

Matthew 19-03-17a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're continuing our study this morning in the Gospel of Matthew. This is the 17th of March 2019, just 10 years from the rapture.

No, I'm kidding. By rights, it would actually possibly be three years to the rapture and then seven years of tribulation. So three years we think we can make, I'm not sure if we're going to last 10.

At any rate, we're going to pick up this morning in Matthew chapter three, Matthew chapter three. We're looking at the ministry of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus has come down to the Jordan. So we'll ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and then we'll begin.

Father, it is a wonderful truth that comforts us and encourages us to remember that we are sustained by your grace. It is not our might or our power, but your Spirit that enables us and not only to understand and to perceive divine truth, but also to implement it and to have it produce fruit in our lives. We thank you for the fellowship that we enjoy.

We thank you for the wonderful things that we have gleaned from your word in the past and those things that are before us this morning. We ask your blessing on our fellowship and our study that as we look together into the perfect law of liberty that the Holy Spirit will minister to each heart in an effective and encouraging way, that we'll be motivated and enthusiastic about the potential and the challenges that lie ahead, that we can be good and faithful servants, that we can redeem the time, that we can be representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ until He comes. We ask your particular blessing on those who are not at full strength that you will work in those situations to accomplish your purposes, to build inner strength and spiritual heartiness even as physical healing and spiritual healing take place.

So we're grateful and we are thankful and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Matthew chapter 3 begins by saying, In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Hopefully this resonates from our study last week. What is repentance? Why was repentance necessary? There is always at least one area, usually several, where we could benefit from a change of mind. The nation of Israel had become barnacled, had become overgrown and oversewn with weeds and thorns and those things that choke out the effectiveness of the word, as Jesus will soon be communicating via parable, because of the false nature of their worship of God.

They believed in God. They were the people of God. They claimed it.

They liked it. But their practice was a complete departure from the will of God. They did not as a nation.

There were, of course, wonderful exceptions, but as a whole and as a nation they had sunk into a system of righteousness by works. They misunderstood the law. Paul will say later they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

And this is a powerful example for us to look at and avoid ourselves. We congratulate ourselves on loving God and having a zeal for God, but we have to express that enthusiasm in a knowledgeable way. And we will be seeing examples of this in the miracles and in the parables that are embedded in this gospel account.

But it begins with John the Baptist calling the nation's attention, calling the people's attention, calling individuals' attention to the need for change of mind. The leadership in Israel, the spiritual leadership, the scribes, the priests, the Pharisees, the Sadducees. We always talk about the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

You always remember the major theological differences between them. The Pharisees are very particular about the law, and the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection and didn't believe in angels and so on. They spiritualized everything, and there are comparable theological aberrations today.

But what we don't always remember is, as prominent as they are and as such a signature piece of religious life in Israel, people in that day didn't stop and think. Moses never said anything about a Pharisee. Moses never said anything about a Sadducee or about a Zealot or about any of the other factional parties or what you might call denominations.

In that day, when Paul says they had a zeal but not according to knowledge, where does the knowledge come from? Where do we go for spiritual knowledge? We go to the Word of God, right? They had the Word of God. They heard the Word of God read in the synagogues and at the temple. They did the assembly feasts and came down.

They were granted a fair measure of freedom, as much as they hated the oppression of the Romans. The Roman policy, as you will recall from your detailed studies of ancient history back in high school and perhaps college, remember how the Romans did? They had a structure that they would impose. The Roman Empire would build roads.

They would build forts. They would create infrastructure. They would levy taxes.

You remember in the birth narrative that in the days of Caesar Augustus, all the world would be taxed. All the world is, of course, the Roman Empire, the world of the Romans. And they're registered to be levied with taxes.

But they also didn't want to have to constantly be fighting brushfire rebellions in every

part of the empire that they had conquered. And so they granted hegemony. They granted a measure of freedom to keep their local gods, to keep their local governments, to have local magistrates, local kings.

And they granted a fair amount of freedom. And this pacified people. They thought, well, the Romans have broad commerce and trade and security and a road system.

It's easier to travel. The taxes are not burdensome. It was a fair amount.

But it didn't drain them dry. And this contributed in large measure to the success of the Roman Empire. So they were free to worship God.

Roman money got cranked into refurbishing the temple in Jerusalem. That's why they call it Herod's Temple. Herod has funding from the Roman Empire.

And this is a pretty good deal. They didn't have this whole, if you take federal money, then you've got to adhere to these federal standards. They were fairly lenient.

