



THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

APRIL 9 - MAY 24

(2) "John the Baptist" HIGHLIGHT: *Matthew 3:1-12 NLT*

H

Below are excerpts from the overall passage for use with the APPLICATION and RESPOND. It will be beneficial for the group to read the whole passage to understand the entire context.

1 In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, **2** "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." **3** The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

"He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming!
Clear the road for him!'"

4 John's clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. **5** People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. **6** And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? **8** Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. **9** Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. **10** Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

11 "I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. **12** He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat

with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

EXPLAIN

E

The purpose of this section is to deepen everyone's understanding of the Word.

John the Baptist was an eccentric—different, to say the least. We would not choose his living quarters—the Judean wilderness, “the barren region to the west of the Dead Sea: hilly, cut by precipitous canyons, pockmarked with caves, rocks; a desolate wasteland” (Jack P. Lewis, *The Living Word Commentary*). A wardrobe of coarse camel hair and a diet of locusts and wild honey would have caused most of us to cross the street if we met him walking on the same sidewalk. But this strange messenger drew crowds from Jerusalem and all Judea (Mark 1:5). Why? Because John was called by God (Luke 1:11-17 and 3:2-3). When a man has the fire of the Holy Spirit in his belly people will come—even if it’s just to watch him burn. And burn he did. “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.”

John made it clear that he was not THE LIGHT, he was just a light to show the way (see John 1:8-9). John’s passion for Jesus caused him to move into the shadows so that Jesus would be glorified. “He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less” (John 3:30).

Matthew 3:1-12

v.1 Those days when **John the Baptist began preaching** were dark days. The political and spiritual dignitaries listed in Luke 3:1-2 was the Holy Spirit’s way of drawing attention to a situation that was utterly impossible to break through. Israel was under the boot of Rome politically and was wandering under the leadership of a corrupt priesthood spiritually. But God has never run out of ideas or out of men. When the picture seemed so dark God sent John to begin preaching.

vv.2-3 **John’s message** was direct: **repentance for sin and turning to God**. John could not grant forgiveness of sin but he preached repentance as an attitude of the heart that would allow God to work (see Luke 3:3). God will not do our repenting for us; only we can do that. Because **the kingdom of heaven is near** repentance is required to be ready for it. There was a sense of urgency in John’s task (as **Isaiah** had prophesied): he was to **prepare the way for the Lord’s coming! Clear the road for Him** (“make his paths straight”). “Clear (straight)” is the same word used by Peter when Simon the Sorcerer wanted to buy the gift of God—“your heart is not *right* with God” (Acts 8:21). John was saying, *The kingdom of heaven is at hand—get right with God*. This is not the time for games—get “true”; get “level”. Don’t play on the slippery slopes.

vv.4-6 The people listened. They saw a man whose burning passion was to make a way for the coming Savior—and they believed his message, **confessed their sins, and were baptized**.

vv.7-10 Whether it was by the leading of the Spirit or just simply by the common awareness of the hostility that the **Pharisees and Sadducees** had for anyone who threatened their religious leadership (these were the same people who orchestrated Jesus’ crucifixion) John **denounced them as a brood of snakes** trying to get away from the fire of **God’s coming wrath**. Unless they **proved by the way they**

lived that they had repented of their sins and turned to God they were still just snakes in the grass. Their heritage (**descendants of Abraham**) could not make them safe; their religious positions were empty bowls if there was no repentance. They were just bad **trees that would be chopped down and thrown into the fire of God's judgment**. Repentance is more than talk; it is an everyday walk. Faithfully looking at the day's activities to see how they match up with Christ who is living in me (Galatians 2:20).

vv.11-12 The vast difference in the ministry of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus is seen in these verses. John **baptized with water**. But there was **someone coming soon who was greater**. So much more powerful that John **did not feel worthy to be His slave and carry His sandals. He baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire**. Jesus deals with the heart. He **separates the chaff from the wheat and then cleans up the threshing area—gathering the wheat into His barn**. He cleanses and purifies. He “saves us from the empty life we inherited” and buys us back with His own blood (see 1 Peter 1:18-19). He turns ashes to beauty to all those who surrender to His power. He breathes on a smoldering wick and it flames into a light that leads people to THE LIGHT.

A

APPLY

Be comfortable with some silence as people think back to the sermon or reread the text. Answer honestly. You don't have to answer every question.

1. What stuck out to you in what you heard in the sermon or read in the text?
2. What does it mean to repent? What is the role of repentance in the Christian life?
3. Why do you think John the Baptist said that Jesus will, “[burn] the chaff with never-ending fire”?
4. John the Baptist rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees for thinking they will be right with God based on “who” they were. What can we take from this?

R

RESPOND

The purpose of this section is to take action with the truths you're learning. Answer honestly. Find someone who will hold you accountable to living out your response to Scripture.

1. Repentance means to change one's mind. When you first heard the good news of the Gospel, how did you change from who you were before?

If you haven't changed yet, how do you need to change your mind before God?

2. Who do you know that needs to hear of the Light of the World, the one John the Baptist was telling of, Jesus?

How can you share the story of God changing you and shining the light of his Son in your life with them this week?

Be specific about how He has changed you. Try to schedule a time to share this with them.