

Your King Has Come

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 July 2023

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 0 0] Over the last year or so, we have been treated, in this country at least, to a lot of royal pageantry. I don't know if you've been keeping up with all of the royal events that have been happening, beginning with the Platinum Jubilee. Feels like a long time ago now, doesn't it? Followed quickly by the Queen's funeral, and then shortly and most recently by the King's coronation, I have to admit I didn't quite keep up with everything that happened, but one thing that really struck me was during the Queen's funeral, and it was towards the end of the service, everything had kind of happened, and the trumpets played. They played a really mournful tune, supposed to give everyone a chance to process, to grieve what they'd seen and what they'd heard, but then they stopped, and there was a great long pause, a silence, and on the TV, it just showed different scenes, people gathered in different places, and all you could hear was silence. A nation paused, it went silent, and it grieved the passing of a well-loved Queen, but then the trumpets started up again. They blasted a fanfare, and what happened?

Everyone stood up, and then they sang, God Save the King. It was a great turning point in that service. It was a great turning point for a nation, from mourning the death of a Queen to singing for the King.

And landing in Matthew chapter 3, we need to understand that it is that kind of turning point, not only for a nation, but for the world and for God's plan for the world. Years have passed since the end of chapter 2, and John the Baptist comes onto the scene, and what does he announce? In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. God's kingdom is here. It is on the doorstep, he said. I have to imagine him blasting on a trumpet, giving a royal fanfare. Any moment now, he says, you're going to have to stand and sing, God Save the King. He is near. And if that wasn't big enough, that fanfare, that pronouncement, it comes not only after one minute of silence, but after 400 years of silence.

That minute felt like a long time. What did 400 years feel like when God's Word fell silent? We read the last word of God through a prophet from Malachi. That's just a few pages back in our Bibles, but those pages represent nearly half a millennium of time in which God was silent. But now after 400 years, here comes a prophet who says, please be upstanding and prepare to welcome your king.

What king, you say? I don't see a king in our passage. Well, just take a look at verse 3. Here's John preparing the way for, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him. Today, if somebody important is coming, a red carpet might be rolled out, mightn't it, down the stairs for them to walk up. Well, back then when a great king was coming back from victory in battle, they didn't bother with carpets. They would build a new road, a straight road for the king to travel back into the city in victory. That's what Isaiah is talking about. And that is what John is doing, not physically, but spiritually, because he is preparing the way, the coming for the Lord.

[4 : 1 1] Notice that as in capitals, it's not just a Lord, a king, but God himself, Yahweh, the Lord, that is who is coming. The kingdom is near because the king is here, the divine king.

The God of heaven is coming in person, says John. So how do we get ready for his coming? Well, if you got a letter through your door saying that King Charles was going to pop by your home, well, how would you get ready? It would be more, wouldn't it, than a sweep around with the Hoover, wouldn't it? The carpets would be cleaned and the curtains would be taken down and washed, wouldn't it? There wouldn't be a square inch of your house that wasn't ready for that visit. Everything, everything, your garage and the cupboard under the stairs, even just if you wanted to take a peek, you would clean it, wouldn't you? You would tidy it. Everything would be ready for the coming of the king. Well, what about the great king? The eternal creator, the king of kings, the lord of lords. He, he rules not from a throne on earth, but from the throne in heaven. If that is how we would prepare for a royal visit from King Charles, well, how would we prepare if this divine king were on his way?

Well, we need to remember, don't we, that that is not an if, but it is a when. The great king has come. The great king is coming. And our passage tells us two ways that we then prepare to receive him. John gives us the first way. Firstly, he says, turn, turn, for the rightful king is coming. Now, if I had turned up looking anything like John this morning, I imagine that you would have raised an eyebrow, maybe, not actually sent me home to get changed, wouldn't you? A hairy garment, a leather belt. If I had turned up with some dried locusts and a pot of honey to dip them in, you'd think this guy wasn't away for long enough. He needs some rest. Why was John doing this? Well, it's original, isn't it? But it's not original. It's not normal, but it's been done before. John's clothes were made of camel's hair. He had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. But we read about something like that in 2 Kings chapter 1. A prophet gives a message for some guys to take back to a king.

