

## **Jesus Rediscovered**

### **Be prepared**

We are about to embark on a new series looking at Matthews's gospel chapters 3-7. I have called the series 'Jesus Re-discovered' which was a book title by an atheistic journalist called Malcolm Muggeridge who set out to prove the gospels wrong and rather than confirming his deepest suspicions he was compelled by the evidence and bit by bit as he discovered Jesus for himself and became a committed believer and a follower of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

But for each of us, as we go back to the gospel there is a re-discovery of things forgotten and of things we never new or have previously missed. That makes a series like this exciting. We will be led by Matthew into his world to hear a compelling message of good news for the nations. We will be introduced to new characters. We will enter into a another world of sights, smells and belief. We will enter into the era when the fabric of time itself was torn open and the God of eternity stepped through. We will meet Jesus, we will hear him speak, as we watch and listen on the sidelines we may even catch his eye and sense him looking into our very soul. He may even stop and touch us and provide what it is we are needing – for some it will be his greatest gift - salvation, others renewal, others strength, some direction, some rebuke, some encouragement.

We will sit with the others and we will be taught by him – like children or students in a classroom. Discipled by the Son of God himself. He will teach us what faith is, about worry, about prayer, about divorce, about giving, about turning the other cheek and a whole raft of other things. And as we listen to him we will share the reactions of the people of his time. Some did not understand at first but in time things became clear. Some turned away saying this is too hard. Others yielded their lives and were transformed and rejoiced to see the salvation they received.

We will be challenged to our bootstraps and we will hear words the will delight our hearts and make our souls sing. We will question ourselves. We will question God and he will question us. I think because of this encounter with Jesus and his gospel over the coming weeks we will never be the same again – we will all be changed in some way!

Do you want to hear more? Are you ready for what you will hear?

If we were to step out of chapter two and into chapter 3 we would step across a gap of 25-30 years. Matthew unashamedly moves on from Jesus birth because Matthews purpose is to show us that this Jesus brought up in the obscurity of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, the one God would send not just to save and deliver the Jewish nation but all the nations of the earth

and so he skips from Jesus birth to the beginning of his public ministry.

Okay, enough of the preamble. Let's get to the text.

3:1 "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching the Desert of Judea"

So here we are introduced to our first character – John the Baptist. He is the first prophet in the nation for 400 years. The last one was Malachi. We know he is a prophet because in verse 4 we read

"John's clothes were made of Camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was wild locusts and honey."

What do you think his message will be?

You might be tempted to think he is a bit cuckoo living in the desert and so on. But all these details are important.

**2 Kings 1:8** They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt round his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

Elijah was the archetypal prophet. He set the standard for prophetic garb. Camel hair and leather belt! There is also a reference in Zechariah 13:4 to something similar which was 400 years later.

The prophecies about the coming of God's Messiah/Deliverer also said that Elijah would come first. Here is a man in the mould of Elijah preparing the world for the coming of the son of God.

Matthew is trying to help us put together the pieces of prophecy from the Old Testament so he constantly points in these first few chapters how the prophecies were being fulfilled. John is in the mould of Elijah (tell that from what he is wearing) and he is in the desert just like Isaiah prophesied some 700 years earlier

*Vs 3 "This is the one who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:*

*'A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'"*

He is to be The Messiah's Messenger

### **The Messiah's Messenger**

He is the warm up act. He is the one who comes before the arrival of the Kingly Son of God to make preparations.

So here we are with the crowds of folks from Jerusalem, Judea and Jordan. We are in the desert. It's hot. We are on the banks of the Jordan river. We are listening to this bearded bloke dressed in camel hair, who lives in the

desert and eats wild honey and locusts. This is a guy who is serious about his business. His business is to prepare the way for the Son of God (my goodness what a task). His business is to make straight paths for him so we can expect some no nonsense straight to the point preaching. We are at the back of the crowd like all Presbyterians. What was that? It is tricky to hear but the wind blows in our direction and we get what he is saying full in the face

“Repent for the kingdom of God is near” (vs 2)

Did he say repent? Yes he did. This is his message. This is the preparation!

Imagine if some bloke was out in the wilds beyond Dunblane living rough dressed in camel's hair and telling folks to repent. How do you think he would go down? How would you react?

In my experience people in wider society would say things like

‘But I am not a sinner what do I need to repent for?’

‘Go and tell that to the terrorists they are the real sinners’

‘But sin makes life more interesting – fun’

‘oh, that is a very negative message john you'll never get them coming back to church with that message

John here try focussing on something more positive – I've been reading this very interesting book on self

fulfilment how about something like that? Here have a read of it I've finished with it.”

Repentance is often seen as a negative thing but we practice it every day in our homes and lives. What do I mean e.g. when a child sklocks another child on the head the relationship is damaged and in order to repair the relationship we look for genuine remorse, saying sorry and a change of behaviour ie no more punching or whatever. You r looking for a change of heart attitude and behaviour aren't you?

The bible story is all about the reparation of a damaged relationship between the created and the creator. Between us and God.

(damaged reln in your life?)

So repentance rather than a negative is a great thing – it is a gift that enables us to know and walk with out God. It is the path that will lead us straight to the Lord.

(Fist clenched preaching or hands open invitation?)

Repentance is then a genuine sorrow for our sin that is ultimately a rebellion against God. Saying sorry and changing our behaviour as a sign of genuine sorrow.

What do you make of that?

It's not easy to swallow is it?

