sins? "
I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.
" (
Rom. 1:16
)

1 Matthew Henry, 21.