

Digging Deeper Study
Matthew-God's Kingdom Comes
Week of September 28, 2025

NIV Matthew 3	"In essentials, unity; (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) in non-essentials, liberty; (Romans 14:1) in all things, charity." (John 13:34) Quote: "There are a thousand voices shouting to tell you who you are, but there is only one voice that matters. It is the voice of your Heavenly Father... 'You are my child. I love you. I am pleased with you.'" Read the text completely, then come back and discuss the questions. Context: The 400 Years of Silence: For four centuries, from the prophet Malachi to John the Baptist, God had been publicly silent. There were no prophets, no new scriptures. Israel was under Roman occupation, and many wondered if God had forgotten His promises. John's arrival wasn't just another sermon; it was a thunderclap breaking a deafening silence, signaling that God was about to act decisively in history. The Wilderness of Judea: This isn't a forest; it's a barren, desolate, and dangerous place. It's significant that God's new movement begins here, outside the polished religious center of Jerusalem and the Temple. The wilderness was a place of testing (like Israel's 40 years) and new beginnings.
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In those days John the Baptist came, <u>preaching</u> in the wilderness of Judea ² and saying, "<u>Repent</u>, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:	It immediately tells us that God's Kingdom often breaks in from the margins, not from the seats of human power. "Preaching" (v. 1) is from the Greek word <i>kēryssō</i>. This isn't a quiet teaching or a friendly chat. It's the formal, authoritative proclamation of a herald announcing the arrival of a king. It carries an official weight and an urgent tone. "Repent" (v. 2) is the crucial word <i>metanoia</i>. It literally means "to change one's mind" (<i>meta</i> = change, <i>nous</i> = mind). It's far more than just feeling sorry for a mistake. It is a fundamental, 180-degree shift in your entire perspective—how you see sin, yourself, and God—that results in a complete change of direction. John's message wasn't "Try harder" or "Feel sorry." It was a sharp, urgent command to "Repent" (<i>metanoia</i>). This meant a radical change of mind and direction. He confronted the religious leaders because they came for the ritual (baptism) without the reality (a changed heart). In your own life, how can you distinguish between "godly sorrow" that leads to a genuine change of direction (2 Corinthians 7:10) and "worldly sorrow," which is often just regret over being caught or facing consequences? In what specific area is God calling you to move beyond simply feeling bad and toward a decisive change of mind and action? See also Psalm 51:1-4, 10, Acts 26:20, 1 John 1:9:
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"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"^[a]

⁴ 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. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ 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?

⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you

"Brood of vipers" (v. 7) is a shocking insult. John is attacking the religious leaders' spiritual identity. They prided themselves on being "children of Abraham," but John accuses them of having the nature of a serpent—deceptive, deadly, and opposed to God. He is saying their spiritual DNA is revealed by their actions, not their ancestry.

that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ "I baptize you with [b](#) water for repentance. But after me comes

John dismisses the leaders' religious credentials and demands "fruit in keeping with repentance" (v. 8). He argues that a true connection to God is not based on heritage, church membership, or religious knowledge, but is proven by a tangibly changed life.

If "fruit" is the evidence of repentance, what specific, practical fruit should be visible in the life of a follower of Jesus? Looking at your own life this past week, where has the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23) been evident in your attitudes, words, and actions? Where is your tree looking a little bare? See also: Luke 3:10-14; James 2:17-18; Ephesians 2:10

John's message is not casual. He warns that "the axe is already at the root of the trees" (v. 10). This creates a picture of imminent judgment. The time for indecision is over; a choice must be made because the King is arriving, and with Him comes a separation of the fruitful from the fruitless.

How does the reality of Christ's coming judgment change the way you view your own sin and the spiritual state of the people you love? Does this truth create a sense of loving urgency in you, or is it a doctrine you tend to ignore? How can we speak about this truth with both the boldness of John and the compassion of Jesus? See also: 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:15; Romans 13:11

one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.

He will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹² 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."

John, a spiritual giant in his own right, understood his role perfectly: to make Jesus look great. He declared himself unworthy to perform even the most menial, degrading task for Christ. This radical humility was the foundation of his powerful ministry.

John's self-assessment stands in stark contrast to our culture's emphasis on self-promotion and building a personal brand. How does John's attitude challenge the way you view your own accomplishments, spiritual gifts, or role in the church? In what specific area of your life do you need to intentionally "decrease" so that Christ can "increase" (John 3:30)? See also: Philippians 2:3-7; 1 Peter 5:5-6; Luke 14:11:

John makes it clear that his work is external, but Jesus' work is internal and supernatural. Jesus doesn't just call us to a new standard; He provides the divine power—the "baptism of the Holy Spirit"—to actually live a new life.

Where in your Christian walk are you currently trying to live by "water" (your own willpower, discipline, and strength) when you need to be relying on the "fire" of the Holy Spirit? What would it look like this week to consciously depend on the Spirit's power to overcome a specific sin, love a difficult person, or share your faith? See also: Acts 1:8; Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:11, 13; Ephesians 3:16

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

The image of the winnowing fork is unavoidable: Jesus is the Judge who will one day separate the "wheat" from the "chaff." This isn't a threat from John, but a loving warning about the reality of a coming judgment. There is no middle ground; everyone is either gathered into the barn or consumed by the fire.

This truth about a final judgment can be uncomfortable, but it is a central part of the Gospel message. How does meditating on this reality change your perspective on your daily priorities? How should it fuel a loving urgency in the way you pray for and interact with friends, family, and coworkers who do not have the security of being God's "wheat"? See also: John 3:36; Matthew 25:41, 46; Hebrews 9:27

The perfect, sinless King of the universe wades into the muddy Jordan River to undergo a sinner's baptism. He does this not because He needed cleansing, but to completely identify with the brokenness of the people He came to rescue.

Jesus' act challenges our natural tendency to distance ourselves from "messy" people or difficult situations. Where is God calling you to move

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

beyond your comfort zone and humbly identify with someone in their struggle, not as a superior with all the answers, but as a fellow traveler pointing them to the One who walks with us? See also: Philippians 2:5-8; Galatians 6:1-2; Romans 12:15-16; Hebrews 4:15

The Father's voice of approval is spoken over Jesus before He performs a single public miracle, preaches a sermon, or heals anyone. Jesus' identity and the Father's pleasure in Him were based on relationship, not performance.

Because of your faith in Christ, the Father's verdict over Jesus is now His verdict over you (Ephesians 1:6). How does truly grasping this truth free you from the spiritual treadmill of trying to earn God's love or approval? In what area of your life do you most need to hear the Father's voice of loving acceptance over the world's voice of performance-based value? See also: Romans 8:15-17; 1 John 3:1; Colossians 1:21-22; Zephaniah 3:17

The Trinity

This scene reveals our salvation is a Trinitarian effort: the Father plans and sends, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies and empowers. We are not saved by a distant, singular deity, but are brought into a relationship with the living, relational, triune God.

	How does knowing that the complete Godhead is actively working for you and in you change the way you pray or face daily challenges? Which person of the Trinity do you find it easiest to relate to, and how can you grow in your relationship with the other two? See also; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 2:18; John 14:26; Romans 8:26-27
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