

# “Get Ready” // Matthew 3:1–17 // *The Whole Story* 28

## Opening announcements

Welcome to all of our **campuses**; and I want to send out a special greeting to our **college students, who are beginning to come back** from the summer this week.

We are a **different church** without you.

**Two things are not impacted** when you are gone:

- One is **Offering**. Not bitter, just saying...
- The other is **our parking**. Lance Michels, our CH campus pastor, told me, “*When the college students left for the summer, I couldn’t figure it out. We had 700 less people, but roughly the same number of cars. And then I watched the parking one Sunday and figured it out: college students average about 150 per vehicle.*”
- So, those two things don’t change, but everything else does, and so we’re glad you are back.

## Introduction (Bibles, \*starting new Testament.)

- If you fell off the wagon, so to speak... or are new, good time to join in.

Works Consulted:

John Mark Comer, “The New Exodus”

Andy Stanley, “Going Public”

Tim Keller, “John the Baptist”

Sally Lloyd-Jones, “Heaven Breaks Through”

N.T. Wright, “Matthew for Everyone”

Tim Keller, *King’s Cross*

- **Today we’re going to jump** into the story of a rather strange figure sent by God ahead of Jesus to prepare everyone for him. He captured attention of the entire nation of Israel, in part because he was so odd.

I just got back from being overseas where everyone thought we were a little odd.

- **Little things we take for granted** they find weird—like wanting ice in our drinks. Even when I ate at McDonald’s—and typically I’m not a McDonald’s regular, but you’d be surprised how good those “Golden Arches of Capitalism” (pic) look after you’ve been overseas for a while—but **even there, when I ordered a Diet Coke** they’d give it to me with one cube of ice in it. So I asked for extra ice, and the guy at the counter looks at me; I try to say it again slowly and loudly, and then he disappears, I guess to go talk to the manager, and emerged a few minutes later with tongs holding one more cube of ice, like he was giving away a national treasure.

**They thought we talked strange.** In London, where people obviously speak English, they would tell me to speak slowly because they couldn’t understand my accent. I said, “My accent? I ain’t got no accent. *Y’all* the ones with the accent.”

- In S. Africa, they mostly speak English, also, but they use different words than we do for things. There were **certain words we use that I was told not to use** there. At dinner I asked for a napkin. A S. African said, “Hey, that does not mean what you think it means. Here ‘napkin’ means ‘adult diaper.’ So, it’s **not the kind of thing you request in the middle of a meal.**”

- At a S. African guy said, “Man, I can’t wait to get home and take a nice long dudus.” What? Why would you tell me that? But dudus in their dialect means “nap.”
  - Later I was talking with our missionary when one of his S. African colleagues said, “Hey, I’ll hit you with a tinkle later.” I just looked at him, and he said, “Tinkle. Phone call.” So I told our missionary, “Have you ever had a tinkle in the middle of one of your dudus?”

**Sorry for the potty humor**, but when you are from a different culture, you seem strange.

**John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin, was strange for different reasons.** He was a Jew sent to fellow Jews, but his ministry and lifestyle were so odd that it got people’s attention. That was by design, because God wanted to show them what they needed to do to *receive* Jesus.

**Maybe you’ve asked that:** “*How exactly do you receive Jesus?* Is it a certain level of morality you obtain, or a certain amount that you pray? If so, how much is enough? How much of those things qualifies you as a “Christian”? Or maybe you have thought, “*I would like to know God, but I’m just not interested in getting involved in organized religion.*” Or, “*I’m interested in God but just don’t understand the big deal with Jesus.*” John points you toward the answer to all those questions.

Matthew 3:1–17

3:1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 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.’” 4 Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

- The wild honey doesn’t sound too bad, but the locusts?
- *I have actually had ‘locust’ before, on a mission trip to China. **Pic of locusts.** They’re not so bad if they’re fried. And you add lots of Lawry’s Seasoning Salt. Or dip them in caramel sauce. (that’s probably what John was **doing with the honey—covering up the locust taste.**) Believe it or not, they taste like chicken. *The only bad part is when the legs get stuck in your teeth. Seriously.**

**These things about John were not strange to Jews** because they were gross, however, but because they indicated that **John was not part of “the establishment.”**

- **Religious leaders were mostly part of the aristocracy; they lived in Jerusalem;** had degrees, wore nice clothes and were fairly wealthy. John obviously wasn’t.

But there was something really intriguing about all this to them. Because, you see, there was one other prophet in Jewish history who had this “Grizzly Adams” kind of persona—Elijah. And in a couple of places in the Old Testament, the prophets had said that right before the Messiah came, **one like Elijah** would precede him.

