

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew** 15- The King Begins His Ministry

Church June 05, 2022

Matthew 4:12-17

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee;

13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES —

16 "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

The Passage that Brother Vern just read to you is the Apostle Matthew's Account of how Jesus began His Ministry and why the earthly Ministry of the King of all other kings and the Lord over all other lords was headquartered in Capernaum- rather than Jerusalem.

It is usually protocol for visiting royal dignitaries to go to the capitol city of whatever county they visit- because that is where the King or the President or the Ruler is; and that makes their visit very formal and official. And, many times, that formal visit will bring about Treaties or new Laws or other Accomplishments between Nations. And that is why the Magi went into Jerusalem rather than Bethlehem- so they could meet the Ruler (Herod) and tell him that they had seen His star and had come to worship the "*King of the Jews.*"

So, naturally, you would expect the King of the whole Universe to headquarter His Ministry in the capitol city of Jerusalem- or maybe even Rome

itself. After all, He would have the attention of the entire Country; or the entire Empire and more people would know about it- so the publicity itself would have been enormous.

And that is what successful businessmen; and the “movers and shakers” of our Culture; and what politicians and church- growth gurus would have done. Because when you are starting something new- say, “*Christianity*” you’re looking for *maximum* publicity and *maximum* attention- with the people who can “*make things happen*”.

You see, there are three kinds of people on earth. There are those who “*make things happen*”; and those who “*watch things happen*”; and those who say, “*What happened?*” And there are literally thousands of books that have been written that teach that when you begin a local church; or a new Business; or when you begin a new Religion- you want as many eyeballs and warm bodies as possible to greet you; and meet you; and become a part of what you’re trying to do. You want to “*connect*”; and “*network*”; and you utilize all of your “*entrepreneurial creativity*” to find your “*nitch*”; that makes you “*stand out from the crowd*”- so you can draw attention to yourself.

When Dwight Moody, the famous Evangelist began his tent revival in Chicago- back in the 19th Century- in his very first Service- the tent was almost completely empty. And a man, who was there said that God told him to climb the middle pole that held the tent up- right in the middle of Moody’s Sermon. And it just so happened that a reporter for the Chicago Tribune was there that night. And the next morning on the front page of the paper was this huge story about a crazy man, who climb the tent pole in the middle of the church service. So, that night- people came from all over Chicago to watch the crazy man- but instead they heard a powerful Sermon and Moody’s Ministry was off and running.

And History is filled with stories about very famous people, who began something new and the gimmicks and tactics they used to get people to come to their Meetings; or buy their Product; or join their Movement.

Yet when it came time for the incarnate God to begin His 3-1/2- year earthly Ministry- Jesus did NOT go to Rome or Jerusalem. He didn’t meet with the politicians or the rulers or the wealthy businessmen. He didn’t network or connect or do anything that the most successful entrepreneurs would have done. Instead, Jesus chose a small, obscure, unimportant city or village in the northern part of the Roman occupied Province of 1st Century Palestine- which was called, “*Capernaum*”.

Now Capernaum as a city doesn’t even exist today. But when Jesus went there to begin His Ministry- Capernaum was a little over 78 miles north of Jerusalem- about the distance from Gulfport to New Orleans. And back in the 1st Century- it was a small fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee

that contained about 1500 people. Its original Hebrew name was “*Kfar Nahum*” which meant, “*Village of Comfort*”. And when the Jewish historian, Josephus wrote about it- the name in Koine Greek¹ was, “*Kapharnaoum*”. Later, they anglicized that Greek name and it is known to us today as, “*Capernaum*”.

Now Capernaum was established as a city around the 2nd Century BC and was continually occupied until the 1st Crusade in the 11th Century. And this city/town/village is cited in all four Gospel Records (**Matthew 4:13, 8:5, 11:23, 17:24, Mark 1:21, 2:1, 9:33, Luke 4:23, 31,7:1, 10:15, John 2:12, 4:46, 6:17, 24, 59**).

