

LET IT BE SO NOW**Matthew 3****(Read Matthew 3)**

INTRO: This past week I was reminded again of the impact of God's obedient servants in my life and in my family. I received word early in the week of the passing of my friend, Mark, who was a deacon and trustee (the equivalent of Dale Dohner here at ABC), at my first church in PA. He was also father figure for this still wet behind the ears pastor. His humor and ready grin are right there in my mind's eye. Since we both supplemented the heat in our homes with wood, he and I spent a lot of time together cutting and splitting wood. His funeral was yesterday and I was asked to send a tribute to be read and I was very honored. It was easy to talk about a man who looked so much like Jesus. I know his heavenly father received him with "Well-done, good and faithful servant!" By the way he's the craftsman who made the stable for the first nativity set we ever owned and you've probably seen it when you have come to our Christmas part each year. (explain)

And I was discussing with someone, I can't remember who, my mentor Roy Peterman, who called me from Mark's church, to be the associate pastor at the much larger Manheim BIC Church. Roy was seasoned pastoral veteran by the time he became my boss. But boss, probably was not the right descriptor for him. He was an encourager who saw shepherding and teaching gifts in me and helped to develop them. Every church he had pastored had flourished under his leadership, but it was not because he was a dynamic speaker – in fact, he had a rather pronounced stutter that could have been a distraction had he not been so revered. He was revered because he was a shepherd's shepherd and he was obedient, some would say, to a fault.

Roy saw that the congregation really responded to my preaching. Some more insecure senior pastors would have been threatened by that, he was not, instead, he asked me to moved from preaching once a month to every other week. He also encouraged me in my shepherding and youth ministry, which was also in my portfolio. In a way he worked himself out of a job – but he was good with that, because as, yet another, good and faithful servant, his response to the moving of the Holy Spirit was like Jesus as he stepped into the Jordan River for baptism, *Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.* Matthew 3:15. John proceeded to obediently baptize Jesus as Jesus obeyed the direction of the Spirit.

I want to look at John AND Jesus and their attitude of LET IT BE SO NOW, because must be our attitude too. First . . .

John came preaching boldly

- Jesus's cousin, John, was also his opening act, of sorts. Like Jesus, he had been anointed before he as even conceived. He was very special, and not just because he wore clothing woven from camel hair and subsisted on locusts and honey. He was special because he had a preparatory message for those who would soon be listening to Jesus. The message was two-fold: repentance and the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. These are still needed more than ever – in fact it's 2000+ years more urgent.
- John taught about being repentant in a society, like ours, that was sinking down. We often talk about repentance – not because we are "one-note wonders" but because it's central to walking in holiness. By the way, holiness is going to be the theme of our Lenten series beginning the first Sunday in March. Back to repentance: To repent means to change. It means a change in attitude to self and God. Self is no longer the boss and God is. It means a change in direction – away from rebellion and toward submission to God. John was preaching from the river bank "Change your minds! Repent!" And also . . .
- John was reaching thousands of people. They were drawn to him and they listened. And he wanted them to know a greater message is coming from one more power and whose sandals he felt unworthy to even carry. And his will baptism will be with the Holy Spirit and fire rather than the muddy water of the Jordan. His message would separate the repentant from the unrepentant. "So, people, GET READY! The kingdom of heaven is near!"
- As I said, John's message was bold and urgent. He was burdened with the sin of the age, and he wanted to do something about it. While others, like the Essenes, were withdrawing and setting up communities to be able to remain holy – he walked right into the fray.
- John's message was not only bold and urgent, he was tough on sinners and institutions that talked a good line but failed to deliver, listen, *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where*

he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Matthew 3:7. Isn’t that awesome?! Brood of vipers! That gets right to the point!

- And something else that John is pointing out is that pedigree and position is not delivery. Just because you have a theology degree is not enough – you need to repent! Just because your parents are Christians is not enough – you need to repent! Just because you are Brethren in Christ is not enough – you need to repent! Just because you prayed the sinner’s prayer and got saved once is not enough – you need to repent! Repentance is not once and done – it’s a process. No matter who you are, a preacher, a parent, a teacher, we all need to repent. So, if you’ve been feeling a little viperish, repent is what you need to do.
- And here’s the awesome thing, there is hope for the viper. Even though John preached, “DELIVERANCE IS AT HAND AND YOU’RE NOT READY FOR IT!”. The great thing is that deliverance is there for those who get ready.
- And notice this about John, even as he pointed out sin, he was aware of his own. In verse 14 we see that when Jesus stepped into the water, John knew beyond a doubt that here was the one whose sandals he was not worthy to carry and he balked. But Jesus says “Let it be so now . . .”. John knew who he was before a holy God. He also knew that his holy God knew him to his core – so even though he was a fiery preacher who obediently preached the need for repentance, he also knew his own need. Remember that ABC – even though we’re not worthy, we are still called to go to a world that is not ready for the kingdom of heaven.
- One more thing – don’t worry what people think, tell them about their need for Jesus. People flocked to hear John even though he must have seemed quite eccentric to say the least. But he had the truth and he fearlessly spoke it. Here’s my point: be real and people will listen. F. B. Meyer said this of John, “*Yes, if a man is not a reed shaken by the wind, not a copy but an original, who speaks when he sees and knows of God, men will come to him in every age.*” Tell those around what you know about Jesus, and when they see he’s real in your life, they will listen.
- Well John came boldly and preached, and . . .

Jesus came and took on humanity

- I mean, even though he was God the son, he took on human form and became a man. Jesus identified with sinners and their need for repentance as he came to the Jordan River and was baptized by his cousin. It’s what he came to do and it was the right thing to do – so he stepped into the water and said, “*Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*” Matthew 3:15. It was the plan and he obediently did it.
- And notice how heaven opens with obedience. It’s right here in our text, *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened.* Matthew 3:16a. John was right. Jesus didn’t need his baptism of repentance. The one who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) had nothing to repent of. But in his obedience to his Father, he fully identified with humanity by submitting to baptism. And heaven opened. And when heaven opens . . .
- The Spirit of God arrives. John said his baptism was with water, but the One following, the very One who had just come out of the water would bring the Spirit. So, there it was, the Holy Spirit was in the house and God’s plan was fully in play. And with the culmination at the Cross and then the Resurrection, repentance would be less spinning of wheels and lots more of living in victory. And when the Spirit arrives . . .
- God’s approval descends. This was God’s blessing on his Son, “*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*” Matthew 3:17. God said that to Jesus, but it is his word to us as well as we are obedient. What is that God’s calling you to do? What is it he’s showing needs to change in your life? Who is he moving you to talk to? What is he telling you to give to or speak into? You see, as you are obedient and as the Spirit moves in you, the status quo is not an option – your response, like Jesus needs to be, “*Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*” Just think of it this way: LET IT BE SO NOW! Amen.