Only in certain cases did they start to make a sticking point out of recognizing Caesar as divine and the rest of it. They didn't press that in the local community. So what is the change of mind that John is calling for? He's not saying you're too passive and you need to throw off the Roman yoke and rebel and become an independent people.

He's not saying, I'm going to put 10 plagues on the Romans and deliver you out of Roman bondage. And we're going to all march maybe in a circle and occupy the promised land. What is the change of mind? It is to get back to knowledge.

What does the scripture say about the worship of God and the serving of God? God's people are supposed to be worshiping and serving God. Instead, the system of worship has devolved into something that is unrecognizable from the law of Moses. There's no Pharisees.

There's no Sadducees. There's no picayune details about measurements on the Sabbath about how far you can reach and how far you can walk and how many times you can brush the mud off your cloak and all of these burdensome requirements, straining at gnats while swallowing camels. So we know what this is.

It was a man-made system, teaching as doctrines the traditions of men, making up their own commandments. Yeah, we've got God's 10, but now we've got the big book that amplifies and expands the little book and this huge system of burdensome requirement and of ostracism and punishment for people that didn't conform to these man-made requirements. Well, think about that in terms of today.

The Jews in Jesus' day had had the law of Moses for 1,400 years. We have had the Bible with the New Testament for 1,900 years. If you think about canonicity and the rest of it,

by the time the letters were gathered and the Gospels were written and Revelation seals up the psalm, you're at about AD 100.

As a pedantic point, if you're still old-fashioned enough to use BC and AD instead of BCE and CE, which is before the Common Era and Common Era, because that way we can refer to dates without talking about Christ, but BC follows the year number, AD precedes it in proper scholarly writing. So you talk about 586 BC, 587 BC, depending on who you talk to, for the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's armies, but you talk about AD 30 or AD 67 for Paul's death, or AD 100, just so you know. If you see it that way, you think, well, to put that AD, and do you put periods on BC and AD in older days they did? No, we don't.

Same thing with Washington, DC. That's Washington, DC, no periods. That's the current standard.

It changes over time, but if you look at Chicago Manuals style, there you go. So I expect you to get a better grade on your next paper because you now know how to handle those abbreviations. But in these days, the Bible came together and coalesced.

They had the Septuagint and some of the early versions of the Old Testament in translation beyond Hebrew, already circulating in Jesus' day, Syriac, and very soon the Romans are going to get it in Latin. You're going to have Jerome and some of these guys. But by the 100s, by the beginning of the 2nd century AD, you have a Bible like we have.

The collected epistles, there were a few still questioned, but the core of the New Testament has now begun to circulate as a collection. So how long have we had all of this truth? We've had it for 19 centuries and change. What had happened to their religion after 14 centuries and change? It had gotten so modified, so compromised that it was unrecognizable.

What do you think has happened to us with another 500 years? Even more so, even more so. We have the same problem. And even we who like to think that we're getting great, I'm about to say getting back to the Bible, but it reminds me of a great radio program, Bible study program when I was a child, the Back to the Bible broadcast.

I always thought that was a great name for a program. Back to the Bible. Get back to the Bible.

What are you doing with all of this holy smoke, swinging these things with something burning in it, the guy with the pointy hat, and the chains, and the staffs, and the robes, and the tapestries, and the gilding. It's look how holy it is because look at all the ornamentation and elaboration that we have applied to it. Stand the Lord Jesus and three or four disciples next to that and ask yourself, do we need to get back to the Bible? Back to the Bible.

That's what John is calling them to. Change your mind. There's a big problem with what you are practicing and with what you are accepting and taking for granted as the worship of God and the service of God.

What you're saying it is and what you're doing with it is not it. Change your mind. To change your mind, you've got to know what to change it to.

If you're going to change a habit, I mentioned this many times before, all addiction programs understand this principle. It is not enough to say, I am going to stop doing this bad thing. It practically never succeeds that you're just going to stop.

You have to redirect the time or the energy or what you do in a particular situation. You need to not just turn away from something but to turn toward something. It's in Hebrews chapter 11.

I'm sorry, Hebrews chapter 6. It's illustrated in Hebrews 11. But in 6, you remember when it says, not laying again the foundation of change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God? Away from dead works, faith toward God. That's changing your mind.

So that's what John is calling them to. We talked about that last time. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

For us, the kingdom of heaven is always at hand. It is at hand in two senses. It is at hand chronologically in the sense that it is going to present itself to our conscious observation as soon as this life is over for us.