What is fascinating is that Capernaum could possibly be the hometown of Matthew, the former tax collector and writer of the Gospel we are studying. And it is a little less than 20 miles from Bethsaida- the hometown of the Apostles Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John.

According to both **Mark 1:21-28** and **Luke 4:31-36**, Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum and healed a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. And afterward, Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (**Luke 4:38-39**). According to **Luke 7:1-10** and **Matthew 8:5**, this is also the place where Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion who had asked for his help. Capernaum is also the location of the healing of the paralytic lowered by friends through the roof to reach Jesus, as reported in both **Mark 2:1-12** and **Luke 5:17-26**.

In **Matthew 9:1**- the Apostle infallibly wrote:

Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city.

... and the phrase, “**His own city**” was referring to Capernaum.

This has allowed some to suggest that Jesus actually owned a home in this village. However, that is unlikely as in both **Matthew 8:20** and **Luke 9:58**, Jesus Himself said,

The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.

But in spite of the many Miracles and wondrous Works and powerful infallible Teaching that Jesus did in Capernaum- the former tax collector wrote this amazing Passage in **Matthew 11:2-24**, which says:

¹ Koine Greek is the type of Greek in which the majority of the New Testament was originally written. The first seven verses of Luke's Gospel Record was written in Classical Greek- which was reserved for the highly educated in the first Century.

20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.

21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

23 "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

... and all that is left of Capernaum today is a few ruins- one of which is supposedly Peter's house.

So, we must always remember this great Mystery: that even though we are *commanded* to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature- God Himself must open the heart of the people we preach to- or else NOBDOY will repent; NOBODY will believe; and NOBODY will be saved. If God has not chosen them to save them- they will NOT come to Jesus and they will die in their Sins.

Now we have no idea who God has chosen- so we must preach to *everyone*. And we must work lovingly and faithfully and patiently with each one that God brings through the front door of this church- no matter how sinful they have been. And if they turn on us; or hate us; or when they slander us; or when they love us; and believe what we teach- however it goes- we must always be the same. Pastors and Elders are not here for our own Good. We are not doing this to build up our own name or so that people will make much of us. People who are called to the Ministry are doing what we do- for the Glory of God and for the Good of God's people. And so, we carry on- no matter what people say or what people do.

I personally believe what Charles Spurgeon taught- that the Great Commission will ultimately be successful- and MORE people will be Saved than Lost when Jesus returns. In fact, I believe that amazing Victory is what will bring Jesus back- when the enemies of God are made a footstool for His Feet- through Conversion. **Psalm 110:1** says,

The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

So, Jesus is ruling and reigning right now- in Heaven. And He is at the “Right Hand” of the Lord God Almighty. And He will remain there- seated- Until... Until... something marvelous happens:

... Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.

And that is done when we go into all the Nations and preach the Gospel to every creature. And ALL of God’s elect will be saved- no matter what their background; or nationality; or culture; or language; or custom; or tribe.

So, simply because they persecute us today- does not mean they won’t be saved- and all their house- tomorrow (**The Acts 16**). And simply because they reject us today- does not mean they won’t receive what some other faithful Preacher says tomorrow and be saved. And that is why the Apostle Paul said this in **1Corinthians 3:6&7**:

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

So, the small fishing village in which the incarnate Son of God chose to begin His earthly Ministry; and where He mercifully healed people and where He graciously performed many Miracles- became the very place where Jesus issued a “*Divine Curse*” and a “*Divine Condemnation*” because they refused to believe.

Now please read again

Matthew 4:12&13:

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee;

13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Now there were no newspapers or radio or television or the internet back then. So, all they had was “word of mouth”. And so, somebody, probably John’s disciples, found out that John had been captured and put into Prison. And they told others, who told others, who told still others. And eventually, word came to Jesus that John the Baptist was in Prison.

