

Matthew 3:1-6

Kevin Cauley

Please open your Bibles to [Matthew 3:1-6](#)

Having testified concerning Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy in his birth, Matthew now moves on to Jesus years of ministry. Matthew begins at this point in the history of Jesus life because the critical years of Jesus life were from the time of his baptism to the time of his ascension. It was these years that the apostles required one to witness in order for Judas successor to be named ([Acts 1:22](#)). These were the years in which Jesus ministry began, in which he taught the gospel, and in which he gave his life to redeem the sins of man. Jesus' teaching and actions in those years were the things the apostles were to pass on to others in their work and ministry.

In chapter two, Matthew introduces us to the herald of the King and the coming kingdom. Matthew then shows that the herald recognized his King and that God also testified that Jesus was the King upon the occasion of Jesus' baptism.

Vs. 1 – What are “those days?” Likely the days in which Jesus was still living in the city of Nazareth. Matthew fast forwards through time here in order to bring us past the intervening years of Jesus' life to begin discussion of Jesus' ministry. We have no reason to believe that beyond the events that surrounded his birth that Jesus had a childhood unlike any other, saving that he committed no sin.

John the Baptizer is more accurate than John the Baptist. John was not a “Baptist” or a member of any other denomination for that matter. He was described as “a baptizer” because that is what he did. He baptized. Modern day Baptists (the denomination) gain no credibility by pointing to John's description here and claiming it as their title. The church that belongs to Christ ought to have that right and proper name by which her Lord and Savior would be honored ([Matthew 16:18](#), [Romans 16:16](#), [Ephesians 5:23](#)) and so ought her members to carry the name of Christ, Christian ([Acts 11:26](#)).

Luke tells us that John was Jesus' cousin by birth of Mary's sister, Elizabeth. John's father, Zacharias, was a priest and John's birth was surrounded by unusual events as was Jesus'. One may read [Luke 1](#) to learn of those things. John was approximately six months older than Jesus, at least, in human age.

Matthew tells us that John “came preaching.” The word for “preaching” here is from the Greek word kerusso and signifies ringing out a message so that all may hear. John was the first to herald forth the message that God's kingdom was soon coming.

John preached this message in the desert area of Judea somewhere near where the Jordan comes into the Dead Sea. This area, while not completely devoid of human life, was, and is fairly barren. That's not to say that it was a desert of sand, but a wilderness of scrub brush, boulders, and wild animals ([Mark 1:13](#)).

Vs. 2 – Here is the message that John preached. Repentance is a change of mind that results in reformation of life. Repentance is not a mere acknowledgment of sorrow ([2 Corinthians 7:9,10](#)), but a willingness to make permanent change in one's life. John's message was that the Jewish people needed to change from their sinful ways because the kingdom of heaven was coming. The kingdom of heaven does not admit those who revel in sin ([Galatians 5:19-21](#)). One must repent of sin and be forgiven before becoming one of its citizens ([Acts 2:38](#)).

Vs. 3 -The Jewish people knew of John and his ministry. They all went out to hear him ([Matthew 3:5](#)). The Jewish leaders recognized that the people believed John to be a prophet ([Matthew 11:32](#)). However, there was some confusion as to what John's purpose as a prophet was among them. Some even went so far as to confuse him with Jesus ([Matthew 16:14](#)). Here, Matthew makes it plain that John was Jesus herald as predicted by Isaiah. The prophecy is found in [Isaiah 40:3-5](#). Not only then did John's ministry bear record of his divine approval, but also the prophetic record.

In Matthew's day and age, a herald was one who would go ahead of the king to whatever city or town the king was about to enter and proclaim that the king was coming and for the city to make everything ready for his arrival. The herald would also ensure that appropriate engineering was accomplished to level the hills and fill in the ditches so that the king would have a smooth and easy journey to conduct his business. In parallel, then, this was John's great work; to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus as Messiah; to tear down the hills of impenitence and disobedience, to fill in the valleys of indifference and apathy, to call the people back to considering the right ways of the Lord. And so John did indeed prepare and when the Lord appeared, he testified as to His presence. The King is here!