And the king asks them, what kind of a man was it who came to meet you and told you this? They said, he has a garment of hair and a leather belt around his waist. The king said, ah, that's Elijah the Tishbite. Okay, that was his signature look. The king knew him by what he wore. So why is John dressed as Elijah? That's who he's dressed as. Well, I said a minute ago, this is the first word of God through a prophet to his people since the end of the Old Testament. And you just heard how the Old Testament ends. We read in Malachi chapter 4, see, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. And what will he do? He will turn the hearts of parents to children, turn the hearts of children to parents. God's last promise was to send Elijah again. And in his day, Elijah turned the hearts of Israel back to the true and living God. Well, that is what was needed once again. And so while it's shocking, the way that John was dressed, it's really no surprise. Because in a sense, he is another Elijah, a second Elijah to call God's people to turn back to him in spirit and in truth. He was sent to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

He was sent to turn hearts hardened by sin into hearts softened by the gospel of God's kingdom. Well, friends, that is how we prepare for the coming of the great king, not by having our homes cleaned, but by having our hearts cleansed. That is why that turn or that change of heart was symbolized then by washing in water, baptism, confessing their sins. They were baptized by him in the River Jordan.

[8 : 49] That is why the whole country went out to John, that their hearts might be turned inside out, that their lives would be turned 180 degrees. That was marked by that baptism. Mark calls it, in his gospel, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, a turn your life around baptism, a clean your heart out baptism. Somebody dies and leaves a property. What happens then?

The family come, don't they? And they have to sort through all of the possessions in the house. And as much as some of those things might be precious to them, all things, treasured things, well, the whole lot, it has to go, doesn't it? And so they get a skit outside of the house, don't they? And all of the things in that house go into the skit. It is cleaned out. And then what do they do? They bring a van load of chemicals and cleaning equipment, and they strip that house from top to bottom.

Well, friends, that is what happens when a person dies to their sin and turns to God the King. The old furniture and the fittings of our lives are cleaned out of the heart, even things that meant a lot to us.

In an old life, old habits, an old lifestyle, old loves, old ways of thinking, we confess it as sin. And God himself comes in and washes our hearts clean from those lesser loves.

Now, if I asked you, have you done that today? Is that you today? If you're a Christian, well, you can answer, yes, it is. Yes, my heart has changed like that. I have turned from serving my sin to serving the King. Of course, we still do sin. But our allegiance is no longer to our sin, but it is to Jesus Christ. And so when we sin, what do we do? We confess it as sin, and we turn from it.

[10 : 59] But if I asked you, is that what your baptism was for? I wonder what you would say. Is that what your baptism was for? Is that what it did for you? The answer is no, it's not. This isn't your baptism.

Is your baptism the same as John's baptism? Well, what has changed? This baptism was to prepare everyone for Christ's coming, but what has changed? Well, he has come. The King has come.

Just listen to this conversation that Paul has with some Christians he meets in Ephesus in Acts 19. Paul asked them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? They answered, no, we have not even heard there is a Holy Spirit. So Paul asked them, what baptism did you receive?

John's baptism, they said. Paul said, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is Jesus. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The year baptism is not John's baptism. That baptism was good for its time, says Paul, but what was it doing? Preparing the ground for the coming King, which is Jesus.

Ours is a Jesus baptism. John says the same thing. I baptize you with water for repentance, but after me comes one who is more powerful than I. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. So John's baptism isn't quite your baptism. If you're a Christian, you have a Jesus baptism. But what John's baptism stresses, which we do still need, is the need for every person to turn to our rightful King.

[12 : 58] John said, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Do you know the first words of Jesus' public ministry? They're on the next page of our Bibles in Matthew 4. Hear this. Jesus began to preach, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. John and Jesus, they preached the same sermon. Turn, be changed, get ready.

The kingdom of God is near. The King is here. And that is what Jesus preaches to us today. Turn. The rightful King is coming. So then how do we turn and get ready? Well, John is super clear what repentance is. He says to the religious leaders of the day, you brood of vipers. Who want you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. To the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they could talk the talk, but they were not walking the walk. They had come to this baptism. We're not told why, but John clearly thinks they're there for the wrong reasons. Perhaps it was a bit like when a local dignitary goes to a kind of community event. They feel they need to show their face.

