

Matthew 19-03-10b

Let's resume our study now in Matthew chapter 3 via Ezekiel. We ask ourselves of all of the possible ways God could have introduced the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ at this juncture in history, the most important thing God has ever done, the central event of human history is the Lord Jesus' work on the cross. It is preceded by his three and a half year ministry to Israel and that is introduced by John the Baptist and that's what we see here.

Why is it introduced in this way and why is it introduced in this place? It is introduced by a man who is the summation and the distillation and the fulfillment of pretty much everything in the Old Testament. He is an Old Testament prophet in the way he functions, even in the way he looks. He is in the location that harks back and itself sends a message and he is performing a ritual that is a summation of everything the ritual requirements of the law of Moses was supposed to picture.

What is the purpose of the law of Moses? Why did God give the law at Mount Sinai to Israel? He doesn't say this is the law of the world, conquer other nations and impose it on them. This is definitional for the people of God. This is how the people of God are to live in a way that pleases him.

This is how the people of God can reflect God's glory and be a light to the Gentiles. When he says to Abraham, your descendants are going to be a light to the Gentiles and a blessing to everyone, how do they do that? Are they intrinsically a blessing? Are they just really nice people to be around? What kind of a blessing and what kind of a light is that? It is redirected blessing and light from God. So to the extent that they embody, are imbued with and reflect the glory of God, to that extent they fulfill their purpose and their destiny of blessing all peoples.

God told Abraham, through you all nations of the earth will be blessed. Well, blessing comes from God and they are a conduit of blessing when they are qualified. So this call to change their minds is so that the glory of God can once again flow in and through God's people and they can appreciate God's glory embodied in a single man, the fullness of deity in bodily form.

When he is introduced, if their minds are changed, they will recognize him, they will appreciate him, they will accept him and they will follow him. But the mindset has to come first. Changed minds have to precede changed functions and changed opportunities and changed fulfillment of potential, all related to the glory of God.

The default question and answer, why was man created? Why did God create the earth and put man on it? What's the big picture answer? For his glory. We are here to reflect the glory of God and to appreciate the glory of God. We appreciate it and we reflect it.

Reminds me of what guys like me are supposed to do. Learn the word of God, appreciate it and then reflect it, send it out, let other people see it and enjoy it the way that we do. I get to look at it first.

I get to plummet and explore it and be humbled by it and rebuked by it and corrected by it, instructed by it. And then I get to share that with others. And it's a wonderful privilege.

But all of us have that role. It just manifests in different specific ways, different spiritual gifts, different little pieces of conversation and pieces of observation, known and unknown, conscious and unconscious. But we are here to enjoy and reflect the glory of God.

Don't forget why John is there. It's not about John and it's not even ultimately about Jesus. It's God the Father.

John 14.6, what does it say? I am the way, the truth and the life. No man does what? Comes to the Father. The destination is the Father.

The Lord Jesus is a means. He is the way. Where does the way go? What if it's a circular track? Have you ever, some of us have spent time on a track.

I hate running on a track for exercise because it's circular. You don't go anywhere. You're just around and around.

It's great for measuring if you want to see what your time is for a half mile or a mile or three miles or whatever. It's real easy to measure on a track. But a track doesn't go anywhere.

I like running out here. I like running where the scenery changes and you go somewhere. You get on a road, it's got a destination.

Jesus is the way. The way to where? The way to my gratification? The way to my solution of problems? What is he the way to? He's the way to the Father. No man comes to the Father unless they travel this way.

Well, the way to appreciate the Lord Jesus is to listen to John the Baptist and have a mind that is changed and is ready and has the right priorities. So that's the message. The glory of God had departed from Israel way back in Ezekiel's day.

Remember Ezekiel's by the river Kabar. This is the time of the Babylonian captivity for Judah. And he sees these visions and in vision he sees the glory of God.