And it's over either at death or the rapture. But there is not much time, relatively speaking, until the kingdom of heaven is going to be where we're looking at it. The question is, are we going to be looking at it from the inside or from the outside? As believers, we will have one of those two perspectives.

The kingdom of heaven is in hand. So if you don't change your mind, you're going to be looking at it as, like what we saw driving home last night in the dark, a dim glow on the horizon. You're in the darkness, which is outside.

You look and you say, you know, there must be a city or a fire or something. Look at that unnatural glow on the horizon. We don't want this to be our view of the kingdom of heaven in the eternal future, waiting to hear the creaking wheels of a wooden wagon.

And with the last leavings of the tree of life leaves that they've been getting picked up ever since it left the new Jerusalem, and it's been creaking along, following some dirt track by the time it gets to us. And there's like 12 leaves left. Did you ever go to the store to buy something? You want to get avocados, and there's three left and they're all bruised and mushy.

I'm being slightly facetious here, but it is a serious matter that if we do not change our mind, our view of the kingdom of heaven is going to be a distant one. And from a standpoint of darkness, this is what the word of God teaches. Do you hear that anywhere today? Does anybody tell you that Christians are going to be in the darkness which is outside in the eternal future? Do you hear anybody saying that everybody is not going to be happy over there? That there is going to be weeping and gnashing of teeth for believers in the eternal future? Read your Bible.

According to knowledge, that is what the future will hold for many of us. I don't want to be that us. I want to be the us that is inside.

I want to change my mind. I want to know how to change my mind, and I want to know what to change it to. If I'm not going to be a part of dead human works, I want to change my mind away from works that produce death.

The fruit of it dies. It doesn't last. What do I turn my heart to? My mind to faith toward God, the practice of faith, trusting the promises, trusting the principles, believing the doctrines, and living in their light, walking in that light.

It is not enough to know. We have to practice. So John is calling people to that.

It's interesting. I didn't point this out last time, but in verse 3 it is quoting Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. This is almost verbatim from the Septuagint.

This is how the Greek translation rendered it, and that's how it comes across to English. So we're getting it after you spin the rock on the pond and it hops twice, and you get the plop. But there's never as much power in it as when it hits the water the first time.

Throw a rock and hit somebody in the head instead of skipping it twice and having it hit them in the foot is how I think of it. In Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3 in the Hebrew, this isn't what it says. This isn't what it says.

And so then you have this wonderful hermeneutical question about, well, if the Old Testament is inspired and says it one way, the New Testament is inspired and says it another way, which way am I supposed to take it? What it says in Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3 in the Old Testament, and you can put a star beside this and say, see Isaiah 40 verse 3, and turn back to Isaiah chapter 40 verse 3, and I'll give you the actual statement. Comfort ye, comfort, yes, comfort my people, says your God, speak comfort to Jerusalem and cry out to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. Then verse 3, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Notice your text note there for the second part of the verse when it says, make straight

in the desert. In your New King James, it says, this follows the Masoretic text and the Targums, which are the commentaries on the Masoretic text, Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Vulgate omit in the desert. Septuagint omits in the desert.

But to get what this actually says in Hebrew, you need to make a couple of marks here on verse 3, the voice of one crying, colon, the voice of one crying, colon, quotation mark, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. In the wilderness is not where the voice is crying, in the wilderness is where you prepare the way of the Lord. See the difference? The voice of one crying, quote, prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness, make straight in the desert.

See the parallelism? Prepare the way in the desert. I'm sorry, prepare the way in the wilderness, make straight a highway in the desert. So that's the parallelism, and that parallelism helps us understand why when it says that the Septuagint omits in the desert, they screwed up.

They had a bad copy. The parallelism helps us resolve what this verse says, and the Masoretic text is correct, and the Septuagint less so. But it's fascinating.

They have whole studies on this, whole long journal articles and seminary classes dedicated to the uses of the Old Testament in the New, and when it doesn't seem to match, when verbs are changed, or, you know, he shall be called a Nazarene, and, you know, fulfilling the prophecy, and there is no prophecy, or it says in Isaiah, but it's actually Zechariah or whatever. That's not a real thing, but there is a place where it seems to be misattributed, the wrong prophet is attributed. So what do you do with that? Well, it's a whole study, and we're not going to do it this morning.

Let me explain here in this particular case what I think is going on. First of all, you remember rule of thumb, there's just certain, it's like the blood on your thumb. You remember the blood on your right earlobe, blood on your right thumb, blood on your right toe.

