



Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
‘Make ready the way of the Lord,
Make His paths straight!’”

4 Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10 The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Central Church of Christ

www.winnipegchurch.ca

Sermon given by Paul Birston

www.paulbirston.com

February 26, 2017

Sermon video available at www.winnipegchurch.ca under the “sermons” tab

www.winnipegchurch.ca/wp/media/ or at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BPo4L3c6zo&index=19&list=PLr4wzHR7QBLC0h6miS7ZEOD2sfYcuts9x>

Visions of Jesus on the Horizon of Glory

We have just heard the powerful words of Matthew 3:1-12. Can you see them?

Can you see pictures of John the Baptist in his garment of camel's hair and leather belt? Can you see him crying out in the wilderness? Can you see the winding paths of the Judean wilderness being made straight for Jesus to come?

Maybe you can see the crowds coming from Jerusalem, Judea and around the Jordan to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. Maybe you can see the sharp ax at the roots of the trees. Can you see God turning stones into children of Abraham?

The picture we focus on most now is the picture of Jesus in Matthew 3:12. John says of Jesus, "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Jesus' winnowing fork is in His hand. It is also known as a winnowing shovel. Sometimes farmers used a winnowing fan. At harvest farmers used the winnowing fork to pick up cut grain from the threshing floor. They would throw it in the air and the strong winds of Israel would blow away the chaff to one side and the heavier wheat would fall back to the threshing floor. Israel is at the intersection of four climatic zones where there are winds and strong breezes particularly in the heat of harvest season.

Jesus has His own threshing floor. Threshing floors were often round pavements outside made of stone or even rolled earth placed near the crops and barns. Threshing floors provided an even hard surface where the grains could be threshed and collected for storage in the barns. Animals could be used to tread the grain to loosen the chaff from the wheat. Threshing floors could be inside barns. To hold the grain within the threshing floor area a raised edge was added or a board placed across the barn door. This is the origin of our word "threshold."

Threshing floors became very important in the Old Testament too. A threshing floor was important in the lives of Jesus' ancestors Boaz and Ruth. King David bought a threshing floor from Ornan the Jebusite that became the location for God to have His presence dwell in the Temple in Jerusalem from where salvation would come, the harvest of souls of the whole world.

John says the wheat belongs to Jesus. It is *His* wheat.

The vivid image John provides of Jesus is a metaphor for us. He is talking about Judgment Day. This is the great Day of the Lord when He will separate the righteous from the wicked. This would resonate with Jesus' Jewish listeners and Matthew's Jewish readers who would recognize this theme from the Old Testament. It is very clear, for example in the Psalms, beginning with Psalm 1. God will take the righteous home to be with Him in His glory eternally.

Where are you in this picture? Christians, you are the wheat. You are *His* wheat. God wants you in His barn, safe with Him in His glory forever.

There is a crescendo of glory in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation that intensifies towards the final consummation of History in Revelation.

Why Is This Vision of the Apocalypse Here At the Beginning of the New Testament?

Why does Matthew begin His Gospel and the New Testament with a vision of the end even before Jesus' ministry and the good news of His death, burial and resurrection?

The Book of Revelation is an apocalypse. Matthew begins His Gospel with an apocalyptic vision. An apocalypse is a revelation, something we could now know unless God reveals it.

Not only does Matthew begin His gospel with an apocalyptic vision, by the end of His book He will include 37 apocalyptic passages, many of them right in the middle of His Gospel. Why? What do we learn to do from them?

Matthew wants us to keep our eyes on the long view of God's glory. Like John through the Revelation, Matthew wants to encourage his readers by providing hope in persecution.

Luke adds something to his account of this vision of Jesus that gives us more clues. Luke shows us that these apocalyptic visions of Jesus are not just for a far off day. They are meant to impact how we live now. He records the words of John the Baptist answering the questions of three groups:

And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" 11 And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." 12 And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." 14 Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

John answers questions from three groups: the crowds, tax collectors and soldiers. He tells the crowds to share their clothing and food compassionately with the poor. Luke instructs the tax collectors to not be greedy and collect no more than they have orders to do. He tells the soldiers to not take money from anyone by force, don't accuse anyone falsely, and be content with their wages.

God's people are to live in light of Jesus' victory, His coming again and the account we must give at judgment. We are to be caring, honest, compassionate in our work. We are to make life's big decisions in light of His light: our careers and goals, how we use money, most importantly how we care about God and other people.

Apocalyptic visions of Jesus also give us hope in hopeless situations. They give our lives purpose. We are part of God's mission here on earth.

Judgment Day will be a day of Joy for His people.

Perhaps the horizon of glory has been behind you in the background, put off for a later day. Consider the benefits of turning around and putting the horizon of glory in front of you.

Jesus' Power, Humility and Humble Invitation

Throughout his Gospel Matthew shows us the triumphant power of Jesus and His humility.

After further revelations about His power, His coming again and His judgment of unbelieving unrepentant cities in Matthew 10-11, Jesus gives this beautiful invitation in 11:28-30,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Back to Matthew's apocalyptic beginning in chapter 3, we see Jesus' humility immediately following the awesome vision of Him with His winnowing fork clearing His threshing floor, saving His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff,

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” 15 But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he permitted Him. 16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

Visualize this: you are His wheat, gathered into glory, baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire purifies you. Immersion into Christ, unites you with Him in His death, burial and resurrection and sets you on the pathway to glory.

If you are on the pathway, please keep going with Jesus in front of you on the horizon of glory. If you need to be immersed into Jesus today to join Him in glory, please come forward in a few minutes during our closing song.

Visions of Jesus on the Horizon of Glory from Matthew to Revelation

Jesus gives homework. He tells people to go and do many things: go and tell, go and do, go and sell and give...

Jesus has already done what He asks us to do. He tells us to take up our crosses daily and die to self. He has already done this. The crown of suffering leads to the crown of glory. He always kept the crown of glory in view,

...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Over one week at Camp Omagh, a group of brothers and sisters in Christ got together to study through the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation looking at all the visions of Jesus on the horizon of glory. I encourage you to do this. You will be blessed.

(For more on this you can find two articles on “Apocalyptic Now” at www.paulbirston.com)

From Matthew to Revelation we see visions of Jesus on the horizon of glory.

In the Gospels Peter, James and John saw Him in glory on the mount of transfiguration.

In Acts 1, Jesus’ Apostles saw Him lifted up to heaven through the clouds.

Stephen saw Jesus in the moment of his death from persecution, “But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55-56).

In Acts 9 on his way to Damascus, Paul saw the victorious Jesus in heaven. For the rest of his life, Paul was obedient to “the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).

In 1 Corinthians 15 we see Jesus coming to give the kingdom to His Father.

In Thessalonians we see Jesus’ coming back to give justice for His saints.

In Hebrews we see God, Jesus and all their people assembled in heaven.

Finally, at the other end of the New Testament from John’s vision of Jesus in Matthew 3:12, John the Apostle’s visions of Jesus compliment and expand on the visions from Matthew of John the Baptist we saw at the beginning. John delivers the Revelation of Jesus entrusted to him with the promise of a great blessing:

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (Revelation 1:3)

Once again our eyes are lifted to visions of Jesus on the horizon of glory in Revelation 1:12-16:

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a Son of Man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. 14 His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. 15 His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength! (Revelation 1:12-16)

Central Church of Christ
www.winnipegchurch.ca
Paul Birston[©]
www.paulbirston.com