He gets lifted up by the hair of the head and transported over there, sees the abominations, sees the reason for the departure and God tells him they are making me leave. I cannot think of something worse to be convicted of. Most of you know I was tapped for potential jury duty here in these past few weeks.

I went down to the courthouse twice and almost got embargoed into this criminal trial. Somebody is charged with a very serious capital crime. And you think, wow, what has to happen? What kind of a life do you have to be leading that you end up being charged with this crime? You're guilty of this crime potentially.

How did this come about? Well, you don't want to be charged with missing the glory of God. Later on we're going to see the Pharisees standing in front of the Lord Jesus talking to him and they don't recognize him. They're Pharisees.

They are experts in God's word. Do you consider yourself knowledgeable about the word of God? Relatively speaking. You're not necessarily have a master of theology, but do you feel you're reasonably versed in the word of God? I hope so because you've been coming to this church.

Hopefully you feel reasonably versed in the word of God, right? We've explored so many books and passages and concepts and things together. We're a Bible church. Are we reasonably familiar with the scriptures? Yes or no? Yes.

If I say Hebrews chapter 11, what do you say back to me? Oh God. If I say Hebrews chapter 11, what is that chapter about? By faith, by faith, Abraham, by faith, Noah, by faith, men of old, you know, without faith, it is impossible to please him. Faith is the substance of things hoped for.

Hebrews chapter 11 is the faith chapter. Don't forget. If I say to you, this will be more easy because we just finished first Corinthians.

If I say first Corinthians chapter 13, what are you going to say? Love. Thank you. Praise the Lord.

If I say to you the glory of God, what do you think? What is the fullness of the glory of God? Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's glory in bodily form. He is the full reflection of God's glory.

We appreciate him. We come to him and he is the way. He takes us to the Father.

This is the mind that we have to have. But what if you have all of this scriptural knowledge and you can quote big chunks of scripture, you know where things are located. If I say fall of Satan in the Old Testament, what are the two chapters in the Old Testament that talk about how thou art fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of darkness? Ezekiel and Isaiah, right? One is half of the other and they're the furthest apart.

So it's Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. It's the low chapter in Isaiah, that book comes first, and it's the high chapter in Ezekiel 14 and 28. Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28.

You want to read about the fall of Satan? Those are your chapters. Old Testament.

Cleansing of the leper, one of my favorite parts of the entire Pentateuch.

If I could only have one chapter out of the Pentateuch, I would pick this chapter. Do you remember what it is? It's Leviticus chapter 14. Cleansed leper.

It's the hyssop and the scarlet string and the cedar handle and the priest, the cleansed leper. We're going to be seeing that before long. But there are these wonderful single chapters.

You have a lot of scriptural knowledge, probably more in the New Testament and rightfully so. Easier to navigate. You remember Galatians, foolish Galatians who has bewitched you.

You've fallen into legalism. You remember the problems in Corinth. You remember the relatively strong church in Philippi.

You know what's in Revelation. You know about the letters to the seven churches. John is called in chapter 4, verse 1, come up here and then what do you have in Revelation? What are the four series, only three of which are revealed to us in the book of Revelation? What is it that the lamb as it had been slain breaks? The seals.

What is it that the angels do after that? The trumpets. And then what do the angels do after that? The bowls. Seals, trumpets and bowls.

See, you know this. We've been through Revelation. By the way, here's a fresh thought for you next time you think about Revelation.

Those three things and I just gave you the clue. How do the seals unfold? Who operates the seals? Who breaks the seals? The lamb. Who's the lamb? Jesus Christ.

Who blows the trumpets? Not the lamb. Angels. Who pours out the bowls? Not the lamb.

Angels. How come angels don't open the seals? They have to search heaven and earth trying to find somebody worthy to break the seals. But once the seals are broken by the lamb, who does all the rest of the work in Revelation? Who dries up the rivers and blights one third of this and that and the other? The angels.

So when you hear, O come let us adore him, and you're going through the verse of it and it says, born the king of angels, find the phrase king of angels in the Bible. It's not there. But the authority is in the scroll.

