



July 5 and 8

John the Baptist, Steve Cuss

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

Primary Scripture:

Matthew 3:1-13

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS JEWISH 'DENOMINATIONS' IN JESUS' DAY:

Zealots. Rome cannot be redeemed. Fight it with protest and violence. Those in our ranks executed by Rome are faithful martyrs. God will bring the Kingdom through our efforts.

Essenes. Rome cannot be redeemed. Withdraw geographically and live in cloistered community under strict purity laws and frequent baptism. God will bring about the Kingdom without our help, but we will be found faithful when God comes.

Pharisees. Rome must be tolerated. Rome has corrupted the temple, so we are faithful to God through hyper focus on morality and individual holiness. God will punish and reward in the afterlife. Few will be rewarded.

Sadducees. Rome is to be embraced. Rome has tarnished the Temple, but our worship in it and animal sacrifice keeps the Temple pure. There is no afterlife, so punishment and reward happen in this life. Peace with Rome and wealth are signs of faithfulness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the passage of Scripture. What stands out to you? What is surprising?
2. Look at the brief description of the religious groups of the day. Do any seem relevant to today - i.e., are you like any, or do you know anyone who is? (no names please.)
3. John Ortberg says: "Repenting is a gift God gives us for our own sake, not His. Repenting doesn't increase God's desire to be with us. It increases our capacity to be with Him." Have you experienced this to be true?
4. We defined Repentance as: 'Changing your mind. Opening yourself up to a new possibility. Making room in your heart for God to surprise you. Humbling yourself. Testing your assumptions against God's truth. Believing the better news. Depending on yourself less. Asking God to take charge of your life.' What is your reaction to any of these?

Some questions for repentance below. React to any of them you like.

5. Have I asked God to forgive my sins and rule my life?
6. Have I ever declared that in baptism?
7. Do I have a secret habit that I think I manage but is managing me?
8. Do I lose the battle with self condemnation?
9. Am I carrying something that is not mine to carry or that I cannot control?