- **Matthew cites Isaiah**, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness.
- **This week in our Bible reading:** Malachi 4:5, “God says, I will send Elijah” before the coming of the Messiah.

And so they wondered, **could this be Elijah reincarnate?** He looks like him. He preaches like him. And he **got their attention**.

5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Let’s talk about John’s message.

**First, A. Note the the simplicity of John’s message: “REPENT.”** All that means is: *turn away from sin.*

- That was basically his whole sermon. If you were **taking notes as he preached**, you'd write down, "Point 1: Repent."
- After a while you might say, "OK, John, I've got that; what's point 2?" And he'd say, "I'm not done with point 1."
- And you'd say, "**Well, John, I want something else.** I am here to *learn.*" And he'd say, "Then you'd better get serious about repenting."
- The **problem is not you need to learn something new**; the problem is you need to obey what you already know.

For most of us, **the problem is not that we don't know enough.** It's that we are not obedient to what we do know.

Evidently, most of the people listening to John didn't need to be told **what to repent of.** They already knew. The **vast majority of people** today don't need to be told.

- **What area of your life**, right now, is not under the full authority of God?
- Obeying him in area of sexuality?
- Is there **any area of your life** God doesn't have Lordship over? **Any habit** you have that you know is not pleasing to him?

If so, **you need to repent.** Listen: And **God has nothing else to say to you until you do!**

- Do you know **how wicked** it is to say no to God directly?
  - Need I remind you that one bite from a forbidden fruit plunged the whole world into darkness. All disease, death...
  - In Numbers 15...
  - Sin gets its wickedness not from the depravity of the deed, but from whose authority you reject when you commit it.
  - Rebellion is like **witchcraft.**

For many of you, **the message is simple.**

- You know what is wrong in your life. You don't need me to tell you.
- Repent. Forsake what God has forbidden.

Second, note **B. the tone of John's message: Apocalyptic.** "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

- That's **what we call "apocalyptic"**—which (typically) means, it concerns the end of the world.
- Usually **talking that way that makes people think** you are crazy. You see someone with a bumper sticker or T-shirt that says, "The end is near," you don't think, "That's a person I really would like to influence my life more; babysit our kids."
- But it made people listen to John, because they believed him.

There is **always an apocalyptic tone** to the gospel message, however, because at any moment, 1 of 2 things could happen:

- **The coming of Jesus:** like a thief in the night. They don't make appointments.
  - They say that there are **two subjects that will get people in church: The end times, and sex.** Always made me wonder if you come up with a series about what kinds of sex we'll have in the end times, if attendance would go *through the roof.*
  - **But I don't know when the end will be here.** But I do know Jesus said to live ready, because in the very moment you think it couldn't happen, he comes. It could be today.
- **Death:** Bridge in Germany: *You don't know when you will die.* It could be today. For most people the day of their death comes as a surprise.

**Are you ready to meet God?**

- "What would you do today if you knew this was your last day?" Whatever you said you'd do, you should start doing that today.

- *Life is short. Talking with two of our college girls... how fast life goes. You have no idea. It goes faster and faster.*
- **Wisdom is living today with the final day in mind.**
- **That's why Moses, in Ps. 90, prayed:** "Lord, teach us to think about death that we might know how to live."

**Third, notice C. the response to John's message: baptism.** Now, baptism was not completely uncommon in those days. John was not doing a brand new thing, but Jews used it in only 2 ways:

- **First, as part of the conversion process** for Gentiles to become Jews.
  - **Conversion to Judaism typically involved 3 things:**
    1. Circumcision, which I think had to reduce the potential male convert pool pretty dramatically. We do **spontaneous baptisms here—imagine if we did spontaneous circumcisions**. "We've got everything you'll need—bandages, Vicodin").
    2. **You memorized some key passages** out of the law.
    3. You got baptized, showing that you were washing away your previous sinful, Gentile pagan life.
- The **second use of baptism** was a ritual cleansing you gave yourself, as a Jew, in purification ceremonies, before you offered sacrifices and the sort.

But John's baptism was different than either of those—it wasn't aimed at Gentiles, it was directed at Jews—so this wasn't about becoming a Jew, but **nor was this just ritual cleansing. Baptism of REPENTANCE. He was talking as if Jews—religious Jews—needed to be converted, too.** That was a revolutionary concept.

**7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism,** (all the religious people had started coming, because

that's what religious people do: they find out where religious things are happening in the religious world and they go hang around and do those religious things so they can add them to their religious resumes).

