

Walk the Talk – Matthew 3:8

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Squirrel Problem*

1. In a small mountain community, three of the local pastors were in the habit of meeting monthly for mutual encouragement.
2. One month they got to talking about their squirrel problem.
 - a. for some unknown reason the squirrel population had exploded,
 - b. and all three churches had had a problem with an infestation of the little varmints.
3. One pastor confessed he'd bought a shotgun and tried blasting them off the beams that supported the church roof, but all it did was make holes in the ceiling.
4. The second minister said he'd *trapped* the critters and then released them several miles out of town; but they'd all returned!
5. The third pastor said that after an initial problem of dozens of squirrels, he hadn't seen *any* for over three weeks.
 - a. the other two asked him what he'd done to rid himself of the pests.
 - b. he said that he'd trapped them, then baptized them and made them members of the church;
 - c. and had never seen them again!

B. *Today*

1. Our text this morning is drawn from John the Baptist's message to the people who had come to him to be baptized.
2. Let's begin our study by setting the scene –

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 1-2*

¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

1. Matthew's story of the life of Jesus up to this point, ends with His arrival as just an infant, in His home in Nazareth.
2. Chapter 3 opens many years later – nearly *30 years* later, when Jesus leaves the quiet anonymity of His life in Nazareth to begin His public ministry.
3. When Matthew writes, "**In those days**" he means the days just preceding the inauguration of Jesus' mission as the Messiah.
4. **In those days** – this interesting character known as **John the Baptizer, came preaching in the wilderness of Judea.**
 - a. John was indeed an interesting person; look at v. 4 –
⁴ Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.
 - b. a camel hair garment was not what we would call very comfortable!
 - c. and his clothes weren't lined with satin or silk; just straight camelhair!
 - d. his diet consisted of whatever came to hand in his surroundings there in the wilderness;
 - e. which let me tell you from the experience of having *spent* several hours in the Judean desert – isn't much!
 - 1) he ate bugs -
 - 2) and for dessert, dared to wade into a beehive and snag some of the comb.
5. It's not so clear to us, but to the people of *that* time, John's whole appearance and setting would be remarkably similar to the prophet Elijah, the *first* of the OT prophets.
 - a. Elijah was a *rustic* who seemingly *came out of nowhere* to proclaim a message of

- repentance.
- b. John seemed to be *reprising* the role of Elijah, and indeed, the scriptures even refer to him that way.
6. John didn't choose the *city* as the scene of his message & ministry; he picked the *wilderness*.
 - a. you'd think that if you wanted to preach to people, you'd go to the place where most of them were,
 - b. *and* where they were gathered for a specifically religious purpose – at the temple in Jerusalem. So why didn't John preach there?
 7. John picked the wilderness *precisely because* it was *outside* the accepted religious forms of the day.
 8. The wilderness of Judea where he worked was right alongside the highway that led from the Jordan River where he baptized, up to Jerusalem.
 - a. as people traveled from their homes all over the land of Israel *to* Jerusalem, they would pass through the very region where John was preaching and baptizing.
 - b. they were pilgrims, going to Jerusalem to worship God,
 - c. so John took advantage of this motive, this desire to go and meet with the Lord, to deliver an important message to them *before* they got swallowed up in the vain religious show that was taking place in Jerusalem.
 9. His message was a simple, yet deeply disturbing one –

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

 - a. **“Repent”** was the message of the OT prophets to the ancient Jews who had worshipped idols.
 - b. every Jew of John's day knew that idolatry was a sin that no longer plagued them as a nation – and yet John's message sounded hauntingly similar to the message of the OT prophets who announced God's swift judgment lest they turn from their sin & return to Him.
 - c. but to the solemn and sobering message of repentance, John added something that created great joy and expectation; he said, **“The kingdom of heaven is at hand!”**
 - d. this was something every Jew longed for, even *ached* for.
 - e. the Kingdom of God meant the coming of their Messiah-King who would defeat the Roman oppressors, liberate their land from political, military and economic bondage, and establish them as the rulers of the world.
 10. But John's message was confusing: Repentance was something sinners did while the Kingdom would come to those who were *the favored* of God. How could he mix a call to repentance with the glorious promise of the coming Messiah and His rule?
 11. The answer lies in the rest of John's message . . .