But instead of going to the Prison- to pray with John; or to encourage him; or to try to get him out- Matthew tells us here that Jesus travelled almost 80 miles north and “withdrew” to Galilee.

Now after Jesus ascended into Heaven- God the Holy Spirit “moved” on several men- many of them Apostles (like Matthew) and, over the next few decades- they wrote the 27 Books of the New Testament. And one of the common themes that runs through the 20 Epistles- is that believers are told to visit other believers, who have been imprisoned.

Now we need to remember that back in the 1st Century- Christianity was an illegal and persecuted Religion. And so, many genuine believers were arrested and thrown into Prison where they were beaten; and tortured; and martyred. They were not in Prison because they wrote bad checks or because they sold dope on the street corner. They were imprisoned for being a believer and follower of Jesus.

Now most Christians here in America are NOT imprisoned. Our Persecution mainly involves being talked about; shunned; and having inheritances or promotions on the job taken from us. Most of the people in Prison today are there because they were doing something that the Bible tells us NOT to do.²

But back in the 1st Century- genuine believers were cast into Prison for being genuine believers. And in the Epistles- those imprisoned believers are clearly and repeatedly told to remain faithful- even unto Death- while we are clearly and repeatedly told to go to the Prisons and pray with and for our covenant brothers and sisters.

But when a Christian was imprisoned- the stigma of that spilled over to his entire family. So, nobody would hire the family member of a man, who had been imprisoned for being a Christian. Their businesses and money and land and houses were taken from them; they were shunned and abandoned. No doctor would treat their illnesses. They couldn't run for political office; they couldn't buy land; and they couldn't own many possessions. They were treated like lepers. And many unnamed believers; who were truly saved; and who remained faithful to the End literally starved to death for the crime of loving Jesus. And their names have been lost to us- and we will never know their Testimony until we join them in Glory- but they are rejoicing in Heaven even this moment!

So, the very Act of going to the Prison to pray for them was like hanging a sign around your neck that read, “*I believe what this man believes! I am a brother in Christ to this man and we agree about Jesus!*” And so, as the Church obeyed the Bible and went to the Prisons to pray with their brothers- many times, they were arrested; and their families never saw them again. And yet they were faithful to go and pray!

Yet here we see Jesus- as soon as He heard that John had been arrested- He “withdrew” to Galilee. And Jesus never saw John again- until He ascended into

² Even though the Command to visit the people in Prison was, in context, referring to genuine believers, it is still appropriate for believers to preach the Gospel in Prison today.

Heaven. But Jesus never went to pray with John and there is no record that Jesus even sent an encouraging word to him.

Now keep in mind that other believers WERE going to pray with John and encourage him (**Matthew 11:3**). But not Jesus. So, is this a case of a Leader not doing what he has told his followers to do? Was Jesus a Hypocrite for not following His Own Instructions? No, and here is why:

The single most important thing that Jesus could do during the next 3-1/2 years is to *fulfill* the law of Moses. Because if Jesus leaves a single tenet of the Law unfulfilled- we all go to Hell. If the Law is not totally fulfilled in Who Jesus is and What Jesus does over the next 3-1/2 years- we are doomed; and we will die in our Sins.

The Messiah, whoever He is- MUST completely and totally fulfill ALL of what God gave to Moses- in order for the New Covenant Promises to come to pass. In other words, in order for the Sins of Gentiles to be forgiven and in order for guilty sinners to become Righteous; in order for God to do all of that- WITHOUT animal sacrifices- but by the shedding of the Blood of a perfectly sinless (spotless) human being- Moses' Law MUST be completely fulfilled. Because if it isn't- then we have NO hope.

