

Gospel of Matthew

Chapter 3:7-17

“The Lamb of God”

All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapel Fellowship of Enid
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Teaching: Last Sunday we only made it through the **first 6 verses of chapter 3**, which along with **Luke chapter 1**, introduce John the Baptist and his baptism of repentance.

Now as we pick it up in **verse 7**, we see some of John’s personality coming out as he deals with two recognized, Jewish groups; the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees were a group of very religious people. And when I use the term “religious”, I’m not using it in a positive way. The Pharisees were a large group of legalistic, mostly wealthy people who took great pride in keeping themselves separate from the common folk. In fact, the name “Pharisee” means separatists or to separate.

Most Jews in Christ’s day, had tremendous respect for God and the law He’d given them in the **first five books of the Bible**. But the Pharisees were zealous about strict adherence to every nuance of that law, plus what they, rather arbitrarily added to it.

But here’s the thing ... the Pharisees, like most religious or legalistic groups ... found that it was much easier to clean up the outside than the inside. It was easier to follow a list of rules than to let God change their hearts.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, were a somewhat smaller group than the Pharisees, in part because they were rather elite. Membership was generally restricted to the very wealthy and those who had the “right” pedigree.

As a result of those things ... they were a very politically active, but theologically liberal party ... which ... put them at serious odds with the Pharisees.

The two groups strongly opposed one another and were very vocal ... even spiteful about it. They were always looking for opportunities to undermine the membership and work of the other.

Now the Sadducees, remember, were more political, than religious so when Jesus first came on the scene they weren’t particularly concerned or even interested. In some ways they were glad because He was causing such a stir among the Pharisees.

But when the Lord began to gain in popularity and titles like “king of the Jews”, began to circulate ... then the Sadducees began paying attention. And ... on rare occasions they even partnered with the Pharisees in opposition of Him.

And just one more reminder before we jump into our text this morning ... dealing with the societal background of what we'll be looking at.

Remember that the Jewish nation, of Christ's day was not an autonomous nation. Rome controlled them. So any authority that the Jewish People had over themselves ... they had because Rome granted it to them.

And that limited authority was administered through a council of 71 Jewish elders collectively known as the Sanhedrin. A council that consisted of Pharisees and Sadducees with a few scribes (Jewish lawyers) thrown in. They were the congress of Israel in that day.

Verse 7: Picture this; John's in the shallows of the Jordan River ... baptizing the repentant as fast as he can because they just keep streaming to the bank. But all of a sudden, he stops in mid dunk ... he looks up and sees a gaggle of Pharisees making their way through the crowd ... and over there a gaggle of Sadducees ... and they're all carrying towels ... as if they'd come to be baptized ... Halleluiah!

But John looks at them and at the top of his lungs he yells at them collectively ... "**You brood of vipers!**".

It'd be like someone coming in here this morning with Bible in hand as if they wanted to learn and I scream from the pulpit "**You viper ... who warned you to flee from the wrath to come!**"

But John's not slandering so much as he's vetting. And he's not just hurling derogatory comments so much as he's making a very important point.

Note his words ... "**You brood of vipers**". He's accusing them of being poisonous. Vipers aren't dangerous to themselves, but they're deadly for those close enough to them to be envenomated.

Q. And what was their poison? What deadly venom were they injecting into the unwary? – Think of what we know about these two groups and compare that to what we know about Jesus:

- 1.** The Pharisees promoted religion and the Sadducees promoted activism and humanism
- 2.** But Jesus demands a relationship.

And these poisons are tactics that still top Satan's list. Often, they're very well disguised, but they're still poison:

- 1. Religion** -- looking good on the outside at the expense of what's in the inside.

2. And activism -- Investing your time and resources into creating heaven on earth rather than pointing people to, and preparing people for, the real Heaven.

The simple truth is that we must each seek a personal relationship with Jesus and allow Him to change us from the inside out.

Verses 8-10: John's not refusing to baptize them ... he's just demanding that their hearts be right and their repentance be genuine.

He reminds them, as he does us ... that God sees through our church clothes and fake smiles and platitudes. Our pedigrees and titles mean nothing! God looks directly at the heart!

And he goes on in **verse 10** with this idea of trees and fruit; an illustration that's repeated over and over in the scriptures. In fact, if you get a chance later ... read **Matthew 7:13-23** and **James 2:18-26**. Those two passages offer us a very concise understating of fruitfulness and the importance of it.

But for now ... let me give you just a few of the many good fruits that the Word lists:

- The fruit of holiness - **Romans 6:22**
- The fruit of (evangelism) soul winning - **Romans 1:13**
- The fruit love - **Galatians 5:22-23**
- The fruit of giving - **Romans 15:25-28**
- The fruit of good works - **Colossians 1:10**
- The fruit of praise - **Hebrews 13:15**
- The fruit of obedience – **1st John 2:3-4**

Q. So what if John was talking to you? What if this guy with the booming voice was aiming verses 8 and 10 at you when he said, “bear fruit” ... “bear good fruit”? –

Q. What would you point to as your evidence? –

Q. Now ... if in answering that question ... you find that you are, in fact ... fruitless ... what can you do to become fruitful? – Well the answer to that one is actually pretty simple ... get saved! If you're life literally has no fruit in it that would be pleasing to God ... you're not saved. And I can say that because the Bible does ... **1st John 2:2-4, Matthew 7:16-20 & James 2:19-20.**

So if that's you ... you need to seek forgiveness through Jesus and accept Him through prayer as the Lord and Savior of your life. Any one of us would be happy to pray with you for that at any point this morning.

