

JESUS' FORERUNNER, JOHN THE BAPTIST: A MESSAGE FOR ALL MATHEW 03:01–12

Introduction

John the Baptist set a blazing example for every minister and believer of the gospel. His message is a message for all; he speaks to the common person and to the religionist alike.

- I. His ministry in the wilderness or desert (v. 1).
- II. His message to the people: Repent...the Kingdom of heaven is near (vv. 2-6)
- III. His message to the religionists, the Pharisees and Sadducees (vv. 7-10).
- IV. His message to all: Christ — Messianic preaching (vv. 11-12).

I. *Mathew 03:01 Desert of Judea*

John ministered in the wilderness. This was not a desolate, desert-like area. It was country area with at least six cities scattered about, probably small communities or villages. It was in this country area, the wilderness or desert of Judea, that John emerges with the lightning cry for repentance: the long-awaited Messiah is at hand (See *Christ, Messiah*, Mt. 1:18).

Thought 1. God uses the wilderness or desert (quiet places) to prepare and launch the ministry of men. Quietness is essential: “Be still and know that I am God” (Psa. 46:10). Meditation is essential (Gen. 24:63; Jos 1:8; Psa. 1:2; 63:6; 77:12; 119:15, 78; 119:23, 48, 148; 143:5; 1 Tim. 4:15).

Thought 2. Believers are never alone, no matter how secluded they may be. God is there. He will reveal and manifest Himself in the place where believers are; He will use the believer in the place as a witness to His name.

Thought 3. The gospel began in a wilderness or desert, not in a synagogue or temple or church (see Isa. 32:15; 35:1-2; 51:18-19).

Thought 4. God has the very place for every believer to serve. John's place was in the wilderness or desert; Christ's was in the cities and synagogues as well as the countryside. Believers should witness and prophets should preach wherever they are — in the wilderness or in the city.

MATHEW 01: 18 MEANING OF CHRIST, MESSIAH

The word for “Christ” and “Messiah” is the same word: Christos. Messiah is the Hebrew word, and Christ is the Greek word. Both words refer to the same Person and mean the same thing: *the Anointed One*. The Messiah is *the Anointed One* of God.

Mathew says that Jesus “is called Christ” (Mt. 1:16); that is, He is recognized as the Anointed One of God, the Messiah Himself.

In the day of Jesus Christ, people feverishly panted for the coming of the long-promised Messiah. The weight of life was harsh, hard, and impoverishing. Under the Romans, people felt that God could not wait much longer to fulfil His promise. Such longings for deliverance left the people trusting. Many arose who claimed to be the Messiah and led the trusting followers into rebellion against the Roman State. The insurrectionist, Barabbas, who was set free in the place of Jesus at Jesus' trial, is an example (Mk. 15:6f).

The Messiah was thought to be several things:

1. *Nationally*, He was to be the leader from David's line who would free the Jewish state and establish it as an independent nation, leading it to be the greatest nation the world had ever known.
2. *Militarily*, He was to be a great military leader who would lead Jewish armies victoriously over all the world.
3. *Religiously*, He was to be a supernatural figure straight from God who would bring righteousness over all the earth.
4. *Personally*, He was to be the One who would bring peace to the whole world.

Jesus Christ accepted the title of Messiah on three different occasions (Mt. 16:17; Mk. 14:61; Jn. 4:26). The name Jesus shows Him to be man. The name Christ shows Him to be God's anointed, God's very own, Son. Christ is Jesus' official title. It identifies Him officially as:

- Prophet (Deu. 18:15-19)
- Priest (Psa. 110:4)
- King (2 Sam. 7:12-13)

These officials were always anointed with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit who was to perfectly anoint the Christ, the Messiah (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:32-33). □

JOHN THE BAPTIST — THE MINISTER

John was questioned by the religionists who were very suspicious of him. These particular religionists were a fact finding commission sent from Jerusalem, the headquarters of Jewish religion. The questioning of John by the religionists was to be expected, for John's father, Zechariah, was a priest (Lk. 1:5); and in the eyes of the authorities, all the sons of priests were automatically priests by descent. However,

John was not a priest like other priests. He was most unusual, for the way he lived and preached was radically different (Mt. 3:1-12). He was a nonconformist, and the authorities had to find out why.

