***GREATER THINGS*** in 2023

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**The Greater Kingdom**

**Prepare Yourself -** Matthew 3:1-12



**How prepared are you?**

Are you ready for the **Greater** Kingdom?

If we seek to understand the message and ministry of Jesus Christ, we must start with the one who was sent to **"prepare the way of the Lord"**.

*In those days* ***John the Baptist*** *came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,* Matthew 3:1

Who was John the Baptist?

* He was eccentric.
* He was unconventional.
* He was great.

*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women* ***there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist****. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* Matthew 11:11

* Second cousin of Jesus (Mary and Elizabeth were cousins)
* His father, Zacharias, was a priest.
* In line to join the priesthood and serve in the temple
* Priestly preparation began at an early age.

The **Greater Kingdom** comes with both a **warning** and a **promise**.

*“****Repent****,* ***for the kingdom of heaven is at hand****.” For this is he who* ***was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah*** *when he said,* ***“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight****.’ ”* Matthew 3:2-3

*A voice cries: “In the wilderness* ***prepare the way of the Lord****; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* Isaiah 40:3

*“For behold,* ***the day is coming,*** *burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name,* ***the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings****. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. “Behold,* ***I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.*** *And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”* Malachi 4:1–6

**Repent** – change the way you think, make an about face

**Kingdom of Heaven** – the reign and rule of Christ upon your heart and life

**The Kingdom of Heaven.** The phrase appears thirty-two times in the Gospel of Matthew.

What do you do with this message?

*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****.* Matthew 3:4-6

Baptism was a shocking thing to do. He was saying you are like pagans outside the nation of Israel.

* For **proselytes to convert,** they would have instruction by a scribe, go through circumcision and **immersion in water.**
* For **Jews,** in order to worship in the temple, they would wash in **a mikvah** when defiled, washing pool with moving water.

The Greater Kingdom is not about **who** you know … but rather to **whom** you belong.

*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.* Matthew 3:7-10

*And I will* ***give them one heart****, and* ***a new spirit I will put within them****. I will* ***remove the heart of stone*** *from their flesh and* ***give them a heart of flesh****, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.* Ezekiel 11:19–20

Entering the **Greater Kingdom** requires **repentance** of our sins and surrendering our hearts to His **rule**.

*“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.”* Matthew 3:11–12

The **Greater Kingdom** is accessed through **repentance** and faith.

Be **honest** about your need for repentance.

*Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.* Psalm 32:2

Acknowledge the **danger** of sin and the **damage** of guilt.

*For* ***when I kept silent****,* ***my bones wasted away*** *through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.* Psalm 32:3–4

Confess your **sin** fully.

***I acknowledged my sin to you****, and* ***I did not cover my iniquity****; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,”* Psalm 32:5a

Hide in God’s **love**.

*… and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.* ***You are a hiding place for me****; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.* Psalm 32:5b–7