That was the cleansed leper. We are cleansed lepers. So what do you do with your thumb? Well, it's a rule of thumb.

Remember, when you come to a quotation of the Old Testament in the New, flip the pages of your Bible. As we talked about Thursday night, we don't have the kind of memory and the kind of mental library that people had in the ancient day. We use this externalized memory, this Bible that's printed, to store and retrieve our memories of Scripture, because we've had another many centuries of mental deterioration.

We're not as smart. If anybody tells you the old guys were goat herds, just smile and walk away. They do not know what they're talking about.

These people had huge, vast intellectual capacities. All of them, the shepherds that

came to visit the baby Jesus were 10 times smarter than any of us. Those guys knew their Scriptures.

They didn't fall apart when the angel appeared and the multitude of the heavenly host told them, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace toward men of good will. They didn't fall apart. What did they do? They put the flock in the care of underlings and went, and they knew exactly where to go.

We've done that study. The guys were smart. They had Scripture in their heads.

It made sense to them. They had zeal according to knowledge. We want zeal according to knowledge, but we've got to use help.

And that's why God said, you know, knowledge will increase in the latter day. Many will run to and fro. So we're running to and fro here in the Old and New Testament.

43, 40 verse 3 of Isaiah, the voice of one crying, prepare in the wilderness the way of the Lord. Now, we know that literal things stand in for ideas. The visible stands for the invisible.

Are they actually supposed to go out there and start leveling the ground and, you know, truckloads of gravel? We know that this is not a literal way and a literal highway, right? So if that's not literal, then the wilderness is not literal, right? There's a wonderful principle of interpretation. I learned it from Dwight Pentecost in his book Things to Come. You can read about a page and a half on this idea.

Scripture is very consistent. If you lift up and off of the literal and you are flying in the realm of the non-literal, the symbolic, the spiritual, they're not mixed. There may be symbols that are visible, but the truth is all of a piece.

It's not part spiritual and part literal. So we don't have a preparation of a spiritual way, but it's in a literal wilderness. If it's a spiritual way, it's a spiritual wilderness.

You see what I mean? Everything is consistent. Your context, your view is either all in the realm of symbolic. Everything means and stands for something else, or it's all literal.

Was John at the literal Jordan, dunking people in literal water and giving them a literal vocal message? Yes. You can understand things from that situation that lift up into the spiritual, but you don't mix them. There wasn't actually Holy Spirit in the water.

Their sins weren't being washed away. There wasn't forgiveness taking place because literal is literal, symbolic is symbolic, and it's of a piece. That seems self-evident, but you'd be amazed how many times it's not observed in Scripture interpretation.

So look here. The voice of one crying. Do you hear any voice but mine right now, and am I shouting? Hopefully not.

What is this voice? It's a voice emanating from Scripture for us, right? People were to look for a message. That message can come in many forms, but the voice is as symbolic as anything else. Scripture doesn't have to be read to be understood, interpreted, and applied.

It doesn't have to be read out loud. It doesn't have to be a voice, right? So there is a message. There is a communication, and it is making a strong appeal.

It's not just talking. It's not conversing. It's not mumbling.

It's not stuttering. It is projecting a strong, clear message. There's a strong, clear message that says, prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness.

The figure of speech is, it is as though the Lord is going to traverse the wilderness, and the wilderness is rough, rocky, and not conducive to that travel. So you make the way. You do what you are supposed to do, and this is before the Lord gets there.

Have you seen these building the railroad documentaries or movies that try to depict it, you know, the Transcontinental Railroad? You've got a locomotive, and there's wood and ties and spikes and stuff, and they're building the track and then rolling forward and building the track and rolling forward. It's just a few feet ahead of the train itself. They're just making the track.

It's not quite a tank. A tank just rolls its own tracks right along with it. Tracked vehicles.

But this is not the picture here. The Lord has not come yet, but the time of His coming is at hand. His kingdom is at hand, and before He gets here, get ready.

The way should be easy and straight and level and not full of obstacles. The Lord should not have to take a Go three ways around the block. In the desert, make a way, because the time of His coming is at hand.

Believe it or not, this is really important to understand the baptism of the Lord Jesus. These things directly connect. They directly relate.

So prepare in the wilderness the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. God doesn't typically travel a highway.

I traveled a lot of highway yesterday, never saw God. There's no God mobile. The Pope's got a Pope mobile.

God does not have. He doesn't travel on highways. This is clearly figurative.