A sinless, spotless, perfectly Righteous human being- born of a woman- MUST be given ALL of our Sins and die with them on himself- or we are doomed. And the ONLY way that a human being can become perfectly Righteous- is by keeping ALL of the Law- All of the time. So, Jesus MUST be tempted- in ALL points as we are- yet WITHOUT Sin- or we are doomed. Jesus MUST perfectly obey ALL that God told Moses to write down; and He MUST obey it all in Thought, Word, and Deed- 24/7; and He MUST obey it all with total Delight and Joy- or we are doomed.

So, Jesus MUST be crushed by God- or we are doomed. God MUST pour out the fullness of His terrifying Wrath against Sin on Jesus- or we are doomed. And Jesus MUST die with ALL of our Sins upon Him- or we are doomed. And then Jesus MUST rise again WITHOUT our Sins- leaving them in the ground and underneath the Damnation of God- or we are doomed.

And THAT is THE single MOST important thing that Jesus can do- over the next 3-1/2 years- or all of God's elect will NOT be saved. So, several times, when angry Jews wanted to kill Jesus- He either vanished or walked right through them or He simply disappeared. Jesus will NOT allow Man to kill Him until it is time. And it will NOT be time- until Jesus fulfills the Law. Remember what Jesus said in

John 10:17&18:

17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.

But the flip side is also true. And when the Jews, who were, at least, *temporarily* pleased with Him and wanted to make Him a King right then and there- Jesus would have none of it (**John 6:15**). And He resisted that as well. Why? Because it wasn't time for Jesus to be coronated. Jesus came to this earth to die- not to be crowned. Not yet.

So, Jesus withdrew to Galilee because it was NOT time for Him to die. And Matthew tells us that Jesus left His boyhood home of Nazareth and,

... settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

So, was Jesus afraid? No. It has always amazed me to hear preachers talk about the reason Jesus was crying at the funeral of Lazarus was because He loved him so much. But Jesus waited and didn't go down and heal him sooner- precisely because He already knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. So, no, He was NOT crying because his friend had died. He was crying because NOBODY believed! Mary didn't believe; Martha didn't believe; and the others that He had spent so much time with- they didn't believe either.

And the same thing is true about this Issue about why Jesus settled in Galilee. Jesus was NOT afraid. He had already been in Heaven with God for all of Eternity. He knew what Heaven was like. We fear Death because it is an unknown to us. But it was NOT unknown to Jesus. So, He wasn't afraid. Jesus was *perfectly* obedient to His Father; and He was being perfectly led by God the Holy Spirit- and it simply wasn't time for Him to die. THAT is why He went to Galilee.

Okay, but why did God want Jesus to go there? Matthew tells us that by going there- Jesus would fulfill the Old Testament Prophecy given by the Prophet in **Isaiah 9:1&2** and **60:1-3**

14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES —

16 "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."

... and Matthew wanted his Jewish readers to know that Jesus was the fulfillment of those Prophecies- thus making Him to be the Messiah.

Now before we can possibly understand why Jesus did the things He did in His 3-1/2 year earthly Ministry- we must try to get into the mind and heart of the first man, who chronicled the Birth, Life, Ministry, Death, and Resurrection of the Jewish Messiah; the Christ; the Anointed One- the incarnate God- a man, who was originally given the name of "*Levi Mahtityahu*" at birth by his Jewish parents. And this name means, "*Gift from God*" in Hebrew. Later, his name was "anglicized" to just, "*Matthew*" at some point AFTER he wrote this Record.

But we need to remember that Matthew was a Jew, who, before he was saved- betrayed his own people and became a despised tax collector. But, before God created anything- He "set His Love" upon this Jewish sinner; and God *predestined* him to be saved; and to become one of only thirteen people³ in the history of the world that were called, "*Apostles*." These men were called the "*Shahlia*" to the Jews- which meant they were the men who were chosen to represent Jesus; and who had the SAME Authority and the SAME Power as Jesus.

So, Matthew wanted to reach his Jewish brethren with the "*Story of Jesus*" (Greek; *Euangelion*)- the "*Good News*"- the "*Gospel*"- that tells all people everywhere that Jesus lived and died and rose again to save them from the frightening Wrath of God- that the Almighty is "**storing up**" (**Romans 2:5**) for those who have sinned against him and who have *refused* to repent.

