

The Preaching of Repentance

Matthew 3:7-10

John the Baptizer taught, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). John is said to have come “preaching,” literally, heralding and proclaiming the “good message” of Christ, as “*the voice of one crying in the wilderness*” (Mark 1:3). While he was paving the way for the soon-to-come Messiah and His kingdom, his message of repentance was no different from hundreds of God’s prophets before. As noted by Jesus Himself, the city of Nineveh repented in sackcloth and ashes “*at the preaching of Jonah*” (Luke 11:32; Jonah 3:5). Yet not all who heard God’s plea to penitence responded.

Matthew notes that the religious icons of the day came to listen to John’s preaching. At their approach, John presents God’s **affirmative position**. He said, “*O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*” (Matthew 3:7). Quickly and unequivocally, he let it be known that nothing short of true and genuine repentance would be acceptable. The Pharisees and Sadducees saw no need to repent, having justified themselves in their own eyes. Much of the world today sees no need to repent.

John next anticipated an **attitude of posturing** on their part. He said, “*And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father*” (Matthew 3:9). It is a sad but true fact that when faced with the need of repentance, many will look for a justification, an excuse, or any reason not to have to. These religious leaders had one of the strongest spiritual pedigrees ever to exist, yet that which had been done in the past was not enough to save them. If their heritage was insufficient to their salvation, how much greater insufficiencies will abide in the feeble excuses of man today.

John lays it out before all mankind that nothing less than **absolute proof** of one’s repentance is required by God. “*Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance*” (Matthew 3:8). Jesus’ statement regarding the finding out of false teachers states that “*by their fruits ye shall know them*” (Matthew 7:20). It must, therefore, be evident to all, not just God, when one repents. That proof extends not only to confession of sins (Matthew 3:6), but to the actions which result (Luke 3:10-14). This is a timeless truth which reaches to the far corners of the earth even yet today (Acts 17:30).

The need for preaching such as John’s has not gone away. The world is still in need of repentance, “*and how shall they hear without a preacher?*” (Romans 10:14). God’s **affirmative position** has not changed, nor has the **absolute proof** He requires of all. What must change is the **attitude of posturing** so frequently presented by sinful man.