

Twenty-Eight Days With Matthew

Day 3 – John 3

Prayer:

Lord, You sent John the Baptist to “Prepare the way of the Lord.” Prepare my heart for Your revelation of the Messiah through the Apostle, Matthew. As I reflect on Your Baptism, move me to recall Your baptismal grace so that I may consecrate my life for Your service. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Meditation:

In Matthew’s Gospel the appearance of John the Baptist had at least three main functions. The *first* function was to demonstrate that John the Baptist’s ministry was simply another extraordinary example of the Messianic Scriptures being fulfilled.

A *second* function was to make an intimate identification of John with prophetic ministry of Isaiah (Matthew 3:3). This identification is so close that it seems Matthew would have readers believing that having John the Baptist appear was almost as if the Prophet Isaiah was right there himself...in person!

A *third* function of the appearance of John the Baptist was to introduce another major theme of Matthew: “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (or “here”)” (Matthew 3:2). Called the “Kingdom of God” in other Gospels, Matthew’s point was simply that if the King has appeared, so has His Kingdom.

What was to happen when God’s Kingdom comes? What will the Messiah do? Matthew, in 3:7ff., answered these questions by providing a record of John’s prophetic witness, a witness that reads more like the Old Testament narrative with which the covenant people were so familiar.

- ?? John’s the prophetic garb (camel’s hair)
- ?? Harsh warnings of repentance (sounds like Old Testament vintage?),
- ?? A call to return to God’s messianic promise to Abraham,
- ?? The immediacy of judgment (by “ax”), and
- ?? The threshing floor of judgment, a prevalent theme among the Old Testament prophets (cf. Isaiah 21:10; 41:15; Jeremiah 51:33 et al.).

These signs herald the coming of the Messiah *and* His Kingdom. John’s preaching is God’s final ultimatum: The Messiah’s coming! The Kingdom is near!

Jesus’ baptism, which follows immediately afterwards the realization that the Kingdom, was the last piece of the God’s plan needed to initiate the Kingdom. By it “all righteousness,” the plan of God for the world, would be “fulfilled.”

Some might question Matthew’s claim that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Others might put aside the prophetic witness. But who would dare doubt the greatest witnesses of the Messianic King and the coming of His Kingdom: the very presence of God’s Holy Spirit and the unmistakable voice of God Himself?

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Matthew wrote so that the Jews—and Gentiles—would recognize and believe the Kingdom of Heaven. He wrote so that people would respond to the Baptist' prophetic call and follow Jesus.

Who will follow Jesus? Wait and see. Matthew provides the answer as soon as the very next chapter.

Prayer:

Father in heaven, I believe that Jesus is promised King. As the Messiah has come, lead me to know His Kingdom and, by grace, to live within it as a grateful servant. Let Your Kingdom come and Your will be done in me. In the name of Christ, the Messiah, I pray. Amen.

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