Vs. 4 – John wore a coat of crude camel's hair, but not the fine hairs used in today's manufacture. He wore a leathern girdle. The same was said of Elijah ([2 Kings 1:8](#)). This was fitting for the one who came in the spirit and power of Elijah ([Luke 1:17](#)). He ate locusts which were more similar to our modern day grasshoppers than to what we in the United States style as locusts. Honey also was his food. He gleaned it from wild bees. John wore only the essential things that he needed to wear; no fancy fineries of which the Sanhedrin afforded themselves ([Matthew 23:5](#)). He ate only what he needed to sustain his life. What privations John endured to serve his God! His sacrifice reminds us of those great heroes of faith discussed in [Hebrews 11:32-40](#). Here is a great lesson to us all regarding self-sacrifice for the sake of God's kingdom.

Vs. 5-6 – Certainly thousands, perhaps millions, came to hear John preach, even publicans ([Luke 3:12](#)) soldiers ([Luke 3:14](#)) and the religious leaders of the day ([Matthew 3:7](#)). Even so, we should regard these verses as an example of hyperbole because not all of these were baptized of John. The Pharisees were not ([Luke 7:30](#)). Verses five and six comprise one sentence the subject of which is Jerusalem, Judea, and the region.

Additionally, this is a compound sentence with two predicates. The subject of the first sentence acts as both the subject of the first and second predicate. Hence, since we know that not everyone was baptized of John, we ought not to interpret these verses literally,

but as an example of hyperbole. [Luke 7:29](#) tells us what category of listeners were obedient to John's message of baptism, namely, the common people. John's words were God's counsel ([Luke 7:30](#)). Rejection of God's counsel only served to condemn one's self. Would the situation be any different today in regard to Christian baptism?

The apostle John tells us that John baptized in the river Jordan because there was "much water" ([John 3:23](#)). The Greek word baptizo means to dip or to plunge. The verb is in the imperfect tense here indicating repetition of the act among all of the numerous people who came. "Confessing" is also in the imperfect tense indicating the near simultaneous occurrence of these two actions. They would confess and baptized, confess and be baptized, confess and be baptized, one after the other.

This was no mere sprinkling or pouring of water upon the heads of those who came. They were submerged beneath the Jordan and subsequently came up "out of the water" ([Matthew 3:16](#)). They confessed their sins because it was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins ([Luke 3:3](#)). Thus, it required fruits that were suitable for repentance ([Luke 3:8](#)). Hence John required them to confess their sins prior to their being baptized to show their repentance and make them proper candidates for baptism. John's baptism is similar to Christian baptism in this regard, but not the same in that it looked forward to the coming Messiah. Christian baptism looks back. See [Acts 19:1-7](#).

This is the second time we have come across the word "sin" in our study. The first was in [Matthew 1:21](#) in reference to Jesus' mission. Here we find it in reference to confession and the act of baptism. It is no coincidence. Both the shedding of Christ blood ([Matthew 26:28](#)) and baptism ([Acts 2:38](#)) are said to be "for the remission of sins." It is appropriate that Matthew so associate the two early in his account.

Sin is the problem with which Jesus dealt. It is here represented as prohibiting those who have it in their lives from entering the coming kingdom ([Matthew 3:2](#)). Jesus solves the problem of man's sin through forgiveness and instruction. Jesus purchased the opportunity for all men to be forgiven when he gave his blood on the cross ([Matthew 26:28](#)). Forgiveness is then offered to the sinner based upon the sinner's repentance and obedience ([Acts 5:31,32](#)). Instruction then takes over in the life of the Christian in an effort to prevent him from continuing in a life of sin ([Romans 6:1,12,13](#)). This is not to say that the Christian won't ever sin ([1 John 1:8-10](#)). It is, however, to say that God intends to reduce the amount of sin a Christian may commit through teaching him not to sin and to warn the Christian regarding the dangers of deliberately committed sin ([Hebrews 10:26](#)). Why is sin so terrible? Because it is that which separates man from God ([Isaiah 59:2](#)) and which will ultimately condemn man to a Devil's hell ([Romans 6:23](#)). How fortunate we are to have a High Priest who has been touched with the feeling of our infirmities, yet without sin ([Hebrews 4:15](#))! He has thus architected our salvation, but not without our own obedience ([Hebrews 5:9](#)).