John says, **he said to them,** "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (He's not exactly looking to win friends and influence people). **8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 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. **10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.**

(<sup>1</sup>Opt A:

**Stop hiding behind religion.** Don't tell yourself, "I'm a Jew, and I've been through this or that ritual, so I'm ok."

- I'm talking about something that needs to happen *at your very root*.

**Religion is the cover-up for true repentance.**

One of the most revolutionary stories Jesus told involves 2 sons. We call it "the story of the prodigal son."

- Son #1: riotous living, frat parties, smoking weed. Franklin St. He was separated from the Father because of his *rebellion*.
- Son #2: stayed at home. In Jesus' story, this son is also "outside of the house," which is Jesus' way of showing that he also was not in fellowship with the Father, even though he was close to the house.
- He was furious at the grace the father showed to the returning prodigal, which Jesus says means that he doesn't get is that he

<sup>1</sup> Opt A is the one I went with in the sermon. I wrote Opt B afterward—I think it is cleaner and easier.

also is a recipient of grace. **He thinks he *deserves*** the Father's possessions, and he never deals with the core issues of his heart—pride and his need for grace, and these things keep him separated from the Father just like the prodigal.

**Jesus was saying there are two ways to be separated from God.** One is by defying the laws of God (like the first prodigal). The second is in thinking you are good enough to earn the Father's approval, never dealing with the core of your heart, and failing to recognize the grace that you desperately need.

- **Religion keeps a lot of people from ever dealing with the root problem in their heart:** *Love of self, more than love of God*
  - It's kind of like a **married guy who keeps a mistress**. He's with his family most days, but Fri and Sat mornings he spends with his mistress. So you tell this guy that his wife is really upset with him. So, he really focuses on being a great husband Sun–Thurs, but doesn't stop seeing the mistress on Fri-Sat. You tell him, "The problem is not that you're not busy enough on the days you are with your wife. The problem is that you have a divided heart that you've given to another lover." That's what religion does. Doesn't deal with the core issue: self-love, money love, rather than God-love.
- Even worse, religion keeps you from throwing yourself on God's grace, the only hope you have of heaven.

**Which is why John** is so harsh with them. He wants to wake them up.

You religious people: Stop trying to figure out what other religious thing you need to do to be a good Christian. **Stop doing your damnable good works** and just repent. Surrender yourself fully to God and throw yourself on his grace. It is your only hope.)

((Opt B:

**Stop hiding behind religion.** Don't tell yourself, "I'm a Jew, and I've been through this or that ritual, so I'm ok."

- *I'm talking about something that needs to happen at your very root.*

**Religion keeps a lot of people from ever dealing with the root problem in their heart:** *Love of self, more than love of God*

- *It's kind of like a **married guy who keeps a mistress**. He's with his family most days, but Fri and Sat mornings he spends with his mistress. So you tell this guy that his wife is really upset with him. So, he really focuses on being a great husband Sun–Thurs, but doesn't stop seeing the mistress on Fri-Sat. You tell him, "The problem is not that you're not busy enough on the days you are with your wife. The problem is that you have a divided heart that you've given to another lover." That's what religion does. Doesn't deal with the core issue: self-love, money love, rather than God-love.*
- *Even worse, religion keeps you from throwing yourself on God's grace, the only hope you have of heaven.*
  - *Jesus told a story about 2 men who went into the Temple to pray. One was a really religious guy—the best of the best, religious speaking—whom Jesus said stood to pray and thinks about all the things he has done that God must be pleased with. The other, a tax collector, in our view, think a John, or a sex-trafficker—who is so overwhelmed with the sense of his sinfulness that he won't come in farther than the back, afraid to be struck dead, and simply beats his chest in regret and repentance and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus said, the one—the repentant sex-trafficker, went home justified, because he hoped in God's grace and God credited to him Jesus' righteousness; whereas the*

*guy at the front, went home with only his own righteousness, which was no righteousness at all.*

- **John says, “Do not say we have Abraham...” Religion makes you retreat into something *other than God’s grace*. What is that for you? What do you retreat into to say, “I’m a good person. I’ll be ok. Your church attendance? Your reputation? Your leadership or ministry experience? Your politics? Your good parenting? There is **no hope but God’s grace**.**

**John shows us that there are two ways to be separated from God. One is by defying the laws of God (like the first prodigal). The second is in thinking you are good enough to earn the Father’s approval, never dealing with the core of your heart, and failing to recognize the grace that you desperately need. **Opt: prodigal son story—above.****

Which is why John was so harsh with them.