And when those seals are broken by the only one qualified to break them and that scroll and what is written on it begins to unfold, the angels blow the trumpets. The angels pour out the bowls and we're not real sure what happens with the thunders because John's not allowed to write that down. John knows it though.

If he's one of the two witnesses and he nudges his brother James and says, let me tell you what happened when I heard those thunders. Those guys are going to know, aren't they? They know something they need to know that the enemy does not need to know that John heard and remembers but didn't write. And that's in those seven thunders.

It's very fascinating. But we know all about this. Here's my point.

I say that to remind us all that scriptural knowledge is not sufficient to appreciate the glory of God. What is the problem? Why is John saying change your mind? Lack of appreciation of the glory of God. Do we all agree on this? That people are glorying in themselves, glorying in their works, glorying in their tithing of the spices in the cabinet and so on.

But their whitewashed tombstones are full of dead men's bones. Who is it he's talking about when he says that? Bible experts. People that know their Old Testament Bible backward and forward.

These are not slouches when it comes to knowing the word of God. They know it. They all go to Bible church.

Do you hear me? Going to Bible church doesn't mean you appreciate the glory of God. Having spent time in a lot of studies and taking a lot of notes does not mean we appreciate the glory of God. The Pharisees were the Bible church of their day.

They were the pastors of the Bible church of their day. And if you don't think all of us get convicted, these guys were the leaders. And they got the harshest condemnation.

We saw this in past studies, the woes that are pronounced on the Pharisees and it's coming up in Matthew. Change your mind. We need to look at our mind and see what needs changing.

If you can look at your clothes and see what needs changing, if you can look at your bed and see what needs changing, if you can look at your plants and your house and see what needs changing, if you can look at your tires and see what needs changing, can we look at our hearts and our souls and see what needs changing to be ready because for you and for me the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is as close as your last heartbeat and your last breath and your last blip on the EEG, the kingdom is here. You know what that tells me? For us, let's say the youngest of us might live another 50 years, then for all of us listening to the sound of my voice at this point today, Jesus is coming back within that time.

For those of us that are older and 3 score and 10 is creeping up or we've passed it by and we're beyond that, it's a lot closer. The return of the Lord Jesus for us is at the end of our life or if he comes before the end of our life, that's the end of our life. We don't know when it's going to be, but it is soon.

It is at hand. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And in the same way that when John the Baptist was proclaiming this, was Jesus alive? Was Jesus 30 years of age when John is down here preaching at the Jordan and baptizing people? Yes.

The king is at hand and his kingdom is at hand. He is near. And the same is true for us, that we need to be sensitive to and aware of the urgency of this message.

There's not much time if we are going to change our mind to get ready, to look for those things that need changing. And your mind is not one unified single thought. It's a bedlam of thoughts and priorities and good things and bad things and proud things and shameful things.

Which parts need changing? Some parts don't need changing. You're here. You're in church.

You're digging into the word of God. That's a good thing. But you can't say, well, I've got one good thing, so I don't need a change.

Are there parts that need a change? Change your mind. Are there some Pharisees who are good guys? Do you think Gamaliel is around at this time? Do you think Gamaliel has some good things? He's the guy that trains the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul is a boy and his daddy is a Pharisee.

Do you remember this about Paul? He says, I'm a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees. Paul's family is a family of Pharisees. Those Pharisees are alive here.

Do you think they ever come to Jerusalem? Do you think that Paul's family had heard about Jesus? He may be very young at this point. He's probably around. Paul is probably a boy or youth at this point.

He's somewhat younger. He may be almost the Lord's age because he dies in 67 A.D. and that's about 30 years after Jesus is 30 years of age. Paul could be in his 20s right here.

Knowledge of the law, but not knowledge of the glory of God. So that's the call. That's why John is where he is.