But Matthew is also interested in making sure that the Jews, who would read His Gospel Record- saw that Jesus was:

- The long-awaited Messiah
- Immanuel (God with us)
- The 2nd and last Adam
- The 2nd and last Moses
- The Son of Abraham
- The Son of David
- The King of the Jews

... Who was now going to lead God's people through the 2nd and last

³ I arrived at the number 13 from taking the original twelve Apostles- and subtracted Judas, the Traitor; and then added both Matthias and Paul.

“*Exodus*”- out of Sin’s (Egypt’s) Bondage and into Heaven (the new Promised Land).

And Jesus was going to do that by saving the souls of the “*Elect*”- which now consist of *both* Jews and Gentiles, who have been predestined for Salvation from before the Foundation of the world! And so, their 2nd and last “*Journey through the Wilderness*” was going to be their lifelong walk with God as they are opposed by the World; and the Flesh; and the Devil- on their way to Heaven which is the 2nd and last “*Promised Land*”.

Another way that Matthew is going to describe Jesus’ earthly Ministry is by telling his Jewish readers (and us) that Jesus is the King- Who is now “setting up” His new Kingdom on the earth- where His people will rule and reign with Him as both Kings and Priests.

Remember from **Matthew 3:2** what John the Baptists’ Message was:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

... and we find that phrase, “*the Kingdom of Heaven*” ONLY in Matthew’s Gospel Record. All of the other three Records of Jesus use the phrase, “*the Kingdom of God*”. Now there is a reason Matthew used this phrase and the others didn’t. And we will get into that in the future, but for now- we need to understand why the people needed to repent? Because John is the *fulfillment* of the Prophecies from both Isaiah and Malachi that said:

Isaiah 40:1-5

1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.

2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the Lord's hand Double for all her sins."

3 A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

4 "Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley;

5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Now the “**warfare**” to which verse 2 refers is the ongoing Battle that Sin causes between the individual and God- making that person an “*Enemy of God*”. And God said here that He would sovereignly “remove” the Sin (iniquity) and by

giving that person who has been cleansed by God- *twice* the Grace that Sin gave them in Wickedness.

And by doing that- by saving that person from the Wrath of God- a “Way in the dark Wilderness” will be cleared; and a “Highway in the Desert” will be given- so that the individual will walk in Holiness and Righteousness.

And this Salvation to unworthy rebels is *symbolized* by using roads and paths- that the Jews would have been familiar with. And so, in verse 4- Isaiah illustrates this Glorious Salvation by saying,

Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley

In other words, by saying that the “**Valleys**” will be raised up and the **Mountains and Hills will be made low**”- Isaiah was telling the Jews that Salvation is coming to them and that the “*Way to God*” is going to be paved and there won’t be any Hinderances or Barriers anymore to reach the Almighty.

We must realize that much thought and planning was done back then about making a trip. There was a lot to consider when trying to go between cities because there was no Highway Department and so, the roads were in terrible shape. Not only were there bandits and thieves all along winding roads- which made travelling very dangerous; not only were there life- threatening hairpin turns way up in the mountains; and flooded roads down in the valleys- but the roads themselves were filled with dead bodies of both man and beast. Also, there were huge holes right in the middle of those roads where people had literally been trying to dig a well to get water; and they came up dry. So, they would simply leave the hole in the road and go somewhere else to dig.

And people would fall off the paths that were high up in the mountains; and they would drown as rivers washed over the roads down in the valleys. And people would fall into those holes all the time and be injured and even killed. And that is why Jesus said this in **Luke 6:39**:

A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit?

... where the word, “**pit**” here had to do with the holes that people dug in the middle of the road to try to get water.