Thought 1. Too often institutional religion is suspicious and opposed to the unusual.

=> If a person is different or does things differently, he is questioned.

=> If a person is unusually blessed or if miraculous things are happening in his life and ministry, he is questioned.

John the Baptist, the messenger was a man who knew who he was. Others had questions about John. He knew exactly who he was. He knew God personally; therefore, he knew God had sent him into the world for a specific ministry. He was from God, called and commissioned by God; therefore, He knew exactly who he was and what he was doing.

The word *sent* (apostalmenos) means to send out; to commission as a representative, an ambassador, an envoy. Three things are true of the person sent from God.

1. He belongs to God, who has sent him out.
2. He is commissioned to be sent out.
3. He possesses all the authority and power of God, who has sent him out.

Here was one person who was a very special witness to Christ, John the Baptist. John's sole purpose on earth was to witness and to bear testimony to the Light of the world. His purpose stands as a dynamic example for every believer. The purpose of the believer is to bear the same witness as John: Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. John knew:

1. John was not the Messiah.
2. John was not Elijah. Elijah was expected to return from the dead to proclaim the coming of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). He was expected to do several significant things: to warn the people, to anoint the Messiah to His kingly office, to raise the dead, and to help select those who were to have a part in the Messiah's kingdom. John denied that he was Elijah in person. Jesus did later identify John with Elijah (Mk. 9:11f); however, what Jesus meant was that John was Elijah in spirit, not in person.
3. John was not "the Prophet." This Prophet was thought to be another forerunner of the Messiah (Jn. 7:40). Some persons thought he would be either Jeremiah or Isaiah. This belief was based on Moses' prediction that there would be a prophet like himself (Deu. 18:15). However, today most Christians interpret the Prophet predicted by Moses to be Christ Himself (Act. 3:22; 7:37).

Thought 1. The lessons are clear. The servant (minister or layman) of God must not...

- claim to be the Christ nor any other great prophet
- pretend to be some great man of God
- seek recognition
- assume some honour that does not belong to him
- allow God's power upon his life and ministry to turn his head toward pride, thinking more highly of himself than he should.

Gen 18:27 *Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord though I am nothing but dust and ashes.*

Gen 32:10 *I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.*

Exo 3:11 *But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"*

2 Sam 7:18 *Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"*

Mat 8:8 *The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

1 Cor 15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. □*

II. Mt. 03:02–06 Preaching the Gospel

There was John's message to the people: repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near, at hand.

1. John's message fulfilled prophecy. It had been four hundred years since a prophet had arisen in Israel. Malachi had been the last. John's appearance made a thunderous impact. (See Isa. 40:3; 1 Kng. 18:21; 2 Kng. 1:8; Mal. 3:1; 4:5). John preached the gospel to all — to the general public and to the religionist alike. No one was excluded from the gospel (vv. 2-6; 7-10; 11-12). His message included three points:
 - a. Repent. Repentance means to change; to turn; to change one's mind; to turn one's life. It is a turning away from sin and turning toward God. It is a change of mind, a forsaking of sin. It is putting sin out of one's thoughts and behaviour. It is resolving never to think or do a thing again. (See Mt. 3:2; Lk. 13:2-3; Act. 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 26:20.) The change is turning away from lying, stealing, cheating, immorality, cursing, drunkenness and the other so-called glaring sins of the flesh (sinful nature). But the change is also turning away from the silent sins of the spirit such as self-centredness, selfishness, envy, bitterness, pride, covetousness, anger, evil thoughts, hopelessness, laziness, jealousy and lust.

- 1) Repentance involves two turns. There is a negative turn away from sin and a positive turn toward God. It is a turning to God away from sin, whether sins of thought or action.
- 2) Repentance is more than sorrow. Sorrow may or may not be involved in repentance. A person may repent simply because he wills and acts to change; or a person may repent because he senses an agonizing sorrow within. But the sense or feeling of sorrow is not repentance. Repentance is both the change of mind and the actual turning of one's life away from sin and toward God.

