



READ: Matthew 3:1-12 (ESV)

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'"

ENTER THE STORY:

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God's prophets do things that other people might think are "crazy." Ezekiel laid on his side for 390 days while eating a wheat and bean bread. Isaiah walked around naked for three years. Hosea married a prostitute, and Jeremiah walked into the king's court wearing an oxen yoke, just to name a few. All of these crazy stunts were actually expected because God's prophets were called to communicate their messages in a way that would get the attention of the people.

Now it makes sense why John's "crazy" wasn't actually that out of the ordinary. Camel hair clothes and a weird diet? That was pretty mild compared to his predecessors. Regardless, God had not sent a prophet to Israel for hundreds of years, so naturally, everyone was interested to hear what he had to say.

John's message played on repeat over and over again: Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

John had ONE JOB. He was supposed to prepare the people for the arrival of the promised Messiah...to help them get their hearts ready. You might think the best way to do that would be to preach about God's love, or his grace and mercy, but that was not his message. It was always about repentance.

It was the same message as Jonah, who warned the people of Nineveh that destruction was coming, and it was the same message as the prophets of old, who urged the people to turn away from their sin and turn their hearts back to God.

Many years earlier, after the people of Israel had broken their covenant with Yahweh for the last time, God removed his presence. The people had been waiting for his return, and it was finally time. THE BRIDEGROOM WAS COMING, and John's message of repentance was necessary in order for the bride to be ready.

This is true for anyone who wants to surrender to Yahweh and receive the gift of salvation. Everyone must approach the King in humility, on bended knee, begging for mercy just like the Ninevites did, and when God sees our repentant heart yearning for more of him, he grants us the gift of his presence. This Christmas, let's ask God to cleanse our hearts so we, too, are ready for his arrival!

PRAY: God, you are everything we need and more, so we humble our hearts and beg for your mercy. Help us incorporate repentance as a regular part of daily life so our hearts are always clean and ready for more of you. Amen.