

PP The Shift

Part 6-Matthew 3:1-3, Prepare the way of the Lord

1/11-12/2025

The gospel of Matthew, more than any other gospel, focuses on the kingdom of Heaven, something he mentions over 30 times

He introduces us to Jesus, the King of this kingdom and who we are about to meet is a mysterious figure called John the Baptist, who prepared the way for King Jesus

Read **PP** *“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.””* **Matthew 3:1-3**

Between Matthew 2:23 and Matthew 3:1 is a span of about 26-28 years

If you flip back 2-3 pages in your bible, to Malachi 4, it's a span of about 400 years and in those 4 centuries, God sent no prophet, no angel, said nothing to Israel; He was utterly silent

The last thing God said before He went silent was: **PP** *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”* **Malachi 4:5**

Malachi had just quoted the prophet Isaiah: **PP** *“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple...behold, He is coming, says the LORD of hosts.”* **Malachi 3:1**

The One Who was coming was Jesus, and the messenger who would prepare the way was John His message was, **PP** *‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’* **Matthew 3:2**

The way into the kingdom of heaven is repentance, but what that means is our aim today

PP 1-It is in the wilderness we find grace

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed a sheet of paper on the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany

He had written on that sheet of paper 95 propositions for debate

Johann Tetzel, a Dominican priest was in the midst of a fundraising campaign to finance the renovations of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

People were able to purchase indulgences that supposedly reduced or eliminated divine punishment for sins and they returned to Wittenburg, showing these official pardons to Luther, stating they no longer needed to repent of their sins

This was the catalyst for Luther's reformation, and the first of the 95 theses was this: **PP** *“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”* Martin Luther, the first of 95 propositions for debate

Hold on to that thought as Matthew introduces John to us: **PP** *“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea”* **Matthew 3:1**

Every word in the bible was carefully chosen and carries significance for us

John was preaching in the wilderness, a word for dry, barren, desolate places

It was in the wilderness that Israel wandered 40 years because of their unbelief

It is to the wilderness that sin always leads us, where life does not grow

If your heart is cold to God, you are in the wilderness and it is sin that led you there

If your life is joyless, monochrome, you are in the wilderness

If the bible holds no joy for you, or prayer is a lifeless conversation with God, if you are dogged by depression, sadness, confusion, loneliness, bitterness, anger, fear, that is what wilderness or desert living feels like

It's where all the roads of this world system eventually lead, the natural habitat of Satan
No matter how exciting it seems, sin always leads us away from life and into the wilderness
Gospel preaching begins in the wilderness and leads people to Jesus Christ for life

John was preaching the grace of repentance in the wilderness, not in the temple courts, not in the synagogues, not on the street corners of Jerusalem

He was way out in the barren wilderness of Judea, and if you wanted to hear the message of good news, you had to go there to find it

God isn't waiting for you to do enough good things to earn His love, and He isn't waiting for you to finally clean yourself up enough to get saved... He meets you right in the very deepest mess of your life and says there, *If you want, I can give you life, you just need to repent*

PP Sin has led you to the wilderness and stripped you of life, but it is there you will find grace

So the first thing I want to point out is that there's a reason John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, it is the metaphor of the life-robbing power of sin that we must repent of

PP 2-Repentance is the doorway to the King

Here is John's main sermon title: **PP 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'**

The Greek has grammatical tenses, just as our English language does, so it's important to know that John's call to *repent* was in the present imperative, a command for ongoing action
Repenting is not a once and done thing the Christians does, but a lifestyle, over and over

PP Repent means to have a breaking of our hearts that return back to God for our joy

We moralize repentance and it goes something like this: *I did something I shouldn't have, I got caught, I feel bad, I'm facing the consequences, I say sorry to God and try as hard as I can to never do that sin again*

But to try and change moral behavior without a change of heart is a life doomed to repeat the sin
Think honestly for a moment: *Have you said sorry to God for the same sin hundreds of times?*
If so, you are trying to change behavior without changing the heart and my advice to you is that you need to repent of the wrong repenting

Repenting isn't the same as confessing, or feeling really bad about sin, or a fear of punishment
Confessing is coming clean with God, getting sin out of the dark into the light, but repenting is turning away from forsaking God in the wilderness of sin and back to God in faith

