

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY SIX

Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

I warn you to guard against Pharisaism. We must work regularly and faithfully to keep from looking like we're one way when, in reality, we're another. How valuable is authenticity, and if nothing else, John the Baptizer was authentic.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THROUGH the years, God has selected unusual preachers to deliver powerful messages. Noah must have come across odd to his neighbors as he hammered for years on his giant-sized boat and warned of God's coming judgment: a sweeping flood.

Elijah wore "a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist" (2 Kings 1:8 NIV) and was known for his emotional ups and downs. With the courage of a lion, he faced down 450 prophets of Baal; but, under the hot glare of Jezebel, his confidence evaporated like mist, and so he ran away in fear (1 Kings 19:1–4).

Despite their peculiarities, God used Noah, Elijah, and many other unusual and imperfect people to grab our attention and shake us out of our complacency.

Matthew opens the curtain in chapter 3 to reveal perhaps the oddest of God's preachers: John the Baptizer. A prophet fashioned after Elijah, John was chosen by God to announce the King of kings, the One who would transform the world.

John's wild looks and bug-eating habits may put us off, but his message is anything but off-putting. It's exactly what we need to hear. Let's follow the crowds to the desert and open our hearts to this strange preacher and his strong proclamation.



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Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you seek God's personal message to you through John, pray the following prayer.

Father, help me today to come to You as I am. Deliver me from a secret life that appears to be one way on the outside but different on the inside. Teach me the spiritual disciplines John the Baptizer modeled in the wilderness: time alone with You and surrender to Your will. With open hands, I come to You now to fill me with Your Word, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we begin by carefully reading Scripture, absorbing every word.¹ Read [Matthew 3:1–10](#), and note Matthew's description of John's appearance. Also, look for details about John's message and ministry.



Observation: The Preacher and the Proclamation

In the observation phase, we look for the who, what, where, how, and why of a passage. Let's begin by observing Matthew's portrait of *who* John was.

The Preacher—Matthew 3:1, 3–4

In his gospel account, Matthew seems to drop John out of nowhere. Who is he and where did he come from? According to Luke's account, the angel Gabriel foretold John's birth to John's father, Zechariah, while he was performing his priestly duties at the temple.

You can read about the angel's prophesy and the events that followed in [Luke 1:5–25, 57–66](#). Write down what you find out about John's spiritual preparation and calling, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17 NASB).



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

According to *Matthew 3:1, 3–4*, how did John live out that calling?

Imagine John as a young man reflecting on Isaiah's ancient prophecy in Isaiah 40. Can you put yourself in John's sandals? What must it have been like for John to know that *he* would be "the voice" declaring the coming of the Messiah?

Seeing yourself in the Scriptures puts a permanent chill up your back. John never lost that chill. Realizing Isaiah wrote about John seven centuries before he was born gave strength to John's voice—taking away all resistance, all reluctance, and all tendency to compromise his message. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Proclamation—Matthew 3:2, 5–10

Next, observe John's strong proclamation: "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2). We'll look closer at the meaning of this message in the interpretation section. For now, let's look at *how* people responded to John.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

Those Who Received John's Message—Matthew 3:5–6

What did those who came to “see and hear” John do to demonstrate their belief (*Matthew 3:5–6*)?

Those Who Rejected John's Message—Matthew 3:7–10

In contrast to the crowds were the Pharisees and Sadducees, who came to “watch” with critical eyes and weigh John's words on their scales of judgment. What did John say to these people who didn't believe his proclamation or, in their own view, need to repent (*Matthew 3:7–10*)?



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10



Searching the Scriptures Background Study

The Pharisees and Sadducees make their first appearance on the stage of Matthew's gospel in Matthew 3:7. Knowing who these antagonists are is vital to understanding Jesus' life and ministry. For helpful background information, read "The Pharisees and Sadducees" on page 56 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*.² Record what facts stand out in the space below.

Even before Christ opened His mouth to speak, the nation of Israel was already forming sides: those who would receive Him and those who would reject Him. Let's dive deeper into the *what* of John's message, "Repent . . . for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2), which also became the principal proclamation of the One who baptized with the Holy Spirit.