That's why he's dressed the way he's dressed. And the Lord Jesus is going to talk about him in upcoming passages. But in Ezekiel chapter 43, as we conclude our look at the glory of God, turn to Ezekiel chapter 43.

If the glory of God has departed any area of our lives, we want it to come back, don't we? Don't we want the glory of God to shine in every area of our lives, whether it is our relationships, intimate relationships, family relationships, friend relationships, employee, fellow student, fellow traveler, fellow person of long standing, whatever the connection

is, we want the glory of God to be evident. How did the marking angel know who to put a mark on their forehead? How did he know? Did he have to ask them a series of questions? How did he know who to mark? Does it say, go and have a talk with each one and kind of see where they stand? How did the marking angel know who to mark? In chapter nine, there was visible expression of their attitude. They were sighing and they were crying.

They were easy to spot. Are we easy to spot in pursuit of the glory of God? Do people know this about us if they spend any time with us at all? Do they know that we love the Lord? Do we know that he's a priority in our lives and that we're trying to live in a way that pleases him, that it is an integral part of our thinking and our goals and values? Does that come out? Can people talk to us for any length of time and not know that we're a believer and that we care about God and his Son and his glory? Can the marking angel find us? Ask yourself the question, are there areas of my life where I'm doing my own thing? We need a change of mind if we're going to be ready for the kingdom. Look at Ezekiel chapter 43.

Afterward, he, the angel, brings me, Ezekiel, to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. What do we know about that gate? The glory of God rose up from the cherub, went to the threshold, went to the gate, went to the Mount of Olives, read chapter 10, and departed to the east. Now, in 43, Ezekiel is brought back to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east, and behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east.

His voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw, the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The vision was like the vision I saw by the river Kabar, and I fell on my face.

The glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. Remember the tragic entry? Palm branches, Palm Sunday, robes. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Jesus rides on the fold of a donkey, comes down, comes in. Where does Jesus go on that day? Do you remember? What's at the end of the quote, triumphal entry? I call it the tragic entry. Why? Because after all of this parade and falderal and hilarity and people jumping on the bandwagon and putting down the fronds and the branches and the cloaks, and Jesus rides in on the fold of a donkey, fulfilling prophecy.

Where does he go? Where does Jesus go when he gets off the donkey? To the temple. What happens at the temple? Does the glory of God fill it? Does the kingdom begin? It says he looked around and left. Why? It's not ready for him.

There's been no change of mind. The glory cannot return. The glory tries to return in the

same way that it tried to stay in the early days of Ezekiel's vision.

God is sticking it out. These abominations have been there for weeks and months and years, generations in some cases, and God remains and remains, and he is patient, and he's long suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to change of mind. But they don't.

And eventually, he says, they're making me leave. And he gets up, and he slowly, slowly, threshold, gate, Mount of Olives, off to the east. Here in chapter 43, in one swoop, the glory of God comes over the Mount of Olives, across the brocade run, into the east gate, across the threshold, and into the temple.

The glory of the Lord, verse 4, came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. This is the third and final time that God's glory fills the temple.

First time is the tabernacle with Moses. When they get that thing finished, the glory of God fills it, and it drives all the priests out. They're blinded.

They can't even enter it for the presence of the glory. The second time is Solomon's temple. Same thing happens.

Nobody can stay in the temple, in the holy place, or anywhere near it, because the glory of God fills it. And this is the third time the glory of God fills the temple. It's yet future.

Then, verse 6, I heard him speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me. This is the guide angel. And he says to me, Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever.

This is the 1,000-year millennial kingdom. This forever is not forever in the indefinite, never-ending future. This is the forever it is as long as the kingdom endures.

That's where God is going to be. 1,000 years, God's glory is going to be in the millennial temple in Jerusalem. No more shall the house of Israel defile my holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry, or with the carcasses of their kings, on their high places.