We often try to stir up that punishment fear, making sure we feel terrible over what we did thinking it will help us never do it again, but that never works and it's not repentance

In sin, we are turning away from God and run after what our heart is craving

Getting drunk or high is your heart craving an escape from life

Watching porn is your heart craving pleasure and power

Sex outside of marriage is your heart craving pleasure and self-validation

Gossip is your heart running after the power to ruin the life of another

Slander is your heart demanding to show others you are superior to them

Envy is your heart locked into bitter hatred that you don't have what someone else does

PP Repentance is turning away from forsaking God and turning to Him in faith

All through the bible, God bids us to come out of the wilderness of sin and return to Him
PP Repentance is the understanding that in your sin, you didn't just break a command of God, you broke the heart of God

You forsook God, loving yourself more than Him, looking for happiness other than in Him
Holy God, unblemished by sin, finds our sin offensive but is that why He grieves over our sin?
I am offended by the sinful behavior of my kids, but much more, it breaks my heart that they are bringing on themselves what I know will be misery instead of the good I want for them
Yes, God's holiness finds sin offensive, but have you considered that what grieves God about our sin is His fierce jealousy for our happiness, and grief that we are throwing it away?
Sin always leads us into the lifeless wilderness, and it breaks the heart of our Heavenly Father and moves Him to do something to call us out of the wilderness of lifelessness
Repentance is a gift from God and when He convicts our hearts, it is His gracious love that is turning us away from life-robbing sin, to come back home to Him
It is why repentance makes you feel clean, new, as if light has come into you again, your heart again alive, and happy and free
How your life will change when you truly understand that our sin grieves God because He is jealous for our life, happiness and peace?
You won't see Him as some angry Deity pointing an accusatory finger at you because of your sin
He is your good, Holy, Heavenly Father loving you, helping you repent and live

PP 3-A lifestyle of repentance will enjoy the blessings of Jesus

Repentance is not just the doorway to the King in salvation, it is the means of spiritual growth
John the Baptist was a herald of King Jesus, exhorting people to **PP 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.' Matthew 3:3**

John was the son of a Priest, therefore a Levite, destined to serve among the 6,000 priests two weeks a year at the Temple of God

But God had a special call for him as the herald of Jesus, the true King of the world
A king's herald was the mouthpiece of the king, speaking the message of the king for the people
The herald would visit towns and cities before the king traveled to them, making sure the roads were repaired and the people were ready to welcome the king

Sometimes he would issue threats, and John did: **PP "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Matthew 3:10**

Sometimes the herald would warn the people as John did: **PP "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." Matthew 3:8-9**

The Pharisees arrogantly believed they were saved just because they were sons of Abraham
John was the herald of Jesus the King, announcing that the kingdom of heaven was near
He was not smoothing physical roads for an earthly king, he was getting the roads of the heart ready for a heavenly King

His preaching exposed attitudes that were obstacles keeping people from submitting to Jesus
The removal of those obstacles is what repentance is as you turn back to God in faith

If my repentance is aimed only at the depth of my bad behavior, then when I confess that behavior, I immediately feel moral relief because me and God are square again
I don't love Him anymore, I'm just not sinning as much
I don't have to worry about His displeasure any more, until the next time I sin
But the reality is that God is aiming deeper than my behavior, His target is my heart
He loves me, and He wants me to love Him and repentance is the means to make His path straight so His presence can be with me and give me abundance of life
Friends, Jesus wants to be with you, He is coming to you, so prepare, make His path straight
Live a life of repentance, forsaking your attitudes of heart that led you into the dry, barren wilderness
Cry out to God for the gift of repentance, ask Him to help you tear your heart so that godly sorrow will lead you to repent, to forsake sin, and turn back to Him

Are you in the wilderness?

You forsook God and pursued your sin, and it is stripping you of life, and you are miserable
I have good news for you and here it is: God's grace is finding you in that dry, barren place
He will not leave you there, though for a time, like Israel, He will be silent, He will pull away,
He will let you experience the dark spiritual misery you have chosen
But all the while He grieves that you have forfeited the joy and life He can give through Christ
So repent, turn back to Him, make His path straight so He can come to you and give you life!
Are you in need of that?
Perhaps right now is where you begin your journey back to Him, to the King, to Jesus