Maybe it was a fact-finding mission. They wanted to know more. We know at first they weren't against John, but John is against them. He calls them a brood of vipers. Now, I'd not thought much about this until a couple of weeks ago, but what's a brood? Well, brood is what you might call your children, isn't it? A brood of hens, your clan. So, what is he saying? He's saying, you are offspring of the serpent. Remember God's promise to the serpent back in Genesis 3, I will put opposition between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head. You will strike his heel.

John is saying, you are children of the devil. You are opposed to the woman's child, the Christ. And how can he tell? Well, because they've come to the getting ready party for the king, but they're not getting ready. They're at the party, but they are not celebrating.

They think their roots are planted near the flowing streams of God's word, but John says their fruit tells a different story. How they live, the things that they say, the way they treat others or don't treat others. How they think, what they want, it is all rotten. See, turning in repentance to Christ, friends, it is not only words. We must confess our sin as sin, but confession does not go far enough.

[15 : 46] We must change. Now, that's not saying that it is the way that we live that saves us, but it's saying that if our hearts are truly turning to Christ, our lives will follow.

My driving instructor used to say, look the way you want to go. He said, the way you're looking is the way you will steer the car. That is true in the Christian life, friends. If our hearts, the eyes of our hearts are turned towards Christ, then his is the way that we will go, sometimes quickly, sometimes much more gradually, but we will be going in his direction. And I hope that comes as some encouragement to you. If your heart is set on Jesus, but you are finding change hard or not seeing change happening in your life, it might be happening slowly, but if your heart is set on Jesus, let me promise you that it is happening. But perhaps this morning, there are some of you who need to turn your hearts to Christ, even for the first time. Perhaps you know that that change has not taken place in your life. You are looking in other directions. You might have been in church most of your life, and maybe you have heard the sermon preached before, but it is still out here for you, and it's never entered in. But John warns, bear fruits worthy of repentance. And do not think to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. As we sit here in church today, know that sitting in church is not the same as having our hearts changed, nor as having been baptized into a Christian family, nor as having prayed the sinner's prayer once. All those things might be true of us, but the gospel commands us to live lives worthy of repentance. You're not sure whether your heart is turned to Christ. The question then to ask is not you, did that prayer that I prayed once, did that work?

Or even, did God choose me before the beginning of the world? The question to ask today is, am I trusting in and submitting to and living for King Jesus today? Am I bearing fruit, worthy of a life that has changed, transformed? Paul writes in Philippians 2, therefore, my dear friends, as you've always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in ye to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Of course, that is a call we all need daily, isn't it? It's a call that I need to hear every day, whoever we are, to turn from our sin, to submit to God's will and his work in our lives, to work out our salvation with a holy and a God-given resolve. Because the seriousness of that call to turn, it couldn't be clearer, could it? What is at stake? Malachi said, surely the day is coming, it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, said the Lord Almighty. Four hundred years later, and we hear John saying the same, the axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. But now Jesus has come, you say. Jesus has come. Hear what John says of Jesus, his winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering wheat into the barn and burning the chaff with unquenchable fire. It is that serious, friends. If you're a Christian, you know that you have been spared that fire, but none of us can be left thinking, can we, that our daily response to Jesus' call to repent is insignificant, it's inconsequential. Friends, it is of eternal significance how we respond to our rightful king who is coming. Turn for your rightful king is coming.

Well, that is how John tells us to get ready for him, but what does Jesus add to that? Well, Jesus comes, doesn't he, onto the scene to be baptized by John, and his baptism says, point to you, trust, trust, for the righteous king has come. Trust, for the righteous king has come. That quote I just read from Malachi 4 goes on, but for you who revere my name, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays, and that is just what happened when Jesus went down to the water to be baptized.

[20 : 57] Now, I don't know if any of you have a favorite verse in the Bible. I don't have one, I have lots, but this is one. I wonder if you can tell why. Listen to verse 13 with me. Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. Now, why is that one of the most incredible verses in the whole Bible? Because of who he is and because of what he does. Remember who John has prepared the way for? He was coming down that cosmic red carpet, remember? The Lord, the king of heaven and earth, God himself. And so, who is it now he walks down that road? Jesus from Galilee.

Jesus the carpenter. Jesus the king. That is what Matthew wants us to see, that the king of heaven, the divine monarch, God himself, is Jesus Christ. He is who we have been preparing for. He is God.

But then what does he do? He went to be baptized by John. Now, does that not strike you as strange? What was John's baptism for? He says in verse 11, I baptize you with water for repentance.