So, the imagery and symbolism of a “Highway” in the desert and a “Way” in the Wilderness; the concept of bringing the mountains down and raising the valleys up- so that people could walk and travel without danger- was like a dream come

true. So, instead of having to risk your life by going up into the mountains on poorly made paths; and being threatened by robbers and bandits; the notion that there would be roads that were smooth and paved and easy and safe to travel on- meant that God had truly done something marvelous.

And all that Symbolism and Imagery was given by the Prophet to signify what was going to happen when God ends the 400 year-old Silence that had been going on since Malachi had uttered his Prophecies. And it was the Imagery of a time when God raises up the Messenger, who would pave the Way to God. And it symbolized an End to their wanderings and their insecurities after having lived under the boot of Gentile occupiers of hundreds of years. And it symbolized a great Time of Repentance. And it was the Imagery of the Reality that in this glorious New Covenant- God would never be distant anymore- but that God Himself would be “with us”. And when that happens-

Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed...

The Glory of God’s Grace in saving unworthy sinners will be clearly seen and displayed and revealed. And when that Glory is seen- God will be praised MORE than by Him doing anything else.

You see, NOTHING that God has ever done; and NOTHING that God will ever do- is anywhere close to the Glory that His Grace manifests when God saves unworthy rebels- by what He alone does for them. God gets MORE Glory doing that- than He does in creating the Universe; or in forming the Nations. And this is *why* the Apostle Paul said this in **Ephesians 1:3-6a**:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,
4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love
5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,
6 to the praise of the glory of His grace...

This says that God’s Grace has a Glory to it; an Importance; a Beauty; a Value to it. And when God demonstrates or displays or shows or reveals His Grace- by saving sinners- then the Glory of that Grace will be seen. And when the Grace of God is seen- through the transformed lives of the Redeemed- that Grace will be praised. And when the Glory of God’s Grace is praised- God will be glorified like nothing else!

And the Prophecy of Isaiah shows us that this new “Way” of Salvation- this Highway in the Desert- is NOT merely for the Jews when he said this in the last part of verse 5:

... And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

What will all flesh see? The Glory of God’s Grace! How will they see it? When God saves the Gentiles! Now remember, this is what God is going to *cause* to happen through the short Ministry of John the Baptist- because John IS the *fulfillment* of verse 3 that says:

A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.

... that’s what John did. Jesus didn’t do this part- John the Baptist did.

So, the Symbolism of “*clearing the Way*” and “*Making smooth the Highway in the desert*” also refers to the “*Gift of Repentance*” which will allow the Separation and the Barrier that is between the people and God (**Isaiah 59:2**) to be removed.

And John the Baptist also fulfilled the Prophecy given by the Prophet in **Malachi 3:1-5** that says:

1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts.

2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

3 "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the Lord of hosts.

So, please notice here that the “**Messenger**” that “**clears the way before Me**” comes BEFORE the “Lord” Who will “*suddenly come to His Temple*”. So, John the Baptist is that “Messenger” and Jesus is the “Lord” in that Prophecy. And the Reason that John the Baptist MUST come BEFORE the Lord- is because Malachi says that the Lord- Who is the Messenger of the New Covenant (verse 1)- MUST be “**delighted in**”. But before they were saved- the people as a whole did NOT delight themselves in the Lord. Israel was filled with idols in the 1st Century and MOST Jews had totally given up in trying to be faithful to the Old Covenant.

And that is the very reason *why* the Pharisees rose up. The Old Covenant speaks NOTHING of Pharisees. Moses NEVER authorized them; and the Prophets didn’t predict them. The Pharisees existed for one Reason: *The Jewish people had drifted away from God*. And so, the Pharisees took it upon themselves to build “Synagogues”- NOT “Temples”- all throughout Israel as “*Teaching Centers*” where, supposedly, the Pharisees would teach the people the Law of Moses and correctly interpret the Prophets.