But there is a difference in a way. A way is sort of nondescript. That can be a track.

That depicts a stronghold, and the path up to the stronghold, it can just be a track. It

could be a goat track. It can be a way.

Not so a highway. A highway, this accommodates horses abreast. This is caravans, chariots.

This is a big wide way. You get the idea that narrow is the way and straight is the gate that leads to life, but broad is the way and wide is the gate that leads to destruction. Many there are that go in that way.

So prepare a way and create a highway. It may start out as a way. Find the path.

Find the shortest and best traveling path and then improve that into a wide, easy highway. So you prepare the way and you make straight. No twists, no deviations, no imaginative, oh, but there's a wonderful overlook six miles east.

Let's just divert and go that way for the scenery. Make a straight path. Shortest distance between two points.

Make sure the Lord can get here as soon as possible with no obstructions and no diversions. Now back to Matthew chapter three. The Greek, which is quoted here in inspired scripture, is another reading of that same passage and it's on purpose.

Do you think that Matthew and the Holy Spirit inspiring Matthew knows what the original Isaiah 40 verse three says? And in the same way that we often quote our King James scriptures and in our mind we know that, well, when it says study to show thyself approved unto God, it doesn't mean sit down with your glasses and a bunch of textbooks. Study in old English meant to be diligent. Be diligent to show yourself approved to God.

If you're studious, you're hardworking and diligent and you keep at it and you're consistent. So be diligent, be consistent, put some effort into it to show yourself approved. Same thing here.

They use the Septuagint because Greek is now the lingua franca. That's what the Romans did. They used the best parts of empires that they conquered.

They conquered the Greeks and they said, hey, this language works a lot better and is easier to teach. A lot of people already know it. Alexander already spread it all over the place, this Koine Greek.

Let's just use that. So here is kind of the same idea. This quotation is from the Septuagint and in the Septuagint, the Greeks kind of missed a stitch.

So the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. So what is he doing? This is not a misquotation. It brings emphasis to a different point.

If you need to prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness, then the man who is delivering this message now literally is in the wilderness. So both things are true. The way needs to be prepared in the spiritual wilderness.

Here is an actual voice in an actual wilderness calling out to prepare the way of the Lord. So here we have the literal. Isaiah 40 verse 3 is the spiritual.

Both are true. It's a matter of emphasis and the change draws attention to what changed. What changed? What's happening in the wilderness? The voice says prepare a way in the wilderness.

The Septuagint version says there's a voice crying in the wilderness. So the wilderness gets attention drawn to it by its use in a different manner in this quotation. So we want to think about that wilderness.

What does the wilderness represent? Well, two ideas. The first one we talked about last time. You remember the glory of God departing the temple slowly heading east to the threshold, to the gate, to the top of the Mount of Olives, and then to the nations.

And you have to wait about 30 chapters in Ezekiel before the glory of God comes back. For God's presence to return, it has to cross from the nations back into the land. There's been an interesting idea based on something Jesus said that this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world and then the end will come.

And if you look at the historic progress of the gospel beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and it has generally progressed in terms of large movements and big numbers of people. It has progressed westward. The glory of God left going east, but the gospel has proceeded in the Roman Empire westward.

Look at the maps in the back of your Bible, the journeys of Paul. They are north and west. And pretty soon evangelism spreads to Europe and to northern Africa.

And you've got Egyptians and so on. Then it eventually goes across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States, begins on the east coast, spreads across to the west coast, goes to South America, goes into the entire North and South American continents. Then it jumps the Pacific Ocean and ends up in Asia.

And our American presence, even though it was in wartime in the Philippines and in Japan and in Korea, has spread westward, inland, across, and has penetrated. There's a huge, at this point, huge revival. They always call it a revival, but it's actually evangelism.

It is people coming to Christ and coming to faith and then pursuing that faith in those oriental lands now. And there are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of new Christians in China, despite everything. In Korea, despite everything.

In North Korea. And it is traveling across. And now you have Japan and Korea sending missionaries to the Middle East.

And that gap, the earth has now, in that sense, been circled with the gospel. And as it moves back toward the Middle East, coming from the east, you think about, prepare the way of the Lord. The glory of the Lord, the truth of the Lord, belief in the Lord is coming back to the Middle East from the east.

Not from us. We're past it. It's coming from the east in that sense.

But Jesus said, when this gospel is preached in the whole world, the end's going to come. Well, there is no place now, thanks to technology and communication via internet, satellites, everything else, there's no place where that message is not available. I mean, no place.