You religious people: Stop trying to figure out what other religious thing you need to do to be a good Christian. **Stop doing your damnable good works and just repent. Surrender yourself fully to God and throw yourself on his grace. It is your only hope.**)

**Now, vs. 11, John begins to show you the significance of his baptism:** 11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but 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.”

John says that **his baptism is symbolic** of something, a greater baptism. The real baptism happens not in water but by the Holy Spirit. And that makes the place of John’s baptism significant: **He does it “in the river Jordan” on the edge of “the wilderness.”** The Jordan

River was the boundary between Israel and the wilderness. It was the place where Israel, under Joshua, crossed over into the Promised Land after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years because of their sin. It represented them leaving sin for the Promised Land.

John says, “**The real baptism is when you leave the wilderness of sin for the Promised Land of faith and obedience.**” And the only way you can do that is through the **power of the Holy Spirit**, which is why you need a Messiah who can give you the fire of the Holy Spirit, not a cleansing with water.

**So vs. 13, enter Jesus:** 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John recognizes him—they are cousins after all, so he tries to stop him—and says. This is a “baptism of repentance.” What did he have to repent of? Nothing. He was sinless! John knew that. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Was any of Jesus’ righteousness unfulfilled? A spot he needed topped off? He was already fully righteous!) Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

*Did you see it? There it is—the whole gospel!*

What is happening?

Hear this: Jesus, at his baptism, was beginning his ministry of substitution.

Jesus didn’t need to repent, but we did.

- Imagine if everyone in the crowd that day had on a **nametag with their name and the label, “sinner.”** Jesus had on a nametag with his name and the label, “righteous.” Jesus walked through the crowd taking off people’s nametags and putting them on himself. So when he stepped into the water to repent of sin, he was repenting not for his sin but for ours.
- He carried that nametag to the cross, where **God** made him, who knew no sin, to become sin for us.
  - **He would be beaten until** he no longer looked like a man. His back laid bare by a whip, beaten so badly that they say his intestines would have been protruding from his abdomen. He had 9 inch nails put in his hands and feet; a crown of thorns thrust upon his head so that his face was horribly disfigured...
  - People think, “That’s disgusting.” That’s because our sin is disgusting. Jesus was dying for every act of violence, every sexual abuse, every spousal betrayal, every lie, every act of selfishness or manipulation we’ve ever committed.

And then because of that, when the Father declares to him, *‘This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased’* that now belongs to us, even though we don’t deserve those words.

The key word in all the gospel is **“substitution.”**

- The gospel in **4 words**, “Jesus in my place.”
- Jesus did not merely **die for you**, but instead of you.
- He took my **nametag of sin** so I could wear his nametag of righteousness.

***This principle separates Jesus’ gospel from every other religion.***

Every other religion teaches you what you must DO something to please God. Go here. Say this. Rub this. Touch that. Don’t’ do that. Pray this, chant that.

- The gospel, on the other hand, is about what **Jesus has DONE** for you.

- **In every other religion, the prophet is a teacher** that gives you a plan to earn God’s favor. **In Christianity, you get the story** of a Savior who has earned God’s favor for you and gives it to you as a gift.

**Substitution is hard for people to accept** because the whole principle of substitution goes against the core of our pride. It declares that we are absolutely helpless.

- I don’t like to think of myself as helpless.
- I want to think of myself as God’s HGTV project—a fixer upper.
- I want to think of myself as basically able to carry my weight, with maybe a little bit of help.
  - Partner workout where V does the bigger share of burpees. (invited by the devil for the vexation of God’s people). V does 65 I do 35
  - Jesus: I don’t just carry the load; you can’t get off the floor.
- **But the only way to receive the gospel** is to admit total helplessness.
  - Christ did not give you a way to save yourself—some other religious rituals or activities to add to your lives. He did the work to save you. All of it. He gave it as a gift you could never earn on your own.
  - When people say, “You religious people are weak... Jesus is a crutch. You don’t know the half of it; he’s a stretcher.

**So let me end today by talking about baptism for us**—what it is for us today, **because Jesus, you see, would continue this practice** of baptism as the evidence of our repentance.

- **When Jesus gave the Great Commission**, it was the first thing he told new believers to do, “Go, and make disciples, *baptizing* them...”
- It was to be a **symbol of us crossing over** from the wilderness of sin into the Promised Land of faith and obedience.
- Paul says that it was the **symbol that we believe Jesus** took our place in death. Romans 6:3–4

A few things about baptism we learn from the story.