B. V. 3

³ **For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’ ”**

1. Isaiah had foretold John and his mission some 7 centuries before.
2. John was the forerunner of the Messiah, the one who would come as an official herald of heaven, announcing the soon arrival of the king.
3. In the ancient world, when a king planned a royal tour of his dominion, messengers would go out along the planned route weeks ahead of time to warn the subjects that the king was coming.
 - a. the people would then organize work parties to improve the road leading in to and out of their city.
 - b. they filled in holes, repaired the paving stones, pulled weeds, and made the road straight.
4. This was John's message; the Messiah was coming, and the people needed to *prepare* for His arrival – not by repairing the *physical* roads but by taking thought toward the moral and spiritual direction of their lives.

C. Vs. 5-6

5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

1. The people heard John's message, and were struck by its bold simplicity.
2. It resonated in their hearts and haunted their conscience – and all the more since when they got to Jerusalem and entered the temple, they saw the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.
3. So word began to spread about the simple rustic and his message of repentance and more and more people, instead of going to Jerusalem, were stopping to listen to John there in the wilderness.
4. Then John had them do something that quite frankly was *radical* – he began *baptizing* those who responded to his message of repentance.
 - a. when people admitted they were sinners who needed to be made right before the Lord,
 - b. John then immersed them in the waters of the Jordan River.
5. Now, here's what was radical about this – Jews did not get baptized!
 - a. that was something *Gentiles* did when they wanted to become Jewish.
 - b. Gentiles had to do three things to convert to Judaism:
 - 1) he was circumcised.
 - 2) he offered a sacrifice at the temple
 - 3) he was baptized; which was symbolic of being washed clean of one's sins and born into the spiritual house & family of Israel.
6. Now catch this; when John told *Jews* to be baptized as the outward evidence of their repentance, he was saying, in effect, that even though they were Jews, they were no better off spiritually than Gentiles!
 - a. this was a radical and potentially scandalous charge but it was true, and the common people sensed it.
 - b. they heard in John's message the voice of God and experienced the conviction of the Holy Spirit and responded en masse to his invitation.
7. John said that they needed to repent **BECAUSE** the Kingdom of heaven was at hand, at the door.
 - a. as they looked at their lives, they realized that the Messiah would come to bring a Kingdom not just of political liberty, but of holiness and righteousness.
 - b. it was the kingdom **OF HEAVEN** and they were not ready for heaven.
 - c. the moral road and spiritual direction of their hearts was crooked; repentance would make it straight!
 - d. they came to see through John's message that they may be Jews in a physical sense, but spiritually, they were no different than Gentiles.
8. John's message and ministry sparked a genuine revival, and as with all revivals, with all religious movements that swell and become popular, pretty soon it began to attract those with less sincere and pure motives.

D. Vs. 7-9

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

1. V. 5 tells us that all of Judea and the region around the Jordan came out to see John, hear his message and be baptized.
2. This wasn't just some meager thing that was happening; this was a new religious movement that was sweeping the land and everyone was talking about it.
3. John was an iconoclast of sorts; he was bucking the accepted religious forms of the day and calling for a radical return to the God of Israel.
4. He didn't fit into the established religious patterns set up by the priests and religious leaders – yet no one could fault either his lifestyle, his message, or his ministry.
5. Everything he did and said was clearly within the pale of the Scriptures.

6. In fact, what *he* did and said was far *more* Biblical and rang *truer* to the heart of scripture than what was taking place in Jerusalem at the *supposed center* of religious life.
7. So it wasn't long before the religious standard bearers of the day, the Pharisees and Sadducees, joined in with the throngs that were going out to check out the new prophet and the new movement.
8. John had become so popular that the Pharisees & Sadducees hid their disdain for this rustic nobody behind a thin veneer of curiosity.
9. But when they arrived at the Jordan, John saw through their feigned interest.
 - a. *he* knew why they were there – though they tried to pass themselves off as genuine seekers of truth, they're only goal was to gain ammo with which to shoot him down.
 - b. the new movement, the revival, threatened their little religious house of cards and they wanted to find some means of steering the stream of the revival back into a safer course.
10. So he let them have it – calling them for what they really were – a family of snakes!
11. He asked them if they'd truly felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit, knowing that they hadn't.
12. Their faked interest in John's message was one more sign of whose spirit they really operated in, and their presence among those who were *genuinely repenting* was all the more dangerous because of the added judgment it would heap on them.
13. Be aware that it's a *dangerous thing* to be in the midst of the movement of God and to not be a genuine part of it.
 - a. it's a dangerous thing to be in a place where the Spirit is working deep conviction of sin and people are repenting, and your only response is to mock.
 - b. when the streams of revival are flowing and you resist, the measure of your guilt *increases* because you have seen the evidence of God's love and grace, and still hold back.