When they went to be baptized, verse 6, they went confessing their sins. It is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And Jesus went to receive that baptism. So, can you get your head around this? The great king? The great king has come, the Lord of all, God incarnate. And he comes into the water with us to be baptized as a sinner. How could he? And why would he? He alone, he alone has no sins to confess. He alone has never needed to repent. There is no shade of evil. There is no shadow of darkness, no stain of sin in him. He alone does not need to be washed clean.

Surely, if we understand, we're saying with John, I need to be baptized by you. And do you come to me? He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and he goes to be baptized with us.

[23 : 27] And so, you see why it's one of the most incredible verses in the Bible. Given the sermon that John has just preached, it tells us that our great God and King came, but he came not to thresh and burn sinners, but to be baptized with sinners. That our Lord and our God identified with us in our sin, that he stood where we belong, that he took our guiltiness on himself in the water. He soaked himself in our shame. And you shouldn't do that, said John. You have no right to stand in these waters.

But listen to Jesus' answer. Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Here he stands, taking on the demands of God's word on himself. He who is most free, the righteous king, so that by submitting to every detail of God's law, he fulfilled all righteousness, lived a perfect life in our place before God. And he did it, friends. He was even baptized because he was providing a righteousness for us that we do not have in ourselves. We need to be given by our righteous king. Brothers and sisters, friends, I hope you know that we each have sins to confess today.

We all have sins to turn away from. We all have a past record behind us, don't we? And sadly but truly, we all have failures ahead of us too. But in the water that day, he who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. He was washed with our sin that he might clothe us with his righteousness. He took our place in the water that we might take his place on the throne. And so today, we do not turn in fear to him, but we turn with faith, because the one who says, turn to me, is the one who says, trust in me. We do not come today to a king who is burning with rage, but a king soaked in compassion that we do not deserve. That he is soaked not only with water, but with his own blood. This baptism at the beginning of his ministry on earth would lead to another baptism at the close of his earthly ministry. On the way to the cross,

Jesus asked his followers, are you able to drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? What cup? What baptism? The cup of God's wrath that he had to drink.

The baptism of fire, he had to suffer for he carried our sins from the river to the cross. So many ways, his ministry was a journey from one baptism to another baptism. In the water, our sins were washed off of us and poured out on him. On the cross, God's wrath was poured out on him and his righteousness used to cover us. Well, how do we know that that is what his baptism was about?

[26 : 53] What his death achieved? Because the final verses made it clear that that is why he came at all. 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 alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, this is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased. This is the plan devised by father, son, and spirit before the beginning of time promised through the ages that God's well-loved son, Jesus Christ, would come and bathe in our sins so that he could die in our place and save us from God's wrath. And so as you turn to him today, as I pray that you do, do not do it grudgingly.

And do not do it with your teeth clenched. And not only for today or until I get home or until I wake up for work tomorrow, but turn to him and trust in him. Rest the full weight of your life upon him, everything that is in you. Let it rest on him for what he has done for you. He sympathizes with us in our weakness, in our temptation. And not only that, but when we give into temptation, he does not turn against us. In the face of our sin, he not only sympathized, but he suffered and he died to wash us clean from our sin. Not with the water of baptism, but with his own blood poured out on the cross for us. His baptism at the beginning and his death at the end of his earthly ministry tell us that he is a king who is for us from beginning to end. Is he not a king that you would gladly stand and welcome today? Is he not a king who you would gladly sing praises to? Is he not a king who you would gladly prepare for? Is he not a king who you long for? Who you would place the whole weight of your life today, tomorrow, into eternity on? He stepped into the water so that we could turn and walk in his way. So let's turn and trust in him now as we pray together. Let's pray.

Lord, we praise you and we thank you that you came, our God incarnate, to walk this earth as one of us.

Lord, you suffered and you suffered for us. Lord, you were baptized in water that was only ever meant for us. Lord, you have sinned against you. Lord, we praise you because you took our place and you stood where we once stood and you were crushed by the wrath of the Father so that we might walk free.

Lord, here we stand, free, blameless in your sight, washed clean by your blood, if our trust is in you. Lord, let us praise you for that. And Father, how we pray for those who as yet have not turned.

[30 : 29] Father, we ask that by your Holy Spirit, you would turn the hearts of your people to the Lord Jesus Christ, that they too might be saved. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen.