

Peace in Repentance

Matthew 3:1-12

Introduction

One of the least peaceful characters in the Bible is John the Baptist. I never will forget Charlton Heston's portrayal of him in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. When the soldiers came to arrest him, he started grabbing and dunking them, all the while yelling, "Repent, repent!". In true Charlton Heston fashion, he did not go quietly. While theatrical license was in play, I imagine that that movie's interpretation of the Baptizer isn't far off. Here was a man who wore **camel skin clothing**, lived in the **wilderness** around the Jordan River, called people to **repent** and wasn't afraid to **stand up** to kings. You could say he was a man's man. Even his message was one of **judgment**, with images of **fire** and **wrath**. Yet, it's in his story in *Matthew 3* that we find our lens of **Peace** to help us focus on **Advent** and the **comings of Christ**. Where can we find this **Peace**?

Peace Defined

Maybe we should start with a definition of **Peace**. Being bold shouldn't be confused with not having **Peace**. Having **Peace** doesn't mean one is easy-going. Biblical **Peace** is a state of being, especially with relation to God. It's a sense of **comfort** based on what God has done for us and our relationship with Him. Or, as we said in the **Friends** church, it's about *being right with God*.

Peace at the Heart of the Message

Perhaps you noticed in our *Hymn of the Day*, the second line of the first verse says: "Saint John the Baptist came with words of consolation." The words of consolation are found in **verse 3**: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin, Who for our peace and joy will full atonement win." **Peace** and consolation are found in the **atonement** that Jesus wins for us by taking away our sin, through His **sacrifice**. We find **Peace** in the message of John, as he prepares us for the coming of Christ. Where in John's message can we find **Peace**?

Peace Throughout the Message

v. 7—Pharisees, Sadducees and Wrath

Of course, John's address to these fellows is harsh. They are enemies, quite opposed to him and the Christ who follows. Being opposed to Christ, they're opposed to God. Since they are enemies with God, the message of **Peace** isn't for them.

v. 8—Fruit of Repentance

Cyril of Alexandria says that *the fruits of repentance are, by way of anticipation, faith in Christ and the evangelical society that exists in newness of life*. The truth is, when we **repent**, we receive the promise of forgiveness by faith. This is the heart of John's message. Receiving that forgiveness puts us at **Peace** with God.

v. 9—Abraham and His Children

The Jews pointed to their heritage found in Abraham. They claimed this to be proof of their salvation. The fact that God could *raise up children for Abraham* from stones shows that salvation isn't given by **birthright**. Salvation is given by **grace**. God saves whom He will, regardless of pedigree. It's not where you come from, but where you're going. This gives us **Peace**, knowing that our heritage doesn't matter in our salvation.

v. 10a—The Axe and Trees

If the axe follows through and cuts at the root of the tree, it means certain **death**. So, on the one hand, this is **threatening** and not very peaceful. However, this is a **warning**. The axe is at the root, but it doesn't have to follow through. There's still time to repent. There's **Peace** in knowing this.

v. 10b—Trees, Fruit and Fire

To say that every tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire is to say, by implication, that *every tree that does bear good fruit will be spared*. If we bear the fruit of repentance, we will be spared—that's a comfort, hence **Peace**.

v. 11—Baptized with Fire

On the surface, *baptism of fire* doesn't sound too peaceful, or positive. But remember, fire has many uses. It can take life, but it can also give it and purify. The **fire** Jesus baptizes us with gives life and purifies us. This **purity** gives us **Peace** with God.

v. 12—Wheat and Chaff

The chaff will be burned up. The wheat will be stored in God's barn. Here, **fire** is negative and destructive. It's about **judgment**. The chaff are the unrepentant and the wheat are the repentant. **Forgiveness** and **life** are found in **repentance**. For the penitent, that knowledge gives eternal **Peace**!

Means of Grace

We find that John's message, one of repentance, is a message of **Peace**. True **Peace** with God can only come when we repent of our sins and fall on His grace. When we humbly and penitently receive the means of grace, He gives us the gift of **Peace**, just like John the Baptist promised.

*May the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
