



TIME OF GRACE®

Christmas Hype: Jesus Is Worth the Hype

Study Notes

Summary

Is God pleased with you? If you could see the Father's face, would a smile spread across his lips? If you are unsure of your answer, look to John the Baptist standing with Jesus and listen to the voice that booms from heaven. At Jesus' baptism and through your baptism, God answer life's most important questions.

- **Matthew 3:1-6:** ¹In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" ⁴John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.
- Repent = To _____ your mind and _____ with God.
- **Matthew 3:2:** Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.
- Kingdom = A land with a _____ who gets the last _____.
- **Matthew 3:13-17:** ¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. ¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
- Kingdom of heaven = The _____ gets the last _____.

Points to Ponder

1. When you hear the word *repent*, what comes to mind? After today's message, did your view of repentance change? If so, in what way?
2. Listen to one of Jesus' first sermons in Mark 1:14,15. What connections do you see to John's message from Matthew chapter 3?
3. Which kingdom(s) does your soul spend time in? The kingdom of comparison? success? beauty? Why is the kingdom of heaven the only safe place for your soul?

Homework for Next Week

Read John 3:22-30.

Time of Grace Ministry
Christmas Hype: Jesus Is Worth the Hype
Matthew 3:1-3, 13-14, 16-17
December 20, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

So how about you? Do you think it's going to work? Do you think if somehow I could snap my fingers or pray a prayer and you could get that thing that you have in your heart, would it make you as happy as you think and give you as much peace as you assume?

Back when I was growing up in the 1980's as a kid, I used to get really, really hyped about these: Star Wars action figures. I was born in the year 1980, which means I grew up with my older brother, Chris, playing with all of his old school, classic Star Wars toys. The death star, the Ewok village, Jabba the Hut, Boba Fett; this is what I did as a kid.

Until a few years later in the late '80s, my brother and I discovered an incredible truth; that if we would have kept all of his toys in mint condition in the original packaging like this, we would have had major money. Like, not exaggerating, tens of thousands of dollars if we just wouldn't have played with it and would have kept it like this. So in the mid-1990's when they rereleased Star Wars action figures, I had a plan. My plan was to buy as many as I could, to not play with them, to not open them, to leave them in mint condition, to store them away so that years later I would have major money in my pocket. But do you know what happened? It turns out I wasn't the only kid in America who was thinking that same thing and so the market was flooded with unopened Obi Wans and all the rest. Ebay was invented in 1995, which means you could find a billion of whatever I had packed up in my closet. And all those gifts that I asked for Christmas after Christmas after Christmas from my mom were basically worthless. In fact, I just went on Ebay before church today and I found out that that Obi Wan from 1995 - here, what 25 years later - is worth the exact same amount that we paid at Walmart when we bought some years ago.

After moving my collection from house to house and box to box, I eventually caved and I sold all of it at a garage sale a few years ago. Some snotty, bratty little kid came into my garage and do you know what he wanted to do? He wanted to play with my toys, right? He wanted to take them out of the box and I just dumped it and I realized, man, I got so excited but my collection wasn't exactly worth the hype.

Now I'm telling you that story today not just to warn you about the danger of collectibles but because I bet you do the same thing with something in your life. I bet there's something that you stop and think, like if I could just get this, if I could hold onto this, if I could just achieve this it would be worth the hype. It would make me happy, it would provide for my future. And I'm not sure exactly what your "this" is but I guarantee you have this. For some of you, it's relationships, right? If you could just meet that girl, that guy, at school. If you could just find a relationship with someone who's faithful and loving and respectful and puts you first. If counseling would

work and your marriage would turn around and things would be better. Like, if you could just get a hold of that, it would be worth the hype and life would be so good.

For others of you, this is financial. You know, if you could just get money, if you could just make more money, if just that raise, that promotion would happen, life would be so much better. There wouldn't be stress or fear about not having enough. If you could just get it, you'd be good. And for others of you, it's something with school or with sports or with your career. If you could just get to this level, if you could just make that team, if you could just score this many points, like all of us in our heart have this thing we think if we get it and we hold onto it, it's going to be good enough for us.