### 1. Baptism publicly declares your repentance.

- Baptism was a public symbol that re-enacted your leaving the wilderness of sin and entering the promised land of obedience, passing from death to life.
- **Here's the thing: There are many people in the South who get baptized but never repent.** That is revealed by the fact that you don't live with Jesus as Lord today. Someone convinced you that you could accept Jesus as Savior without surrendering to him as Lord, like he was a salad bar. To be baptized is to repent—to walk out of the wilderness of your sin and into the new life of faith and obedience.
- **If your life did not radically change when you got baptized,** then it was not a baptism of repentance, you just got wet in front of a bunch of people.

### 2. Baptism is by immersion

- This is not a huge deal to us... but let me explain it. We submerge people because 1) **that's how they did it in the Bible.**
  - John wasn't standing on the shore with a cup sprinkling water on people's head... he was baptizing them.
  - The English translators **didn't know exactly how to translate that word**, so they just transposed it. Baptizo became "baptize." "Baptize" is not a translation, it is a transliteration.
  - The word, "baptism," literally meant to wash, plunge, soak or dip. Wasn't a religious word at all. Sometimes they used it for people who drowned, ships that went down. We even have a recipe recorded by a Greek poet and physician named Nicander, on making pickles. He says, literally, "bapto (as in, dip quickly) the cucumber in water, and then baptizo (as in, immerse and let it soak) in vinegar... and

then, he said, "your pickle will be filled with the Spirit speak in tongues." No. Not that last part. I made that up.

2) **Because of what it symbolizes.** When you bury someone, you don't sprinkle dirt on their head. You put them under.

### 3. Baptism is not a condition of—but evidence of—salvation.

- Nowhere in Scripture is baptism presented as a condition of salvation.
  - **Many people think that. I can disprove that in one story:** Thief on the cross: "I believe in you." Jesus: Today you'll be with me. If baptism was necessary, he'd have been like, "Hurry, somebody get a hose and a bucket!"
  - **Romans 10:9–10** (there's your baptismal
- Baptism is not a condition; it is the evidence.
  - **Like a wedding ring.**
- **Which is why we do it after becoming a believer.** If you get baptized before you are converted, or as an infant, that is not an evidence of your faith, but your parents.
  - **Baptism is the evidence of** repentance.
- **So the people we see get baptized in Acts** do so *after* their repentance.
  - **Acts 2:41**, 3000 people "received [Peter's] word and *were baptized*."
  - In **Acts 8**, the Ethiopian eunuch says, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."
  - **Acts 9**, Paul believed and was baptized.
  - In **Acts 10**, and the Holy Spirit fell on all who believed the word, and then they were baptized.
  - In **Acts 16:15**, Lydia's heart was "opened to pay attention to what Paul said" and then she was baptized.
  - In **Acts 16:30**, the Philippian jailor said, "What must I do to be saved" and he believed and then Paul baptized him and everyone else who believed in his house.



- **Acts 18:8**, "many Corinthians" listened to Paul's preaching and believed and were baptized.
- **Now let me read the list of verses of all the people** who got baptized before their conversion, or as infants...
  - ...OK
- **I often say, "If you got baptized as an infant..."** Thank God! Now you need to ratify...

Lastly...

#### 4. Baptism is Important:

People say, "Why the big deal?" Ritual...

- Notice what happens to Jesus when he is baptized: **he hears the affirmation of God** and is filled by the Spirit. He is going to go into the **wilderness to be tempted by Satan**. This affirmation of the Father is going to become the core his resistance against Satan; that his body may be in the wilderness but God is his home.
- Your **baptism is like a flag you put in the ground** that signifies for you that you have left the wilderness of sin where Satan rules and entered the promised land of obedience where God rules, and Satan has no more jurisdiction.
  - **M. Luther said the devil came to him every night "to dispute with him."** Luther said he learned two things would chase the devil away. One thing was to say, "Satan, I am *baptized*." I have left your wilderness. You have no more jurisdiction.
  - **The other way, Luther said, and I'm not sure how to say this—was to pass gas.** Because the devil hated mockery, Luther believed, since he was so proud, and passing gas in his face was a way of mocking him and so doing that would make Satan flee. I kid you not.<sup>2</sup>

- **I'll leave deeper explanation of that for another time**, but here's the point: **you need power to resist Satan, and baptism is much more pleasant for those around you than Luther's alternative.**

#### Conclusion:

- The real question: Have you repented? What area do you know he's not Lord of? Do it now.
- Have you been baptized?
  - **Card:** Fill it out.
  - What they'll email you about is **Starting Point**. Every month we offer a class called Starting Point, where you'll get a chance to learn how you can take this next step in baptism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, 469.