Luke 13:3 *"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

Acts 2: 38 *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

Acts 8:22 *Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.*

2 Chr 7:14 *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

- b. The Kingdom of Heaven is near, at hand. John meant two things.
 - 1) The Kingdom *is the Lord's*. He is the sovereign Lord of the Kingdom of Heaven. His coming is now; it is immediately upon us. Therefore, His kingdom or sovereign rule is now. Repent and get ready for His sovereign rule.
 - 2) The kingdom *of Heaven*. It is of another world, of another dimension of being. It is not of this earth.

It is spiritual; it is not physical, not something that we see, look upon and handle. The coming of the kingdom of the Lord, the kingdom of heaven, not the kingdom of this world. Only the Lord can bring this kingdom to this earth. The kingdom of God, not of man.

Mat 5:3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (see Mt. 25:34-35.)

Mark 1:14-15 *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

Luke 21:31 *"Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near."*

John 3:3 *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

Acts 14:22 *Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.*

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

1 Cor 4:20 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

c. Every man is to "prepare the way for the Lord." (v. 3)

Isa 40:3 *A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."*

Amos 4:12 *"Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."*

Hosea 10:12 *Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.*

Joel 2:12-13 *'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*

2 Tim 2:20-21 *In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

Mat 24:44 *"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*

Mark 13:35 *"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back — whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows or at dawn."*

Thought 1. The cry of the prophet is:

- 1) Man has an inadequate righteousness; therefore, repentance is needed.
- 2) The present world is an inadequate world; therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is needed.
- 3) Man has prepared an inadequate life for the Lord; therefore, he must prepare the way for the Lord.

Thought 2. God raises up His servant, His witness, His prophet in His time (v. 3). Every believer (witness and prophet) is chosen by God. God chose and ordained the believer before the foundation of the earth. He may not be predicted by name in the pages and prophecy of Scripture, but he is conceived (predestined) in the mind and foreknowledge of God. This glorious truth should instil both confidence and a sense of responsibility in the believer. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit." (Jn. 15:16)

Thought 3. Preaching is to be to the people, not before them. It is to be affirmative, authoritative, and positive, not uncertain and negative. The gospel is not open for discussion; it is not just one of many possibilities; it is the truth of God (vv. 2-3, 6, 7-12).

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

John 8:24 *"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."*

Acts 4:12 *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

1 Cor 3:11 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

2. John's message was the message of a *prophet*: he dressed and ate as a prophet (v. 4).

2 Kng. 1:8 *They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."*

Zec 13:4 *On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive.*

Lev 11:22 *Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper.*

Thought 1. The believer is to be disciplined and to live moderately. (v. 4)

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Rom 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Gal 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

Thought 2. The believer's dress and habits should be adapted to meet the needs of his people (v. 4).

1 Cor 9:20-22 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

3. John's message bore fruit. The crowds gathered and listened to his preaching, and they confessed their sins and were baptised (vv. 5-6).

Thought 1. The world should hear, respect and respond to the messenger of God (vv. 5-6).

Thought 2. God forgives sin when a person confesses and repents of his sin (v. 6).

Acts 5:31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Acts 13:38 Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

Psa. 85:2 You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.

Psa 103:3 Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.

Jer 31:34 "No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Thought 3. Confession is necessary; it is part of repentance (v. 6).

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Ezra 10:11 "Now make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives."

Psa 32:5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" — and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Prov 28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper; but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Jer 3:13 "Only acknowledge your guilt — you have rebelled against the Lord your God, you have scattered your favours to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me," declares the Lord.

Thought 4. A person who says he is innocent, refusing to believe and admit his sin, is condemned already (v. 6).