Q. But the bigger question is probably ... how can a Christian become more fruitful? – And the answer to that one is twofold:

1st ... You must tend to your tree. All fruit trees need three specific elements of care if they're going to be good producers. They need water, nutrition and they need to be trimmed:

A. In **John 4:10** Jesus answered [the Samaritan woman at the well] and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

B. In **Matthew 4:4** [He] said, "It is written, "MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD."

C. And finally, in **John 15:1-2** He said ... "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."

Tend your fruit tree ... Hang out with Jesus in prayer ... take in His Word daily and submit obediently when He whispers in your ear and tells you that some aspect of your life and habits needs to go!

But I said the answer to greater fruitfulness was twofold and part two is this ...

2nd ... Don't slow down the work of the Holy Spirit in and through your life.

Ephesians 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

The word "grieve" describes a reactive emotion. In other words, it doesn't just happen. We "grieve" in response to some stimulus.

Paul's saying there that we can be that stimulus that grieves the Holy Spirit. In fact, just before and just after **Ephesians 4:30**, he lists some of the things that grieve the Spirit;

Dishonesty, anger, slothfulness, greed, gossip, bitterness, unkindness ... as well as several other attitudes and actions.

Things that grieve the Holy Spirit of God because they specifically hinder our fruitfulness to His glory.

Back to **Matthew** ...

Verse 11: We've talked already about what John's baptism was ... a baptism of, or into, repentance. But he contrasts that baptism here with what it means to be baptized into Jesus.

John's baptism was a symbolic identification with his message of repentance.

And in like manner, the baptism that Jesus offers is a way of publicly identifying ourselves with Him.

But that may be the end for the similarities between their baptisms.

The first thing that we need to recognize is that the word "**He**", in "**He will baptize...**", is an exclusive pronoun. So not only is John saying that Jesus "**will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire**", he's also saying that He's the **ONLY** one who can!

Now I'm going to read you a series of passages that relate to this, but since it's not our topic of study this morning, I'm gonna have to leave it for you to study out further on your own ...

First, Jesus said this to His disciples in **John 7** ...

38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

A little later, He said to those same followers in **John 14** ...

17 [I'm speaking of] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

Later still, in the **book of Acts**, the Lord said to them ...

1:8 ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you

And lastly in **Acts chapter 2**, after the Lord's death, resurrection and ascension ... we read ...

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

From around ... to within ... to upon ... to tongues of fire ... "**He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire**"

And don't miss John's humility in **this verse**. He makes the statement that he is "**not worthy to remove His sandals**".

Slavery was common in that day (not typically because of national origin or skin color, but because of debt), and the worst, lowest, most rebellious slaves were the ones who got the job of removing their master's sandals.

Now get the magnitude of this.

Matthew 3:11 "... I am not fit to remove His sandals...."

These are the words of the man who was chosen by God to be the campaign manager of the Savior of The World. The PR guy prophesied of 700 years before he was born.

Not a one of us in here can claim anything even close to the calling that John the Baptist had and yet when's the last time you stopped to think about how small you are compared to God.

Q. Are you a humble person? -- Pride is a daily struggle for me.

I need to be reminded, and you probably do to, that to be allowed to take out the garbage and unplug the toilet in Christ's name (to symbolically remove His sandals), is a gift of tremendous grace. Such tasks, done for God, are a privilege that none of us deserve.

Verse 12: His axe is already laid at the root of the trees and His winnowing fork is in His hand.

Q. Not hard to see the picture of imminent judgment in John's words, is it?

The "**winnowing fork**" was a separator. After the plant had been harvested and dried it was laid out on the hard surface of the threshing floor. Then the winnower would go to work with his pitchfork-like tool called a winnowing fork.

He'd get a load of the stalks on the fork and toss them into the air to allow the wind to carry away the waste. See the heads of wheat ... the seeds ... the fruit are weighty and the wind had no effect on them. They would fall straight back down to the threshing floor to be gathered into the barns later, but the worthless parts ... the stalks and husks ... the chaff ... that would blow into a pile away from the threshing floor and would then be burned.

It is very true that God is a God of tremendous mercy ... but **Hebrews 12** is also true when it says in ...

29 ... our God is a consuming fire.

So, **verse 12** is a picture of the day of judgment. The wheat is gathered into the Lord's barns, but the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire.

Verses 13-15: Jesus had no sin of which He needed to repent. He was The Spotless Lamb. He had neither spot nor blemish the text tells us (**1st Peter 1:19**).

And yet He says that John should baptize Him "**to fulfill all righteousness**". The meaning is "If I'm going to ask my followers to do it ... I'll go first."

We read in ...

Hebrews 4:15 ... we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

And in ...

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Jesus endured everything we do and more. He endured every hardship and every temptation that we do and He endured the cross so that we wouldn't have to.

Verses 16-17: This is the first clear picture of the Trinity that the scriptures give us. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three separate beings and yet completely one.

In **verse 17** Matthew records God's expressed feelings about Jesus ...

Matthew 3:17 "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

And in **John 8:29**, we're told why He feels that way ...

"And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."

We have much more that we'll be exploring about this baptism of Jesus, but as our time is running out this morning ... I want to share with you one of my favorite pieces of scripture ...

Conclusion:

Matthew 25:21 "His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

Sometimes I literally daydream about what that day's going to be like when I get to stand in the presence of Almighty God and hear Him say those words ... "**well done ... good and faithful servant ... enter into thy rest**".

I know that to hear those words I have to please God.

O. Remember Jesus' words in John 8:29 "... I always do the things that are pleasing to [My Heavenly Father]."? -- I don't know about you, but I can't say those words without my nose growing longer.

How thankful then, we must be that Jesus said "Hey, I know you don't have enough money so here ... you can use my checkbook".

Our only hope is to draw ever closer to Jesus.

Skip the religion ... forgo the humanitarian efforts ... draw close to Jesus ... tend the tree and surrender all for His glory and fruitfulness!