

WHO IS JOHN THE BAPTIST?

- Apart from Jesus Christ, John the Baptist is probably the most theologically significant figure in the Gospels.
- Son of elderly Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-80)
- Elizabeth is a female relative of Mary (cousin/aunt/"kinswoman"). John is regarded as Jesus' cousin.
- John's birth parallels Jesus in terms of angelic proclamation and divine intervention
- Limited contact between Jesus and John as children
- Although his formative years were lived in obscurity in the desert (Luke 1:80), his public ministry ended nearly four hundred years of prophetic silence.
- John's place of ministry is at the Jordan River. John's ministry was foretold by Isaiah.

I. A CALL FOR REPENTANCE: CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Matthew 3:1-6

- a. Central Message: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (NIV).
Change your life. God's kingdom is here (MSG)
- b. Moral Regulation: Calling people into a right relationship with God that affects every aspect of their lives--
CHANGE YOUR LIFE
- c. A Responsibility of Preparation
- d. Repentance as an ACTION:
"[Repentance] is an action word. John told his listeners to make a change of the mind, not merely to feel sorry for what they had done. Repentance speaks of a change of direction, not a sorrow in the heart." -David Guzik, *Blue Letter Bible*

II. A CALL FOR TRUE BELIEVERS

Matthew 3:7-12

- a. Who is John talking to?
 - i. V. 5: People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.
 - ii. Religious leaders: Pharisees and Sadducees

Pharisees "Legal Purists"	Sadducees "Politically Powerful Elite"
Minority membership on the Sanhedrin	Majority membership on the Sanhedrin
Connected with local synagogues and "popular" with common people: concerned with outward appearances	Removed from common people by economic and political status; Small group with aristocratic and priestly influence
Emphasis on obsessively observing the legalistic minutia of the law and overanalyzing/overinterpreting the law. "Works rather than faith"	Derived their authority from activities of the temple. Believed in unrestrained free will. God had no role in their lives.
Holy men who kept the law, pursued purity and wanted to follow God's Word	Flatly rejected the Pharisee teaching that oral tradition was equal to Scripture in authority.

- b. A Controversial Call: Delivered by an Unlikely Character
 - i. Demonstrate your repentance: **Confess your Sins. Be Baptized.**
 - ii. Participation in the kingdom is a matter of heart not pedigree
 - iii. Fruits must be worthy of repentance
 - iv. The Messiah is coming

III. A CALL ANSWERED: JESUS CHRIST, the SON OF GOD IS HERE

Matthew 3:13-17

- a. Final Confirmation: The Divine witness to Jesus' status as the Son of God.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What did you learn in your reading of Matthew 3? What were your aha's from today's message?
- 2) What is your expectation of the Kingdom? How does your life/actions reflect the responsibility, preparation and repentance that the Kingdom requires?
- 3) Discuss the delicate balance between sharing the judgement of the Gospel and the invitation of life/change of the Gospel. How can we balance our message when we share the Gospel with others?
- 4) John calls for true believers in his message. What does being a true believer mean to you?
- 5) How does dependence on God impact our sincerity and humility? What makes living in sincerity and humility so challenging?
- 6) What stands out to you about Jesus' decision to be baptized? What does it mean to you?