You remember the Garden of Uzzah? We're talking about gardens in the first session. Remember the Garden of Uzzah? And the leper king got buried there, and they began to make it a place of worship and abomination, and toads and swine and all kinds of nasty things happening up there. God says, No more.

This temple is not going to be defiled. There's not going to be debauchery and abuse. When they set their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost by My doorpost, with

a wall between them and Me, they defiled My holy name by the abominations which they committed.

That's the Garden of Uzzah. It was planted right next to the temple, shared a wall with a wall. We studied that in our Kings and Prophets study.

Therefore I have consumed them in My anger. Now let them put their harlotry and their carcasses of kings far away from Me, and I will dwell in their midst forever. If they respond and obey, I will dwell.

It is conditional. This is not a God of sovereign decree forcing puppets by pulling strings. This is God saying, I call, I adjure, I warn, I rebuke, I encourage, I tell you what My will is.

You do it, I am present. If you don't do it, I'm gone. You remove the abominations and the abuse, the carcasses of these dead disobedient kings.

Follow My statutes, heed My law, appreciate My glory, and My glory will abide with you forever, and you with it. Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern. Things on earth are a pattern.

You go back and read the construction of the tabernacle with Moses, and it says he made everything according to the pattern shown him on the mount. The pattern represents heavenly things. What's on earth represents what's in heaven.

What is visible represents the invisible. John is a visible prophet doing a visible ritual at the Jordan River, talking about invisible things. We're going to see this in upcoming miracles.

Jesus is going to pronounce forgiveness of sins. Can you see forgiveness of sins? Can you look at me and tell if I have claimed 1 John 1, 9 any time recently? Can you tell if my daily sins have been forgiven or not? Can you look at an individual in the airport sitting across from you waiting for a plane and say, well that person is saved? They may even be reading a Bible, but you don't know for sure they're saved. They might be an atheist mining it for contradictions or something.

Can you see forgiveness of sins? You cannot. If a man that is crippled or a man with a withered hand is suddenly miraculously healed right before your very eyes, can you see that? If somebody has the authority to heal a physical body and to show you something that breaks all the laws of physics, that person is likely to also have authority in the invisible realm. We argue from the visible to the invisible.

Who but God can heal congenital blindness? Who but God can heal leprosy? Who but God can raise the dead out of a tomb or off of a stretcher as they carry the mother's son outside to be buried? Or the young girl that has died and everybody is mourning and

she's in the upper room and Jesus reaches down and says, Talitha cummi in Aramaic and raises her. Who can instantly banish a fever from Peter's mother-in-law? Who can do this but God? So if this same individual says your sins are forgiven you, something that's invisible, we say, well, if he's got authority over here in the harder realm, then he's got authority in the other realm. And Jesus is going to make this point in the not-too-distant future.

So here is the glory and here is the temple that the glory fills, but the temple itself is a pattern. Where is the temple of God right now? You know your New Testament scriptures. Where is the temple of God right now? We're looking at it, aren't we? We're looking at each other.

We are the temple. So what kind of temple is it supposed to reflect? What kind of pattern is it supposed to follow? Is it supposed to tolerate abominations and idolatries and paintings on its walls? This is my argument against tattoos. Ezekiel says no paintings on the walls.

This is going to cause the glory to depart. I'm kidding, of course. But the principle is true.

The temple of God on earth is supposed to follow the pattern of God's presence in heaven. The tabernacle was a of things in heaven. It is a physical and visible representation of invisible truths.

The law itself, the ritual of John in the Jordan, is an external that is supposed to reflect an internal change of mind. Baptism, dunking in the water, you're supposed to come out with a new sense of purpose, a new appreciation for who we are and why we're here. The physical dunking won't do it.

It has to be a pattern of invisible truth. So that's the glory of God returning. The glory of God is far quicker returning than it is leaving.

And this is the wonder of God's grace and mercy toward us when we confess our sins and He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us. When we dedicate ourselves to being a temple for the residents of His glory, He is ready, willing, and anxious to manifest His glory in that place and among those people. Back to Matthew chapter 3, we've gotten through verse 2 now.