Interpretation: Repentance, Baptism, and the Kingdom of Heaven

In the interpretation phase, we search for the meaning of key words and phrases. "The word translated 'repent' is the Greek word *metanoō*," according to Pastor Chuck Swindoll, "which means to 'change one's mind,' resulting in a change of allegiances, lifestyle, or trajectory."³

For those who received John's message, the first fruit on the tree of repentance was baptism—which was a rite of purification. Read the following explanation of John's baptism and summarize the meaning in the space below.



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

John's baptism was an outward symbol of inward devotion to God, submission to His will, and identity with the true people of God. And it was more than just a mark of repentance from sin; it was also a consecration to a life of loving service to God and to holiness. Take note, however, that the audience of John's address was not . . . Gentiles, but Jews! He was saying, in effect, "Because of your sin, you are outside of Abraham's covenant with God—*unclean!* You must repent like a Gentile and come to God as if for the first time."⁴

Why do you think the Pharisees and Sadducees would have resisted John's call to repent and be baptized?

Picking up the prophet's pen set down by Malachi 400 years earlier, John sketched a frightening scene of judgment upon the unrepentant religious leaders. Compare [Malachi 3:1–3](#) with [Matthew 3:7–10](#) and write down the similarities between these two passages.



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

God's judgment always makes way for God's blessing—the "kingdom of heaven," also known as the kingdom of God. Read Pastor Chuck Swindoll's explanation of the kingdom of heaven on page 54 of *Insights on Matthew 1–15*. For an online source, consult *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org. What was the kingdom of heaven that John was referring to?

John's calling was to be the forerunner for the King who ruled over the kingdom of heaven: Jesus. Let's examine John's unique role that sprouted from the prophetic roots of Isaiah and Malachi.



Correlation: The Forerunner and the King

How did Isaiah describe the forerunner and what the forerunner would do, according to *Isaiah 40:1–5*?

How did Malachi compare the Messiah to the sun rising, according to *Malachi 4:2–3*? Who would the forerunner resemble and what would he do (*Malachi 4:5–6*)?



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

What can you conclude from John's fulfillment of Isaiah's and Malachi's prophecies regarding the legitimacy of Jesus as the true Messiah?

John wasn't about increasing himself. His message was all about Jesus. Jesus was the Word; John was just the voice. He was the Light; John was just the lamp. He was the living God on earth in human flesh; John was just a man. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Three Thoughts to Remember

John's message of repentance still rings loud and clear. However, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, we sometimes have a problem coming clean about our sin. What makes it difficult for you to admit sin?

Imagine yourself as one in the crowd who received his message. What sins might you confess? How would it have felt to experience the cleansing waters of baptism?



Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

Matthew 3:1–10

Our baptism in Christ is different than John's baptism, for our baptism joins us with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by *the glorious power* of the Father, now we also may live new lives" (Romans 6:4, emphasis added). What new specific way might the Father empower you to live today?

Claim Christ's power for a changed life and close your study by praying the following prayer of consecration, thanking God for His forgiveness and security you have in Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, through confession and forgiveness, I receive Your grace to live Your way. Thank You for purifying me in the blood of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for my sins. I have died with Him, and I now live with Him today and forever, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. For helpful instruction about *Searching the Scriptures*, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important methods in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.
2. You can obtain a copy of Pastor Chuck's two-volume commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15* and *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, on the Insight for Living Ministries website.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 53.
4. Swindoll, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, 55.



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THE
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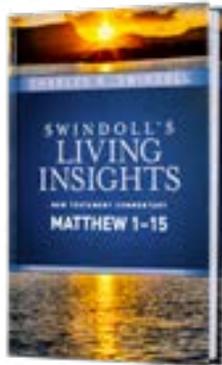
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Strange Preacher . . . Strong Proclamation

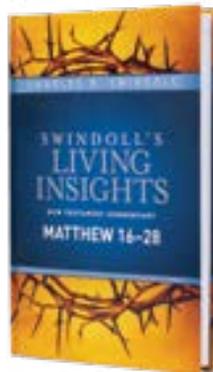
Matthew 3:1–10



Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2021 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Studies, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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10