John 3:18 “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

1 John 1:8 *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

Jer 2:35 *You say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’*

III. **Mathew 03:07–10 John’s Message to the Religionists**

There was John’s message to the religionists, the Pharisees and Sadducees (See *Sadducees*, Acts 23:8). The religionists were a fact-finding commission sent from Jerusalem to investigate the phenomenal reports about John and his ministry: Could he honestly be a modern-day prophet sent from God? When John confronted the religionists, he knew several dangers threatened to deceive them. If they succumbed and were deceived by any of the dangers, they were doomed. Therefore, he warned them about...

- => the danger of being a spectator only, of coming out to his meetings only to see what was happening.
- => the danger of thinking that baptism protected them from the wrath to come, the danger of thinking that God’s judgment was only for the heathen and the ungodly, not for them.
- => the danger of verbal repentance only, thinking their conduct had no bearing on being accepted or rejected by God.
- => the danger of thinking that the righteousness of their forefathers and families would cover and suffice for them.

John’s message was fourfold.

1. Flee the wrath to come. The wrath of God was coming upon all who were only spectators. And baptism by itself was not enough, no matter how many baptisms a person went through.

John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

Eph 5:5-6 *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Psa 2:12 *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

2. Repent. Verbal repentance is not enough. Just being present in the midst of those who worship God is not enough. Repentance requires a change in conduct. The religionists rejected the message; they did not repent. Jesus informed us of their decision. What a warning (v. 7-10)!

All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptised by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptised by John. (Luke 7:29-30)

Thought 1. Two types of persons often shut themselves off from God.

- 1) Persons of high estate (those of wealth and social standing).
- 2) Persons of religion (the self-righteous) (vv. 7-10).

Mat 6:21 *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Mark 4:19 *But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.*

1 Tim 6:9 *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

1 Tim 6:17 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

Psa 52:7 *"Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!"*

Prov 11:28 *Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.*

Prov 18:11 *The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall.*

3. Heritage is of no value. The righteousness of others cannot make a person acceptable to God. Each person has to stand before God as an individual.

Thought 1. Many persons rest in two deceptions: (1) the godliness of family or friends, and (2) the righteousness of some good behaviour. There has always been the tragic thought that a person is acceptable to God:

=> because he has done enough good for God to accept him. He is not bad enough for God to reject — not in the final analysis.

=> because his family or friends are leading godly lives.

What is needed is to "wash the evil from your heart and be saved" (Jer. 4:14).

Luke 3:8 *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*

John 8:38-39 *I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father. "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did."*

John 9:28 *Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!"*

Gal 3:10 *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*

4. Judgment is at hand. Every tree that does not produce fruit shall be chopped down and destroyed. We must never forget that judgment is inclusive; it includes all. It does not matter how high (position) nor how green (appearance) the tree is. It must produce fruit or else be removed and destroyed.

Mark 8:38 *"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

John 3:19 *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*

Rom 14:12 *So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

2 Th 1:7-8 *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

1 Pet 4:4-5 *They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

Prov 29:1 *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.*

Jer 31:30 *Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes — his own teeth will be set on edge.*

Thought 1. Judgment should begin at the house of God, among the religious (v.10).

1 Cor 11:31 *But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.*

1 Pet 4:17 *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

Heb 6:8 *But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.*

Rev 21:8 *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.*

ACTS 23:08 SADDUCEES

The Sadducees were the religious and political liberals of Christ's day. They were the wealthy, the aristocratic, the governing class of leaders in Israel. Many Sadducees served on the nation's governing body, the Sanhedrin. The Chief Priest himself was usually a Sadducee who presided over the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin ruled the people on behalf of the Roman empire (Acts 4:1-2; 5:17). The Romans readily saw to it that the Sadducees held the positions of leadership in the nation, for the Sadducees favoured Greek customs over Jewish customs. And they aided the Romans in doing away with religious practices and instituting Greek and Roman customs (Hellenism).

They are thought to have arisen out of the same struggle as the Pharisees around B.C. 175. However, they were always the fewest in number among the various sects of Jewish belief.

Several things should be noted.