But here's my big question for you today: Do you think that thing is worth the hype? Like here I am, 25 years after buying Obi Wan, and I figured out it wasn't exactly worth it. So how about you? Do you think it's going to work? Do you think if somehow I could snap my fingers or pray a prayer and you could get that thing that you have in your heart, would it make you as happy as you think and give you as much peace as you assume?

Today, I want to wrestle with you and that question and I want to propose another path that you and I might consider following; something that Jesus' best friend and his close co-worker John said was absolutely worth the hype. Something actually that people in modern America think is the opposite - like the opposite answer of happiness but John and Jesus were convinced it is actually the key to finding a satisfying, beautiful life. Today, we're going to open our Bibles to Matthew 3 and Jesus' hype man, John, is going to preach a pretty intense message and he's going to give us a path that many people don't follow but one that leads to incredible blessing. So if you want to follow along on the screen with me in Matthew 3, here's what we find.

"In those days, John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' John's clothes were made of camel's hair and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."

So here in Matthew 3 we meet this really interesting character, Jesus' relative, John. And he's kind of an odd dude, right? He lives outside in the wilderness, he's following the Judean desert diet, he's got this scratchy, camelhair robe, and he has this odd message. Like if you want to draw a crowd and keep a crowd, you probably wouldn't say what John says. He looked the people in the eye and he said to them, "Repent." Whether you're rich or poor, repent. Whether you're a longtime prostitute or a pharisaical prude, repent. Whether you had grown up with God or were just discovering him, John's message was the same. Everyone, he said, should repent.

And that might not sound like the path to happiness, right? If repentance sounds like a difficult thing to do, it actually is. Let me give you just my running definition of how I define the word "repent" in my mind. If you're taking notes, write this down: To repent means to change your mind and agree with God. If there's any part of your life where you're not agreeing with God, to

repent means to change what you think so in turn you change how you behave. So if you're treating anyone in your life - a family member, a neighbor, a boss, the president, whoever - in a way that God doesn't like, repent, John says, and change your mind. If you're approaching dating or sexuality or money or spending or time or college or life or whatever in something that doesn't line up with what God teaches, repent and change your mind. If the number one thing in your heart is not God, if he doesn't get the last word to define your truth, then repent and change your mind. If like the thing you pray about most is not getting closer to God, repent. If what you trust in at the end of the day to be okay is not God, then repent. John looked at these crowds and he called them to change their mind; he called them to repentance and it makes us wonder why? Like, if John's goal was to get a huge crowd so that when Jesus stepped on the stage they'd be ready to meet him, why would he say, "Repent?"

Well, John actually answered that question for us in our text. Remember verse two? John said this: "Repent," here's his explanation, "for the kingdom of heaven has come near." That's John's logic. If your heart says, "Well, I don't know, that sounds hard," or, "I don't know if I want to give that up," he says, "Okay, repent because the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Do you know what that means? The kingdom of heaven? It's one of those Bible passages that is filled with fancy words that you can pronounce but maybe you can't define so let's slow down and talk about what a kingdom is. A kingdom, in essence, is any place that is ruled by a king. Or if you're taking notes, here's how I put it: A kingdom is a land with a lord who gets the last word. If you're living in a land where there's some authority over you and that authority gets to speak the definitive and final word, you're part of a kingdom. And John is saying in this text that he wants people to repent, he wants them to change their mind so that they can be part of a kingdom of heaven.

That's pretty abstract so let me make it kind of concrete. Did you know that you all live in a kingdom? You all live in some kind of mental space where there's some voice in your head that gets the last word. It whispers to you, speaks to you, it guides you. The way that you think, like just a thousand different ways to think, but whatever gets the last word in your thinking, that's the kingdom that you live in. And what John knows is that there are a lot of kingdoms that you could live in in your mental space that would not be good for your soul. There are many kings out there but few of them care for you eternally. And so, John says he wants you to be aware of all these kingdoms of earth and call you to the kingdom of heaven which has come near.

Let me give a few examples of what I mean. I often live in a kingdom called comparison. Have you ever visited that kingdom before? In the kingdom of comparison, what gets the last word is not Jesus, it's not God the Father, it's not the words of the Bible. In the kingdom of comparison, only how you compare gets the last word. It doesn't matter if you are faithful, doesn't matter if you tried your best, doesn't matter what the circumstances were, at the end of the day what defines your joy and your peace is how you compare.