Repent, change your mind, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This is a big deal. Nobody has brought a message from the Lord in 400 years and more.

And here is a prophet. It's a spectacular intervention of God. And he says, I'm fulfilling Old Testament scripture.

I'm in accord with it. I'm quoting it for you. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight.

Isaiah chapter 40, Isaiah and Ezekiel, the right and left leg of major prophets in the Old Testament. You've got those two. You've got pretty much everything you need to know to get ready for the kingdom, to know who the adversary is, to know what the problem in people's hearts are.

If you remember slogging through God's condemnation of the people in Judah in Isaiah chapter 1 through 39, we have what we need. We know what we need to know to change our minds. Description of John, description of the people who came out to be baptized by Him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

Is this enough? All Jerusalem and Judea, all of Jerusalem comes out. Pharisees are coming out and getting baptized. They're jumping on the bandwagon.

They don't want to be looked at as on the outside. They want to be relevant. They want to dress like the people and look like the people and be involved in what the people are involved in so long as it isn't in their definition of sin.

And they recognize that John is a prophet. They recognize that the people see him as a prophet, and they're going to say so later on. He sees the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism.

Notice, they're not coming to his message. They're not coming to his Bible class. John has many other things to say in the wilderness.

He's not just repeating Isaiah 40 verse 3 over and over and over again. John is teaching Bible class in the wilderness. He's teaching the Old Testament.

But what do the Pharisees and Sadducees come to? Just the ritual. They're all about ritual. We can do ritual.

So he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism. He said, you pile of snakes, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Notice, he has been preaching and teaching about judgment for those who do not honor and change their minds about the glory of God. What happened back there in Ezekiel chapter 9? Judgment slaying men and women, children, young and old.

You've either got the mark or you don't. And notice the marking angel was also marking children. Children can learn.

Children can make a decision. You have to be pretty young to be too young to make a decision. But that judgment falls on young and old.

Read Ezekiel 9. And John is preaching that judgment. Change your mind or judgment is coming. Get that mark on your forehead where your attitude is right behind that skull bone in your frontal lobe or judgment is coming.

And so when he sees the Pharisees and Sadducees, he said, who warned you about this coming judgment? Do you think by coming down here and doing this ritual, you're going to get the mark on your forehead? You are not. Coming to church, waving your Bible around, taking pages of notes doesn't save you from the wrath to come. What do you have to do to avoid judgment and to be a repository for God's glory? What do you have to do? Read the next verse.

Bear fruits in keeping with that are a product of change of mind. How did the marking angel know who to mark? They've got manifest behavior. They're grieving over the evil that has penetrated God's place of worship and the place of God's presence.

Where His glory is supposed to be revealed and reflected by His people, it's an abomination and debauchery. And these people are visibly grief stricken over it. They are spared the judgment.

John says, if you want to avoid the judgment, coming down here and getting dunked isn't going to do it. Me baptizing you is not going to do it. Your attitude needs to change, and that will be reflected in your actions.

Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Multiple fruits, multiple manifestations. This needs to come out all over the place in your life.

Don't think that you've got a free pass. Well, I'm descended from Abraham. I'm one of the children of God.

I've got a Bible. I go to church. I listen to this guy or that guy.

I follow this radio program. I contribute to this ministry. I engage in this charity or this act of kindness or contribution or service or community service or ministry or whatever it is.

I'm a part of something. Therefore, I'm excused. When they say, we have Abraham as our father, what are they saying? I'm a member of a particular club, and my membership gets me a pass.

I identify with something outside myself, and that thing outside me makes me okay, and it's Abraham. Do not think to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. I say to you, God can raise rocks into stones of Abraham.

You're about as valuable as one of these rocks. Anybody can be a child of Abraham. The ax is laid at the root of the trees.

