

Matthew 3:11-12

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (NRSV).

In Mathew chapter three, years have lapsed from the birth of Jesus to his baptism. Mathew omits the childhood and adolescence years of Jesus. It would be nice if we knew these things but Matthew's focus is theological not biographical. His objective is to present Jesus as the Messiah that was promised by God and as told to the people through prophecy. Matthew intentionally demonstrates that Jesus is the Son of God. Matthew chapter three is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He is introduced to the world by John the Baptist. Matthew tells us that John is the one that was prophesied by Isaiah to prepare the way of the Lord. It is Matthew's perspective that Jesus is the one that was prophesied about and promised, and John is the prophesied for runner to the Messiah.

That brings us to our Scripture for today. John is portrayed by Matthew as the divinely appointed forerunner of the Messiah. He is baptizing and teaching repentance. Repentance is one of the main lessons of Bible. Virtually every prophet called for repentance. John the Baptist does the same. Repentance is not just a matter of feeling sorry about wrongs you may have done or feeling guilty about your past. Repentance requires action. It is a feeling of remorse and sincere regret followed by a confession, a promise of reformation, a changed life, to re-align your life to God. If remorse is sincere it leads to a changed life. If you never changed then you never actually repented. Crowds come to John from all over the area repenting and confessing their sins.

Matthew introduces a problem with the religious leaders. The problem John the Baptist had is the same problem that Jesus had; the religious leaders transgressed from the will of God. John calls them out. They need to repent. Like the Old Testament prophets, John stands firm in faith. The problem that he had is that his opponents were arrogant. They did not think that they needed to repent. They assumed their status as children of Abraham because as a descendant of Abraham they thought they were righteous by heritage.

I will now deflect your attention all the way back to the very beginning to Genesis chapter three, the first sin. The serpent is crafty. This means, he will trick you with temptation. Notice that he deceives the woman into thinking what is bad is actually OK. That's the trick. That's the gimmick. It has gone on from the very beginning, throughout the Old Testament, through the New Testament, and into the world today. The tempter tricks you into thinking that the wrong is actually OK. The religious establishment was not made up of bad people but they got caught up in their own agenda and transgressed from the will of God. So, the religious leaders, fallen from the will of God, do not acknowledge their transgressions. So, they do not repent; they do not change. They become opponents of John, and of Jesus, and this makes them opponents to God. They claim righteousness while they actually go against will of God.

Jesus comes to get baptized even though. Jesus is sinless. Matthew does not tell us this; it is assumed. The question is. Why does a sinless Jesus submit to baptism? I am thankful that Jesus answered the question for us; otherwise we would question it forever. Jesus said "To fulfill all righteousness." What does that mean? Righteousness is the right conduct, the correct observance to the will of God. Righteousness is according to God's will as revealed in the

scriptures. John the Baptist is doing God's work. So, it is fitting for Jesus to demonstrate servitude to God's will. Matthew does not speculate on what went on inside of Jesus. We don't know his emotions, or what he was thinking, or detailed theological doctrine. Jesus' action demonstrates that baptismal officiation is not based on hierarchy. What happens next is very important. A voice of heaven calls out this is my Son. This is a direct acclamation from God that Jesus is the Son of God. What Jesus does next is also very important. Jesus faces temptation and does what Adam and Eve could not do. He does what no one else in the Bible could do. He does what no one else could do ever in all of history; he resists temptation 100%. He is the only person on earth ever to resist temptation 100%.

Temptation is very strong and deceptive. The deception of temptation is that it gets people to think that something bad is actually OK. It affects everybody. So, we have baptism and repentance. Baptism is a matter of obedience and receiving the Holy Spirit. As Jesus is declared the Son of God, Christians are declared to be children of God. Therefore, every Christian is to act like a person that belongs to the kingdom of God. However, in Christian living we have to combat temptation. We can do that if we make a sincere effort to live a new life devoted to Jesus Christ, his lessons, and his living example of steadfast faith. Spend adequate time in prayer. Study the scriptures in an earnest effort to learn and discern the will of God. We are to pledge obedience to the will of God and sincerely repent. The Christian community is to engage in group study to help each other discern the will of God. The truth is that a Christian cannot possibly live 100% righteous all the time. Only Jesus could do that. Every Christian wavers in their faith. Every Christian fails at some part of their commitment. But God gives to us a solution. God gives us grace. The question for us is What is our response to God's grace?