**Matt. 3:7**

**7***But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?* **8***Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.* **9***Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.* **10***Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.*

The Pharisees were the religious of Jewish politics

* They were the descendants of Ezra and the scribes
* They studied and memorized the of (Torah) and the associated volumes of rabbinical writings that had developed over the centuries (Talmud)
* They interpreted these laws and enforced them in Jewish society

Pharisees took a conservative, literal, hardline view of their rules

* They enforced the letter of the law with threats and intimidations
* But like most sanctimonious, self-righteous religious authorities, the Pharisees were hypocrites

**Matt. 23:23-28**

**23***“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.* **24***Blind guides! You strain your water so you won’t accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!* **25***“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!* **26***You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.* **27***“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people’s bones and all sorts of impurity.* **28***Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

**Luke 16:13-15**

**13***“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.”* **14***The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him.* **15***Then he said to them, “You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.*

Sadducees were the religious leaders

* Sadducees thought the Pharisees took religion too seriously and too literally
* The Sadducees rejected many basic teachings of Scripture including the reality of

 and the existence of angels or even of a spirit

* Because of their liberal views, they focused less on Scripture and the supernatural and more on earthly and accomplishment

Most importantly, the Sadducees managed the temple funds, which meant they had control over the purse strings

* Every Jew was required to tithe between 20-30% of their annual income to the temple
* A tremendous amount of money flowed into the Sadducees’ coffers every year
* Such wealth gave the Sadducees significant power over the people

The Sadducees also held a majority of seats on the Sanhedrin-the ruling counsel over the Jews

* The Sadducees were the party in power in Jesus’ day
* They retained their power by maintaining a cozy relationship with the Roman officials ruling Judea
* In contrast to the Pharisees, who openly despised Romans

John was a that needed to be silenced

Whenever people invent ideas about God, we naturally project our preferred upon Him

The only true and proper way to understand God is by what He has revealed to us in His Word about Himself and His purposes

**John 8:44**

*For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

**Luke 3:10-14**

**10***The crowds asked, “What should we do?”* **11***John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”* ***12****Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”* **13***He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”* **14***“What should we do?” asked some soldiers. John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.”*

**Matt. 3:11-12**

**11** *“I baptize withwater those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* **12***He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”*

John opens saying, *“I baptize with water”*

* In saying this, John is describing the nature of his ministry, of course
* He also diminished his
* His ministry was *merely* one of baptizing in water, a symbolic action
* His ministry was important, yes, but only because it to the Messiah’s greater ministry which was soon to come

 makes us worthy to be part of God’s plan to reach the world with His love

At the end of v.11, John says the coming Messiah will baptize with the

 and fire

John has presented a clear and stark choice

* Either we are baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit
* Or else we will be baptized by Jesus with fire
* Either we are consumed by His forgiveness and
* Or else, we will be consumed by His
* There is no third option