But there are other kingdoms, too. How about the kingdom of beauty? It doesn't matter your age or your genetics or your circumstances or your stress. At the end of the day, all the kingdom of beauty cares is what it sees in the mirror. And if it doesn't match up to the latest glossy marketing, that voice will condemn you. Or think of the kingdom of productivity. I know some

of you live there. How much did you get done? Everything on your to do list? Did you accomplish everything that you wanted to? The King of Productivity doesn't care what happened or if God had other things for you to do. All he cares is that little boxes that got checked or they didn't. There's all kinds of kingdoms; there's success, there's romance, there's the perfect family. And when those kings and queens get the last word in your heart and in your life, they will rob you of the peace and the joy that all of us crave during the Christmas season.

It makes me think of a story I read from a pastor a few years ago. He was working with a teenage girl who wasn't able to find love at her high school and she was pouring out her heart in his office of how terrible it was that no boys were interested and she wasn't going to have a date for the prom. And the pastor thought he had a good answer for her; that she was loved by God. That whatever some 15 or 17-year-old boy thought about her, the God of the eternal universe sought her and loved her and wanted to talk to her. And he thought it was such good news for her heart but what he didn't know was that she lived in a different kingdom. And she looks back at the pastor and she said, "Pastor, that's nice but what does it matter if no boy calls you back?"

My question for you today is who gets the last word in your heart? This or something else? And if it's something else, John has a clear word for you today. He says repent. Change your mind. Those kingdoms will not bless you, they don't want what's good for you in the end. Repent and here's why: Because a different kind of kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, has come near. And I wonder as John was preaching that powerful message if he could actually see the kingdom of heaven physically coming near? Cause we get a glimpse of what an amazing place that is to live in our next verses from Matthew 3. Verse 13: "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him saying, 'I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him." John says, "Jesus, I need to be baptized by you. Why would you be baptized by me?" But Jesus wanted it to be done. Not because he was a sinner who needed to be forgiven but he wanted to draw a crowd so that heaven itself could hype the kingdom of God. And so when Jesus comes up out of the water, the Holy Spirit shows up. We catch this amazing picture; it says, "The Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove," which is super, super good news if you know about doves in the Bible.

Don't know about doves in the Bible? Like why, when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit wouldn't come down in the shape of a cross or a crown. Why a dove? Have you ever thought about that? Do you know the number one use of the word "dove" in the Bible is not as a symbol of peace or of hope or of beauty; the number one use of the dove in the Bible is for a sacrifice. I think the word is used about 40 times in the Bible and nine of them, the biggest use, comes in the book of Leviticus where doves were the sacrifice that really poor people would make to God. Like if you were dirt poor and you couldn't afford a lamb or a goat or a bull to sacrifice in the Old Testament system, you would bring a dove. Actually, if you read through the gospels in Luke 2, after Jesus was born his mother Mary and his stepdad Joseph, they come to the temple and what's their offering? It's a dove. And so when Jesus was baptized and the kingdom of heaven is coming near, the symbol shows up over his head that Jesus is just like a dove. He is the sacrifice for spiritually poor people.

Hey man, I've got to tell you, I love that picture. Have you ever gotten to the end of a day and felt like spiritually poor? Like if the King of Heaven himself showed up and you had to buy your way to get through his gates, like what would you offer him? I think about that sometimes and after all these years of preaching and teaching and reading the Bible and like praying, what in the world would I ever try to offer Jesus to have a spot in heaven? And I realize that some of the simplest things that I've taught you and I've read and I've prayed about, they don't change quickly and I'm not the man that I want to be or the father I want to be or the husband I want to be or the person I want to be; sometimes, I feel really spiritually poor. And maybe you've felt that way, too? There's just stuff in your life that hasn't changed really quickly and you know better, it's not like you're ignorant about it, it's just that in the thick of it it's such a struggle to do what God says is right and to love your neighbor as much as yourself.

If you've had that feeling like you're not the greatest Christian on the block, look at the kingdom of heaven cause as Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit himself shows up, not as a little meter like you have to impress God, but as a dove; as a sacrifice who would die for your sins. Because in the kingdom of heaven, the king doesn't stay comfortable in his palace and on his throne, instead he leaves and gives up his life for the most spiritually poor among us. So that if you came into church today with your head held high or you stumbled and didn't want to look anyone in the eye, there's a sacrifice that Jesus gives that we can be right with God.

