

THE GOOD FRUIT OF REPENTANCE

The Jews overlooked something very important. They had not properly understood that in order to enter the kingdom one must come to repentance. They thought that, as children (descendants) of Abraham, they automatically had a ticket into the kingdom. John turned this on its head, claiming that repentance was necessary to escape God's wrath and enter into the kingdom. John addresses their error in Matthew 3:9.

Matthew 3:9 (NKJV)

9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

The Jews in general, and the religious leaders in particular, had a false security depending on the fact that they were Abraham's descendants through the promised son Isaac (cf. Jn. 8:33-53).

The Jews thought that Abraham was so special that his favor with God sufficed not only for himself but also for them as his descendants. Therefore, they said, "All Israelites have a portion in the world to come" simply by being Jews. They spoke of "the delivering merits of the fathers." Their trust was in their heritage. Their trust was simply in being Jewish.

John the Baptist rebuked this idea saying they should not think "***We have Abraham as our father***" as if that would deliver them; but rather realize that "***God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.***"

What John meant by saying, "***God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones***" is not real clear. Perhaps he was saying don't put your stock in being physical descendants of Abraham, rather realize that God is able to take hearts of "stone" and through true repentance make true children of Abraham out of them (cf. Isa. 51:1-2). This is what is necessary!

Ezekiel 36:26 (NKJV)

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Whatever the case, John was refuting the idea that physical heritage could save them. They needed a new heart (cf. Rom. 2:28-29). They needed to come to repentance so God could save them and bring them into the kingdom. Abraham's true spiritual descendants are those who share the same faith as Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:7, 29).

Galatians 3:7 (NKJV)

7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

This rebuke from John had to really sting these Jewish leaders. They thought God's wrath was reserved for non-Jews. They thought they were already sufficiently children of Abraham – not vipers. They thought they were already guaranteed a place in the kingdom and did not need repentance. This was JARRING to the core!

Matthew 3:10 (NKJV)

10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

The ax is a symbol of judgment that cuts down all who refuse to come to repentance (cf. Isa. 10:33-34). Every person who does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. In other words, all those who do not repent and bear good fruit in keeping with repentance are going to be cut down in the judgment of God and cast into eternal hell fire.

Again, we see the kind of repentance that will enter the kingdom. Genuine repentance is seen in “good fruit”. If there is no good fruit – there is no true repentance. The only way to flee from the wrath to come and safely enter into the kingdom is by way of sincere and true repentance. That is why John cried, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” And in effect when on to say if you are going to get there it must be by way of repentance.

“Christ's arrival and presence would test all men. Those found fruitless would be destroyed just as a fruitless tree...is cut down and thrown into the fire.” – ***William MacDonald***

And this principle still applies:

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.