Notice he started out saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand, but what does he spend more time talking about? Everything that's not going into the kingdom, everything that's not going to be a part of the kingdom. You brood of vipers, you're under the judgment that is to come, and until you start bearing fruit in keeping with a genuine change of

mind, you're a tree that's about to be chopped down. The kingdom is at hand, but everything that's not going into the kingdom, Jesus is going to talk later about angels coming and taking all things out of his kingdom, all things that offend.

The tares are going to be gathered in bundles to be burned. God knows what's wheat and what's tares. He knows what's good and bad fish.

He knows what's sheep and what's goats. They may abide for a time, but you can't say, well, I'm a member of the goat club, and I thought all goats get a free pass. Sorry, no.

I'm a member of the Abraham club. Not at all. Every tree which does not bear good fruit, it doesn't say every tree that bears bad fruit, does it? Well, I'm not robbing liquor stores, and I'm not pillaging and plundering, and I'm not committing crimes.

What if I'm just a tree that is just a tree full of leaves? Can't I just be a neutral tree? I don't have to be a tree that's full of rotten figs or rotten apples or shriveled up oranges and nasty worm-eaten persimmons. Why can't I just be like a hickory? I don't even make hickory nuts. I'm just a hickory tree.

I'm a scrub oak. I don't have any fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit, you can't be a neutral tree.

It's not just the bad trees that are going to get cut down. The only ones not cut down are the ones that have positive fruit hanging on their branches, bare fruit. If you don't bear fruit, you're going to be cut down.

You can't be neutral. There has to be good fruit on your branches or you're going to be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water, verse 11, with a view toward repentance.

This is ACE, E-I-S, into, unto, with a view toward. The baptism doesn't produce repentance. It is done as a symbol of repentance.

It is an outward manifestation of change of mind. You can do the outward manifestation and not have a change of mind. Actually, you can have a change of mind and not do the ritual.

The ritual is designed to reflect the reality for those people. John's not going to be around very long. Once Jesus starts his ministry and John is locked up, there is no baptism in the Jordan anymore.

Jesus' disciples are going to baptize a few people, but there's a lot of people who believe who never get baptized by Jesus' disciples or by John. It's not an intrinsic part of change of mind. Do you think the Syrophoenician woman got baptized? Do you think the Roman centurion got baptized? Do you lot of the people that Jesus is going to encounter and

that are going to clearly believe in him and trust him for forgiveness of sins and receive the blessing of healing and so on, do you think each one of them immediately ran down and got baptized? The Bible doesn't say any of them got baptized.

Baptism at this place and at this time is a pattern reflection of change of mind, appreciation for the presence and the power and the glory of God. I baptize you with a view toward change of mind. This is a way that you can express overtly your change of mind.

You can identify with a need to have the presence of God in our midst once again. 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 fire.

Remember the marking angel? There are those who are marked and preserved and those who are judged. Then Jesus came from Galilee. The winnowing fan is in his hand.

He will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, gather his wheat into the barn. He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. This is a double action.

It's not just wonderful blessing for some and indifference toward the others. There's no third category here, is there? There's not a third part that's just stored in the barn down below. It's not put in a silo to be used or planted or ground.

It's not gathered up and burned. There's the stalks. We're going to keep the stalks over here as a separate thing.

We're not going to do anything with them, but we're not going to destroy them either. We're just going to hold on to the stalks. They haven't done any harm.

We've got the space. We'll just store the stalks. There's no third option here, is there? You're either grain that is brought into the barn or you're chaff that is burned.

There's nothing that isn't one or the other. It's one or the other. It's binary.

You're a zero or you're a one. You're a quantity that is stored for God's use or you are a piece of waste that is destroyed. It's one or the other.

You think, well, how close to the line do I have to be before I'm no longer considered wheat and I might be considered chaff? What if I'm kind of a mashed together part wheat, part chaff? There's no such thing. You are either wheat or you are chaff. So, as I've said many times, if there's a line between salvation and no salvation or a line between blessing and judgment, the safest place to be is not near the line.