So the end is near. But the voice is crying in a spiritual wilderness in Isaiah chapter 40 about the need to prepare a spiritual way so that God can be worshiped and served by his people. Here, John is in the middle of the people of God.

He is in the wilderness, and he is calling literal people to an embodied salvation, to Jesus himself. And so it's all in the physical and literal plane. And you have your attention drawn to that by this rearrangement of Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. This is happening in the wilderness.

It's a literal wilderness down by the Jordan, which tells you that they need to prepare a literal way. You'll see a semblance of this, a zeal but not according to knowledge, shortly before the crucifixion. We call it Palm Sunday.

Preparing a literal way. And which way is Jesus traveling as he rides the foal of the donkey into Jerusalem? Where is he coming from and where is he going to? He starts outside the city, and he is from the east, coming through the east gate. He is traveling west.

He starts on the hill there and comes down across the Kedron Valley and up and in the east gate. It is a literal, it looks like a fulfillment, but it's just a semblance. It doesn't have the spiritual reality that Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3 talks about.

You can't fake it. You can't just go through the motions. You could go down and get dunked by John in the Jordan, but did your heart change? Did your mind change? Jesus can come, the glory of God, the fullness of deity and bodily form can come from the east and enter the city, but is that reality or is that semblance? We ask ourselves the question, I've got a Bible.

I dress up and come to church on Sunday. I pray before my meals. How strong a connection is there between how I look and what I do and who I am and what my faith

actually generates? How much fruit of the spirit there actually is? Israel is a picture in the Old Testament and the New of people who got those two things mixed up and thought that by looking good, they were being good.

Who thought that by telling themselves that they had righteousness and being zealous for that, they were pleasing in God's sight and they weren't. It's a warning, repent. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The time is really short. It's short individually. It is short historically.

It is short spiritually and we are in a wilderness. Turn your TV on to any of the Christian networks and turn on your radio. Listen to most of what you hear.

They're not saying that there's not some good programs, but you've got to really hunt to find them. Walk into a Christian bookstore. Walk into the section of any bookstore.

Look at the titles. Look at what's being taught. The Bible studies that are being embraced and are popular and touted and are people genuflect in front of them are notoriously unbiblical.

There is heresy. There is horrible misleading going on that the churches are embracing, buying the materials, setting up all of their different youth levels to go through and compare notes and let's all get together and run this program in our church. Let's have this speaker come and spend a week with a conference.

We'll all get spiritually healthy. I am not going to mention any of them here, but if you want to know any details, talk to me outside of church. It is scary bad, scary bad what is being accepted, what is being touted, what is being praised and embraced in what you would consider to be conservative churches, conservative denominations, Bible churches.

We are in the wilderness and the message of God is examine yourself and see if you are in the faith. If there is a need for change of mind, we need to get the mind changed and get it changed now. The time is at hand.

Is the way straight? Is the way prepared through the desert? There is desert on the north. There is desert on the south. There is desert behind you to the east.

Is there a way for the glory of God to enter my life, my heart, my example or not? If there is not, then the change needs to be made. That is the call. Many people respond to the call here overtly.

It is a visible call, visible messenger, visible voice, visible wilderness, visible baptism. You go in dry. You come out wet.

Look at me. I am wet. I am baptized.

I am good to go. In less than four years, Jesus will be dying on the cross at the hands of these very same people in this very same town. It ought to sober us and it ought to motivate us to make sure that there is a great wide highway for God's glory, God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to be present in our hearts and in our lives and to be examining that way and looking for rocks, looking for potholes, looking for gophers, whatever it is that is messing up that way.

We have only been given one real mission here and that is make the way straight. Make a way in the desert and in the wilderness for God's glory. It is not complicated.

It is not obscure. It is not opaque. We do not have to be obtuse.

It is simple. Is God at home in the environment that is my heart or is it cluttered up with stuff that ought to be out of the way? There is always a sense in which more of God needs to be in my heart and in my life. There is always some sense in which He is outside ready to be more of a presence and more of a factor.

How clear is that way? How available is the space? That is our challenge. Well, when we come back, we are going to, having already looked at John and his message, we are going to resume now at verse 13 when Jesus comes from Galilee. No two accounts give this the same way.

Verse 13 only says what verse 13 says here in Matthew. It does not say it in Luke. It does not say it in Mark.

It does not say it in John. And none of those match either. For all of the synoptic issues and this guy borrowed from that guy, this particular thing right here is not the same in any of the Gospels.

So we will look at that when we come back.