E. The Fruit of Repentance

1. Let's all heed what John said to the people who came to be baptized in vs. 8 & 9-
⁸Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
2. The movement that came about as the result of John's faithfulness to his calling by God began as a sincere response to his invitation to repent!
3. But as the movement grew in numbers and popularity, it wasn't long before people were coming with less pure motives.
 - a. going to hear John became hip; *the* thing to do.
 - b. getting baptized was something people expected of the religious.
 - c. it became *fashionable* to join the crowds going to the Jordan.
 - 1) they organized bus-tours from Jerusalem
 - 2) shops started selling "John the Baptist" shirts
 - 3) someone made up a little cheer, "I've been baptized, yes I do! I've been baptized, how 'bout YOU?"
 - 4) people who'd been baptized could identify it by wearing a little wrist-band that said "Dunked."
 - 5) for those who were really into it, they could buy a camelhair shirt and dine on a special boxed lunch of honey-dipped locusts.
4. But John made it crystal clear – the show, the movement, being seen in the right place at the right time wasn't the issue; true repentance will be evidenced by a changed life!
5. It's not good enough to be among God's people – you must BE God's person, and if you are, then you *will* bear fruit befitting someone who belongs to God.
6. It's not enough to mouth the words, recite the formula, say the prayer, go through the motions of conversion – does your life after all that show evidence of change? **Where's the fruit?**
7. Some years ago a fast-food chain poked fun at it's competitors who's beef patties were miniature, by asking, "Where's the beef?"

8. John asks – “Where’s the fruit?”
 - a. “You *say* you repent. You go under the waters of baptism.”
 - b. “But where’s the follow through?”
 - c. if you genuinely repent of your sin, then you’ll forsake that sin; you won’t *do* it any more.
 - d. if you say that you want to give your life to God, then you won’t give it to the world or the devil!

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Where’s The Fruit?*

1. What John said to the people of that day, is equally poignant and valid today.
2. John’s ministry was one of preparing for the Messiah Who’s arrival was at hand.
3. So today, Christ’s coming again is at the door!
4. And what John the Baptist said *then* the Spirit is saying *now* – “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
5. It isn’t enough to go to church, sing the songs, & put a bumper sticker on your car and wear a T-shirt with a scripture verse or clever religious slogan on it.
6. Does your life, do YOU bear good fruit?
7. Have you genuinely repented of sin and produced fruit to *prove* it?
8. In Matthew 7:20, Jesus said that it was by our fruit, by the way we lived, that we would now whether or not a person was truly born again.

B. *What We Expect*

1. I want to ask you a question, and I mean it sincerely.
2. Do you want me, as your pastor, to live a life of holiness?
3. Really, don’t you have a right to *expect* that I will?
4. Why do you have that expectation?
5. Let me suggest that it’s right for you to expect me to pursue holiness, not because I’m a pastor, but because I’m a Christian!
6. Think about it – why does *God* expect holiness from me?
 - a. not because I’m a pastor but because He SAVED ME FROM MY SINS **FOR HOLINESS!!!!**
 - b. is that any less true for you?
7. So in the same way you ought to expect and desire that *I* would be holy & godly, and bear the fruit of repentance – so we ought to have the same desire and expectation that *every one* who names the name of Jesus would bear such fruit and live such a holy life.
8. A church which broadcast it’s Sunday morning worship service to several rural areas via the radio, received a letter from a man who asked that each Sunday morning before they began the worship time, they would have the piano player simply hit the “A” key.
 - a. the man explained that he was too distant from the church to attend services.
 - b. but he had an old violin and wanted to join along with the worship.
 - c. by playing the A note first, he could tune his violin and participate in the service.
9. Why are we *here*?
 - a. because it’s the thing to do and the place to be?
 - b. is CC just the latest stop on the church attendance bus?
 - c. or are we here because this is where God speaks to us, and our hearts are tuned to His ‘H’ note - the note of *Holiness*?
10. Jesus is coming soon. It’s time to walk the talk, to bring forth the fruit of repentance.