Almost, thou persuadest me. Almost, I change my mind. I'm so close.

Why don't you just take some of us that are kind of a gray area, just go ahead and take

us in so that we can complete the thought sometime in the future. I want to be as far away from the line. There's no doubt.

God looks at me and says, that's not just a kernel of wheat. That's a plump, ripe, nutritious, wonderful, special, I want that one grain of wheat. No thought of, is there any chaff in there? I'm not real sure.

Have you ever gone to the refrigerator and gotten a, getting ready to get a glass of milk, but you look at the sell by date and it's a day or two past and you look at the milk and you say, well, I can't really tell. There might be a whiff that this is, you know, on the border. I'm not sure if this is good or not.

You don't want to be that kind of milk where somebody has to wonder and sniff and taste and, well, I don't want to take a chance. I better throw it down the sink. You know, when there's a question, you typically pitch it.

Shouldn't be a question about us as chaff. You want to not just be wheat. You don't want to be a thin, little, barely keep it grade C wheat.

You want to be grade A. You want to be extra fine, extra virgin olive oil. You want to have been filtered and processed and made the optimum and the best and the most desirable and the most precious. Don't take a chance on being close to the line.

The wheat is going to be into the barn. He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. In this context, are we talking about going to heaven or going to hell? No.

In this context, we are talking about the produce of one's life. Who is John preaching to? Did he go to the river Tigris? Did he go to the river Euphrates? Could have. Biblical rivers.

Could have gone up there. Could have proclaimed the coming of the Son of God to the whole world. Who is he talking to? Israel, the people of God.

What is he talking about? Not salvation. Not resurrection life. Judgment on the people of God.

Remember the people in the wilderness. John is in the wilderness. They are coming back.

Those people that died in the wilderness are all coming back. But they are not coming back and getting into the land. They are going to be outside the land in the Millennial Kingdom, just like they were outside the land when they left Egypt and they dropped into the wilderness for the very same reasons.

But they are still coming back. God has not yet fulfilled His promise to the house of Israel and the house of Judah to take out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. They are going to have the opportunity that we have.

The full-orbed ministry of the Holy Spirit. The full-orbed opportunity of the to recognize God's Son and to have a change of mind. People say, oh, it was tough getting saved in the Old Testament.

In Israel, they are coming back. They are going to get all of the Bible that we have. They are going to have all of the availability of the clear view of the Son of God that we have.

And then some. So we have this challenge. What part of our mind needs changing? Maybe that's a better way to ask it.

Some parts don't need repentance, but others do. Like in Israel, some people needed repentance where others did not. His winnowing fan is in His hand.

There is a separation going on. Which side are we? How dedicated are we? How clearly identifiable are we for the decision about whether to receive blessing or judgment? Well, next time we are going to pick up in verse 13 when Jesus comes from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by Him. If baptism is a reflection of change of mind, it's an emblem of it, it's a pattern of it, why does Jesus have to be baptized? Think about what we've reviewed this morning in terms of the location and the nature of this ritual, the identity of John.

And we're going to see one word down in verse 15 in your red ink, the third to the last word in the verse, fulfill. Fulfill. John is a prophet.

The ritual is like rituals of the law. The Lord Jesus says, I know you think this is odd, John, but there is an additional lesson when I get baptized. And then we're going to see something really fascinating happen right after that.

That's what we'll pick up next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word, for its power to transform us when we change our minds and when we are amenable and receptive to the ministry of Your Holy Spirit.

We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. That decision to change and to pursue Your righteousness and Your glory is the invitation for You to come and to be at work in us, to will and to do for Your good pleasure. We pray that as we reflect on these things that Your Holy Spirit will find us soil that is receptive to the seed and that we can bear fruit in keeping with repentance and be that 100-fold field that maximizes its potential and is the greatest reflection of Your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We pray these things in His name. Amen.