In other areas in life as we have said we practice this very idea. Families. In a similar way the government is doing something with smokers – new pictures of lung disease and so on cigarette packets – they are pushing for a change of lifestyle and practice. In the same way God is looking for a change of lifestyle and practice. But ultimately what John is talking about is not just changing this part of our lives or that it is ultimately turning the very core and orientation of your life so that it is God ward. So that all that we do and are ultimately surrendered to the Lordship of Christ (Monk?) and in the coming weeks we will hear exactly what that entails.

We will hear the same message from the lips of Jesus 4.17 'repent for the kingdom of God is near'.

And it doesn't seem to matter who you are you get the same message from John. Check what he has to say to the religious leaders.

Vs 7 there they are in all there religious get up, looking superior, comparing notes on his theology and bamb!

'You brood of vipers' vs 7 they all look behind because surely he can't be talking to them. 'Yes you'. 'who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.'

Careful John these men can have you stoned you know.

John is wanting to shock them out of their folly and call them vipers. Snakes. Of course in biblical imagery the snake is the Devil and his work! Being religious and being of a particular race or denomination isn't going to get you into heaven either boys so you can forget that nonsense.

You hear sniggers from the crowd. Some of them are loving this. The smart-alex Pharisees and the pompous Saducees are getting it from John too. Now there is a turn up for the books. You see we need to make sure our best religious intentions are right by God's standards. These guys were very religious but it was doing them no good. In fact it was leading them away from God. Don't all religions lead to God? No says John. In fact some lead you away from God. Religions, like the Pharisees and Saducees that focus on getting enough good works to get to heaven.

Church leaders - ministers, elders come under fire here. We are being asked to examine our lives and repent and beware. These leaders because they preferred the traditions of men kept people back from knowing God and they are slammed because of it. But also ministers and elders need to ask is there anything in our lives we need to repent of, that is not honouring God.

So here is the Messiah's Messenger making a straight path to the Lord - a path called repentance. But also telling us about the Messiah's Ministry.

## **Messiah's Ministry**

What do you imagine the ministry of Jesus to be?

John is going to describe it to us vs 11-12

Vs 11 'I baptise you with water for repentance. (In other words all I can do is make you wet.) But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. (slaves carried sandals John does not think himself worth of being the lowliest in Christ's kingdom.)

John is here to tell about one more powerful. Powerful is a title of God in the book of Daniel. God is coming and he will do one of two things. He will baptise with the Holy Spirit which is another way of talking about bringing salvation/ redemption/ deliverance and he will baptise with fire which is another way of talking about judgement.

What we do with Jesus the Messiah and his call on our lives will determine whether we are willing to accept God's work in our lives or not. Jesus brings about a parting of ways. He will bring people to decision points – we will see that again and again.

His way or the world's way. God's love or God's wrath. Heaven or hell.

That is the unchanging message of the gospel for 2000 years. Jesus has come as the saviour of the world but he will also be its judge at the end of time. That is the Messiah's ministry.

John comes as the Messiah's Messenger proclaiming The Saviour of the world is coming – Hallelujah. Our Saviour and our judge - be ready. Then in the narrative we are introduced to the messiah, to the saviour.

## **The Messiah**

Vs 13 “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John”

Now baptism was for the repentance of sin. Jesus had not sinned and so John rightly tried to dissuade him vs 14. Saying no no no I need to be baptised by you with your holy spirit!

Vs 15 I need to do this to to obey everything that it means to be right with God and as soon as he rises from the water God reveals himself. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is on a mission Father, Son and Holy Spirit come to save humanity from themselves, from their sin and return to him and know a better way to live life before him and the world. To live out his kingdom mandate which we will be hearing all about in the

coming weeks. But for the moment hear a Father's delight in his Son. "This is my son whom I love and am well pleased". They are words echoed in Psalm 2 at the coronation of kings and In Isaiah 42:1

"He is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight: I will put my Spirit in him and he will bring justice to the nations..." Another prophecy about the messiah from 700 years before that Jesus fulfils. He is the King of Kings who will come to bring justice and salvation to the nations".

In the coming weeks then we be reminded how to get right with God – to receive that baptism in the holy spirit – salvation and also how to live God's way.

For today you might be thinking Gosh I am a bit new to all this. I am not sure of I have repented of my sins – turned the orientation of y life to God – or I have slipped back from this - then today's the day. Today is the day to say sorry to God and start afresh with him.

You might be thinking I want to walk right with God. The prayer is then Lord show me where I am falling short, those ways in my life I am not right with you.

In those ways we will begin to see more of God in our lives and his saving, redeeming and life changing purposes. That will set us up nicely for what we are going to be learning from Jesus in the coming weeks.

Let me close with a quote from Malcolm Muggeridge

"It was while I was in the Holy Land for the purpose of making three B.B.C. television programmes on the New Testament that a curious, almost magical, certainty seized me about Jesus' birth, ministry and Crucifixion . . . I became aware that there really had been a man, Jesus, who was also God - I was conscious of his presence. He really had spoken those sublime words - I heard them. He really had died on a cross and risen from the dead. Otherwise, how was it possible for me to meet him, as I did? . . . The words Jesus spoke are living words, as relevant today as when they were first spoken; the light he shone continues to shine as brightly as ever. Thus he is alive,. . . The Cross is where history and life, legend and reality, time and eternity, intersect. There, Jesus [was] nailed . . .to show us how God could become a man and a man [come to] God."

John the Messiah's messenger gives us a glimpse of the messiah's ministry and introduces the world to the Messiah – God's saviour for the nations.