What we need to remember is that the Pharisees were very sincere people. They saw the Sin and Compromise that hundreds of years of occupation by Gentile Nations had brought into their Country- and they wanted the people to return and obey what Moses had given them in the first five Books- called the “*Torah*”. Because those five inspired Books acted as the “*didactic Books*” of the Old Testament. And the word, “*didactic*” comes from a Greek word that has to do with “*teaching godly behavior*”.

But the terrible Irony of the Pharisees is that their fastidious adherence to the Old Covenant Law- helped to cause them to rebel against the END of the Old Covenant; and the dawn of the New that Jesus was bringing with Him. So, in many ways- the Pharisees saw Jesus as their enemy because the very thing they were working so hard to get the people to obey- was being systematically fulfilled in, by, and through Jesus and *eliminated*.

Another aspect of the Pharisees was that while they were personally NOT obeying the Old Covenant- they were holding themselves out to be experts on what Moses wrote in the first five Books (Torah). And so, outwardly they had the Authority to teach the people to obey. And because of that- Jesus said this in **Matthew 23:2b&3**

2 ..."The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

A third Irony about the Pharisees was the fact that in order to get the people to obey Moses- these men literally created a completely different Religion than that which Moses received from God. For example, Moses received from God the Ten Commandments. And under the guise of trying to get the people to obey those Commandments- the Pharisees added hundreds and hundreds of pages of *explanation* of what God told Moses in the Commandments- which in effect- created a different Religion that didn't even resemble what God had spoken. And their additions to the Ten Commandments were so convoluted- that no human on earth could even know if he was being obedient to the Commandments- without consulting with the Pharisees first.

So, their own personal Hypocrisy; combined with their false Teaching; added to their rejection of Who Jesus was and What He was doing- caused these outwardly religious Pharisees to be *further* from the Truth than was a Gentile pagan. And so, Jesus condemned them in the strongest language found anywhere in the Bible. And those who sided with the Pharisees were included in the Lord's Condemnation.

This group of super- religious men, whose sole Mission was supposedly to help bring the people into godly Obedience to the 39 Books of the Old Testament- are the ONLY group of Jews in the Bible that Jesus never said anything Good about. And Jesus' absolute *rejection* of the Pharisees was culminated by the "*Divine Diatribe*" of **Matthew 23**- which is so scathing and so harsh and so brutal- that it is actually frightening.

So, until the New Covenant came in and forever replaced the Old; and until the 27 Books of the New Testament were written- the didactic Books for believers was the Torah. But once the Epistles were written- those 20 Books- which Eusebius, the Church Historian⁴, called, "*the Inspired Letters*" or "*the Memoirs of the Apostles*"- became the didactic Books that taught Christians how to honor God with their daily lives after they were saved.

So, at this moment in Matthew's Gospel Record, John the Baptist has already come. And now Jesus is beginning His earthly Ministry. And John has also initiated water Baptism by immersion; he has now been arrested; and is now imprisoned and will soon have his head cut off. So, at this point- the Ministry of John the Baptist is over. He will never get out of that Prison; he will NEVER baptize another person; he will NEVER preach another Sermon. And that means that at this point- ALL the Prophecies that pertain to John have been fulfilled.

But within those Old Testament Prophecies that predicted who John would be and what he would do- there are parts that pertain to Who Jesus would be and

⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea (265-339 AD); In his writings, Eusebius said that the Apostle John instructed Polycarp to "read from the Memoirs of the Apostles (Epistles) in every Church Service"

What He would do. And the fulfillment of *that* part of those Prophecies is now beginning to be fulfilled as Jesus begins His earthly Ministry.

And Matthew is faithful to tell us that the Main Sermon that John preached is now going to be picked up by Jesus and become His main Sermon. And the Lord Christ- the long-awaited Messiah will now go through all of Israel saying,

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

... and that should be our Message as well.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church PO Box 2906 Gulfport, Mississippi 39505 www.covenantofpeace.net

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.