

## Lesson 6 - CHRIST AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN    Matthew 3:1-6

**(Matt. 3:1)** - *“In those days”* - About 28 years have passed since the end of chapter two and the beginning of chapter three. Matthew was not led of the Holy Spirit to record any more information concerning our Lord’s early life or youth. No Gospel writer records any information on the early adult years of Christ’s life on earth. Only Luke gives us a record of the visit of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old (Luke 2:41-52). Here we learn that Jesus knew early on of His mission to fulfill His Father’s will and recognized that His true Father was (and is) Almighty God (Luke 2:49). We also learn from Luke 2:52 that *“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”* All of this can only be attributed to His perfect, sinless human nature without detracting from or denying His infinite, immutable deity. The constitution of our Savior’s Person is an astounding truth of God’s grace and necessary for our complete salvation by Him as the very righteousness of God (Rom. 1:1-4,16-17). Our limited minds can hardly comprehend it, but we know it is true, and, by God’s grace, we believe it (1 Tim. 3:16). The image of God within Him shone outwardly brighter and brighter as our Lord grew from a child to a youth and to an adult. Following His experience in Jerusalem, we hear nothing of our Lord until He begins His public ministry at the age of thirty.

*“Came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea”* - The appearance of John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah had been foretold by the prophet (Mal. 3:1; 4:5). John avoided the religious establishment of his day because he recognized that they were leading the people astray. He preached in the wilderness where he was raised (Luke 1:80). The Lord commands all of His people not to blend in with the status quo of the false religion of the majority (Rom. 12:1-2). He commands us to follow Christ outside the camp of the world’s religion and ways (Heb. 13:12-14). This is what John the Baptist did. The *“wilderness”* adequately describes the religious climate of John’s day. It was a spiritual wilderness, a desert that was as barren as are the hearts of all men, empty and void of the life of God (Rom. 3:9-19; 5:12). The natural human heart is void of any goodness before God and any desire to seek and follow God. The only hope for a wilderness or desert is for the water of life to come to it. CHRIST IS THAT WATER OF LIFE FOR SINNERS. He revives and refreshes the souls of His people (Isa. 35:3-10).

**(Matt. 3:2)** - *“And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* - Note that this is the same way our Lord began His ministry on earth (Matt. 4:17). Like faith, repentance is a gift from God to His people whereby He brings us to an about-face, a complete reversal of direction, a change of mind and heart, concerning our thoughts about God, self, sin, and salvation. Our natural thoughts on these matters are wrong. The Lord God, by the Spirit, convinces us of our wrong thoughts by showing us His glory in the Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ whereupon He turns us from seeking salvation by our dead works (which are evil) and turns us to salvation by His grace in the Lord Jesus Christ and based on His righteousness alone (Php. 3:3-9). God commands us to repent because He has appointed *“a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31). It is God’s will that all of His people come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9) from dead works (Heb. 6:1), and, through Christ, He assures that this will happen in the hearts of all His people.

The *“kingdom of heaven is at hand”* refers not to a physical kingdom but Christ’s spiritual and eternal kingdom established upon His substitutionary death to redeem His people from their sins. John’s message was that this kingdom was *“at hand,”* i.e. would be ushered in and established by the appearance of the Messiah on earth. Christ had come as the Surety,

Substitute, and Redeemer of God's elect, Jew and Gentile. He had come to offer Himself as the Sacrifice to the justice of God for their sins imputed to Him. Upon His death, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit would be sent and the kingdom of God would be in full force. This is the spiritual, Gospel kingdom realized in the true church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Christ is the King of kings Who rules over this kingdom in grace and power insuring that all of His subjects (God's elect given to Him before the foundation of the world) would be redeemed and brought into this kingdom forever and ever (Col. 1:12-14). It is called "*the kingdom of heaven*" because salvation originated with God in heaven, and we must be born from above to see and enter this kingdom (John 3:3-7). It is a kingdom of righteousness as it is established upon the righteousness of God which is the merit of the obedience unto death of Christ as the sovereign Redeemer of His people (Matt. 5:20; 6:33; Rom. 14:17; Heb. 1:8). The goal of salvation is to make us righteous through the imputed merits of our King (Rom. 4:6-8; 8:33-34; 2 Cor. 5:19-21).

**(Matt. 3:3)** - Matthew leaves no doubt about whom the prophet was speaking in Isaiah 40:3. John is set before us as an example of every true Gospel preacher. He proclaimed Christ crucified (John 1:29) and declared the necessity of repentance of dead works and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same kind of preaching that goes before the arrival of the Son of God. Messiah is more fully set forth by the prophet in Isaiah 40:9-11. He is that One Who appeared to the delight of His people. He fully accomplished the work of redemption and tenderly cares for His people as their Shepherd. "*Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight*" (cf. Luke 1:76) - People must be brought into alignment with the Word of God because our natural thoughts and ways are crooked and perverse. This can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit Who sovereignly, under the Gospel, prepares the people of God to receive Christ and His Word (Matt. 13:23; John 16:8-11; Rom. 1:16-17; 6:17-18; 10:13-17). John realized and admitted that he himself was powerless to do this heart-work within sinners, but he stated that Christ Who would come after him could and does give sinners new life and hearts (Matt. 3:11).

**(Matt. 3:4)** - Like Elijah before him, John's dress and diet were unusual (2 Kings 1:8). He was led and empowered by the same Spirit as Elijah (Luke 1:17; Matt. 11:14). He was not a man given to the finer things of life. His was a simple life-style, and he was committed to the cause of God and truth. His brief ministry was for the purpose of pointing sinners to and exalting the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

**(Matt. 3:5-6)** - All sorts of people went out to hear John preach, and many submitted to his baptism by which they acknowledged personal guilt and faith in the coming Messiah. Their baptism, like ours, was a public confession of and identification with Christ as their Savior from sin. It said that they were people who need and rely upon Christ for all salvation, forgiveness, righteousness, eternal life, and glory. The ordinance of baptism always follows faith in Christ and repentance of dead works (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:37). This ordinance leads us to reflect on the substitutionary death of Christ which is symbolized by being immersed in a watery grave and raised up by the power of another, even as Christ was raised by the power of God. As baptism is the work of the one who administers it, so salvation is solely the work of God. "*Salvation is of the LORD*" (Jon. 2:9).