1. The Sadducees were secular and materialistic minded. They were the independent thinkers, the rationalists of their day.
2. They were heavily entrenched in the priesthood of Jesus' day (see Acts. 4:1-2; 5:17). They readily collaborated with the Roman government in order to protect their position, power and wealth.
3. For the most part they denied the supernatural: the resurrection and miracles, life after death, and the existence of beings in other dimensions such as angels and spirits (Mt. 22:23; Acts 23:8). To them there was no heaven or hell, no existence whatsoever except on this earth. A man died and was annihilated, just ceased to exist. There was no such thing as rewards or punishment in an afterlife, no eternal life. □

RELIGIONISTS — VIPERS

Both John and Jesus called the Pharisees and Sadducees "vipers," meaning full of poison and venom (false doctrine) and malice and enmity (against the truth). (See Mt. 12:34; 23:33; Jn. 8:44.) □

IV. *Mathew 03:11–12 John's Message to All*

There was John's message to all: Christ — Messianic preaching. John's message had only one focus and one theme: the Messiah "will come" (v. 11); "this is he" (v. 3); "prepare the way for the Lord" (v. 3).

1. Christ is greater. Christ alone is to be exalted. John exalted Christ, not himself.

Thought 1. The person whom God uses is the person who exalts Christ (v. 11).

Mat 18:4 *Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Luke 22:26 *But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among, you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.*

Rom 12:3 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

1 Cor 1:29 *So that no one may boast before him.*

1 Cor 1:31 *Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*

1 Cor 3:21 *So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours.*

James 4:10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

1 Pet 5:5 *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

2. Christ shall baptise. (See *Baptism of Jesus and John*, Mt. 3:11)
3. Christ shall judge and purge. His ministry was both to gather wheat, which is an act of love, and to separate and dispense with the chaff, which is an act of justice.
 - a. There is a mixture of wheat and chaff right now: a mixture of true profession and false profession; true righteousness and false righteousness (v. 12).
 - b. There is a destiny for both the wheat and the chaff. The Kingdom of Heaven is the destiny of the wheat. The unquenchable fire is the destiny of the chaff (v. 12) ■

MATHEW 03: 11 THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AND JOHN

The word baptism (baptizein) means to dip, to immerse, to submerge, to place into. John's baptism was with water, but Jesus' baptism was "with the Holy Spirit and fire."

1. John's baptism was both a preparation and a symbol of the spiritual baptism that Jesus was to bring. John's water baptism meant two things.
 - a. It symbolized cleansing from all sin. A person was being prepared for the cleansing that Christ would provide.
 - b. It symbolized separation or dedication. A person was setting his life apart to God in a renewed spirit of dedication. He was committing himself to the Christ about whom John was preaching.

John's baptism is called "the baptism of repentance"; that is, the person who repented was baptised. There could be no question; it was understood: if a person repented and actually turned to the Lord, he was baptised.

2. Jesus' spiritual baptism was a double baptism. (Only one preposition is used in the Greek for "the Holy Spirit and with fire," the preposition "in.")
 - a. Jesus baptises the person *in the Spirit*. He dips, immerses, and places the person in the Spirit. Whereas the person was carnal and materialistically minded, he now becomes spiritually minded (Rom. 8:5-7). The Jews had looked and longed for the day when the Spirit would come. The prophets had predicted His coming time and again. Therefore, the people knew exactly what John was predicting. The Spirit was expected to awaken and excite the people to such a degree that they would mobilize behind the Messiah, following Him in the overthrow of all oppressors. The Spirit was to lead the people in freeing Israel and establishing it as one of the greatest nations on earth (see Eze. 36:26-27; 37:14; 39:29; Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28).
 - b. Jesus baptises the person *in fire*. Fire has several functions that graphically symbolize the work of Christ. It illuminates, warms, melts, burns, and utterly destroys. The difference between baptism with water and fire is the difference between an outward work and an inward work. Water only cleanses the outside; fire purifies within, that is, the heart. Jesus Christ separates a person from his former life and purifies him within by the fire of His Spirit. It should be noted that in John's mind the "baptism of fire" meant that the Messiah was to destroy the enemies of Israel. It was "the messianic fire of judgment" that was to come from the throne of David. □