

Buckle Up
It's going to be a wild ride!



"John's belt: dealing with cultural encroachment"
Matthew 3

Everyone lives by a moral or ethical standard. It may be unwritten or even unconscious, but it is present for everyone. It may be the code of ethics or the rule of life that was imprinted by family; it may be the code of ethics or the rule of life that is imprinted by the laws of the land; it may be the code of ethics or the rule of life that is imprinted by church tradition; it may be the ethics or the rule of life that is imprinted by God and the Scriptures. Often it is a blend of many of these. For a true disciple of Jesus Christ, the conscious decision and commitment has been made to be ruled by God's will, by God's law, by God's Word, by God's Spirit.

Inevitably, there are times when cultures collide; when the voice of family, or law, or tradition or religion differs from the voice of God. This is what is meant by cultural encroachment. The difficult thing is that many times we are influenced by culture unwittingly; we don't even recognize it. The pressure of the crowd, of the culture, of popular opinion can be overwhelming and difficult to resist.

Our Bible belt story this morning is about John the Baptizer who was renowned primarily for his message but easily recognized by his wardrobe and diet. He was the original fire and brimstone preacher and he wore the prophetic garments of camel hair and leather belt like his predecessor Elijah. He lived off the land and ate locusts and date honey. His proclamation passion was to prepare people to meet the Lord. The challenge of cultural encroachment, of God's rule of life being eroded, corrupted, or even replaced is not a new phenomenon but an age-old problem. Let's take a look at Matthew chapter 3 and hear a message from two thousand years ago from the prophet John the Baptizer that sounds like it could have been written for Plano, Wylie, Murphy, Sachse, Allen, Parker and Richardson; for us today.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."³ 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.'"⁴ 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.⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.⁷ 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?"⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Matthew 3:1-12 NIV

1. The true Gospel calls for repentance from sin.
 - John seems to have dealt differently with those who were religious but reckless in their lifestyles
 - What are the sins that prophetic preaching would call out today?
 - Racial prejudice
 - Gender identity
 - Sexual immorality
 - Domestic abuse
 - Abortion
 - Universalism
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10
2. The true Gospel establishes the standard of holy living.

- The unbiblical dichotomy of grace and holiness
 - Philippians 1:27a
 - Ephesians 5:3-5
3. The true Gospel emphasizes the reality of eternal judgment.
- The barn and the fire
 - Revelation 22:12
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9
4. The true Gospel leads to a transformed life.
- The fruit of true repentance
 - Matthew 7:13-27