And not just kind of right with God. In our last verse today, we're going to find out in the kingdom of heaven we really get right with God. Look at what verse 17 says: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" God the Father rips open the clouds and he speaks all the hype of heaven. He looks down at his son Jesus and says this is my son. I love him. And I'm so pleased with him.

So between the Father and John and the Holy Spirit, Jesus gets the hype and we learn that in the kingdom of heaven there is such blessing and there is such joy. I mean, can you imagine if a father would say this verse to you? I'm not sure how you grew up or what kind of dad you had and I won't make you raise your hands but man, if you had a dad like that, you had a gift that many people don't get: A father who saw you, a father who knew you, a father who affirmed you, a dad who was proud of you. If you've ever had your father take a knee and look you in the eye, grab you by both cheeks and say you're my kid and I love you, you had the gift of identity put in your heart.

Now I can't change the earthly father that you had but I can tell you this: In the kingdom of heaven, we all get a dad like that. Not a dad who's distant or distracted, not a dad who's too busy with work or abusive, not a dad who bails, but a dad who actually opens up the heavens in this book and he speaks to us. He says you are my son, you're my daughter, you're the one I love. With you, I am so pleased because Jesus is like a dove; he's the sacrifice for your sins. God, through your baptism, can say the same thing to you that he said about Jesus on that day. So that when you step into the kingdom of heaven, when Jesus is the one who gets the last word, it's not how you compare, it's not how you look in the mirror, it's not what other people say, it's not how successful or productive you are. The final word at the end of every single day is this; is God

himself speaking from the heavens saying you're enough, you're my son, you're the one that I love. With you, I am well pleased.

I have a hunch this Christmas that's a gift that lots of you want. Just ask Paco. Have you ever heard of the story Ernest Hemingway told many decades ago about Paco and his father? There was this boy from Spain named Paco who had a falling out with his dad and he ran away from home to the big city of Madrid. But his father loved him and his father wanted to be with him. So his father started to search for him but he couldn't find him. So the dad took a step; he found the biggest newspaper in all of Madrid and he wrote a massive article printed and it said this: "Paco, Meet me at the Hotel Montana this Tuesday at noon. All is forgiven. Love, Your Father."

Well, Tuesday came and as it was just about noon, this father drove his car to the Hotel Montana and as he turned the corner, he hoped and prayed that he would see his son Paco waiting to reunite and reconcile. But the father never expected to see what he saw. When his car turned the corner, he saw a crowd of men, 800 of them, and every single one was named Paco. A city filled with kids who wanted more than anything in the world to have a father who would forgive them, love them, and want to be with them.

Friends, I'm not sure what you're living for this Christmas but I do know in the kingdom of heaven we find a gift that few people find: Forgiveness of our sins through Jesus. Faith by the power of the Holy Spirit and the affirmation of a perfect heavenly Father. Collectibles aren't always worth the hype, being beautiful isn't either, riches and wealth and popularity, they seem great on the surface but they're not what you think. But in the kingdom of God, we are never left disappointed because we find everything that our souls truly crave. So write down our big idea for today. Today, John calls us to repentance because in the kingdom of heaven, the Lord of love gets the last word. This Christmas season, as you fall asleep on Christmas Eve, there is some voice that will get the last word in your heart. And I pray today that you would change your mind if it's anything except God because today your heavenly Father wants to speak to you the only word that matters; that you're loved, that you're forgiven, and that you're his.

Let's pray.

Father, we wish we could hear with our ears that same voice from heaven to know that we are loved by you despite all the things that we've messed up and done. We can't hear it but we can see it in your word as you promise us that through Jesus, if our sins are washed away, that you feel the exact same way. Your face is shining on us, you look on us with favor, and we pray today, God, that that would give us peace. Lord, I know this is a season of intense and crazy marketing; there will be a thousand kingdoms that will vie for our attention; promising that if they got the last word, they would give us a good life. But they're not worth the hype and you are, so give us the kind of faith to filter out what words we should let into our soul and which ones we should reject. In the end, help us to believe and to hold onto only things that are good and beautiful and true; only the things that come from the kingdom of God. We pray this all with confidence because we know who we are; we're your kids whom you love and we pray it all in Jesus' name, Amen.