

Prepared  
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Luke 3:7-18

Some people refuse to evacuate their homes when a wildfire or hurricane is bearing down on them. Though first responders warn them of the danger to come, some people refuse to do what it takes to avoid destruction. Why is that?

- Some don't believe it will happen to them – it happens to other people.
- Some distrust authority figures. It's just a plot to take over their lives.
- Clinically depressed people may “want” to die to escape their suffering.
- Some regard officials as “boys who cried wolf” too many times.
- Strangely, some will literally risk their lives to hold on to property.
- Some don't want to lose their investment (ie. Marijuana growers.)<sup>i</sup>

That strange character John the Baptist was the eternal equivalent of those emergency workers who knock on doors warning of impending danger. This man who wore funny clothes and ate strange foods was the first prophetic voice Israel had heard in over 400 years. He was a voice “crying in the wilderness” with both a warning of judgment and the good news of salvation through the Messiah.

Big Idea: Sin against God requires judgment. Jesus, the promised Messiah came to bring both judgment for sin and a way to escape that judgment by trusting Him.

This week we'll take this text verse by verse in expositional fashion. Verses three through six set the stage about John the Baptist:

<sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying

in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' ”

- John was a “baptizer.” Jews only knew baptism for Gentiles converting to Judaism or for temporary cleansing from sins. Jews didn’t get dunked!
- This was baptism to display a heart of repentance ready for the salvation of the Messiah. John’s baptism looked forward to what Jesus would do, baptism in our day looks backward to what Jesus has done (Acts 19:1-5).
- We Baptists don’t believe baptism does the saving; it is a symbolic statement of obedience and change within the heart of a saved person.
- In those days kings would send workers ahead of them on a journey to fill in the potholes and remove the obstacles in the road. John was “smoothing the way” and preparing hearts for salvation through Christ.
- This was a message of warning and the need for repentance.
- The word for “repent” means to “change your mind” but this was more than an intellectual change. This spoke to a change of heart that would lead to a change of behavior. We don’t change our behavior to clean up our hearts, we confess we need cleaning up, Christ does the work and our behavior changes because He has changed our heart. That’s the gospel!
- I could score some rhetorical points by saying, *“If ever there was a week where we saw how people need to repent it was this week!”*
- You would say, *“Amen! I can make a list of people who believe differently than I do that need to repent.”* That’s not the point.
- The need for repentance isn’t tied to ideology. We ALL need to repent!
- John was drawing some crowds out there in the wilderness. Even the “religious elite” were coming to take in the spectacle. Some were sincerely moved by the supernatural power of his message. Some came to be baptized not because they were convicted of sin but because it was the “in thing” to do. Some

came to make trouble. John focused right on them and didn't mince words:

<sup>7</sup> He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

- "Brood of vipers" paints a picture of snakes coming out of their holes to flee a wildfire. As things got hot they slithered out. "Matthew 3:7 identifies the recipients of John's rebuke as the Pharisees and Sadducees."<sup>ii</sup>
- Jesus would similarly rebuke this same group of religious hypocrites:"

Matthew 12:34 (ESV) <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Matthew 23:33 (ESV) <sup>33</sup> You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

- John knew they would hide behind their heritage as children of Abraham.

<sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

- We won't spend eternity in heaven because Grandma was a Christian.
- Salvation is not about religious heritage it's about personal repentance.
- Then John gave them the warning of judgment with both barrels:

<sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

- “[T]he axe at the root of the tree means judgment is near. How near? For an unsaved person it’s just one car wreck or terminal illness away.
- Jesus spoke to this metaphor of trees and fruit bearing with a simple parable in Luke 13:6–9 (ESV) <sup>6</sup> *And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ <sup>8</sup> And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”*
- That’s all Jesus said. That was the end of the parable; no conclusion.
- Warren Wiersbe writes, *“It is significant that the parable was “open-ended,” so that the listeners had to supply the conclusion...Did the tree bear fruit? Did the special care accomplish anything? Was the tree spared or cut down? We have no way to know the answers to these questions, but we can answer as far as our own lives are concerned! Again, the question is not “What happened to the tree?” but “What will happen to me?”<sup>iii</sup>* (It also reminds us of God’s patience giving sinners time to repent.)
- The religious people of that day (and today) thought they could avoid God’s wrath by doing good deeds and following the rules. As we said earlier, good deeds are the “fruit” of a heart changed by Jesus.
- We don’t see that the religious hypocrites repented, but some others came to John asking how to live this new life of repentance. They asked the question every believer should ask, *“What then shall we do?”*
- Luke gives us three examples of John’s response to three types of people.

<sup>11</sup> And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are

authorized to do.”<sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

- Be generous, don't cheat people, and don't blackmail them for money.
- If you've repented and turned from sin your life should look different.
- Jesus also addressed this in Luke 6:43–45 (ESV)<sup>43</sup> *“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit,<sup>44</sup> for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.<sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*
- You spot a follower of Christ not by their appearance but by their actions; not by their words but by their deeds; and by how they treat people.
- Let's be clear, being generous, kind, and compassionate doesn't get anyone into heaven but anyone who is really headed for heaven WILL display those characteristics toward other people.
- John's preaching was so empowered by God that the crowd wondered if he was the Messiah. He set them straight:

<sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.<sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

- “Holy Spirit and fire” speaks to the two choices every human must make:
  - Respond to the Holy Spirit of God calling and wooing you to trust in Christ and receive that same Spirit to live within your heart.
  - Otherwise the choice will be eternal destruction (fire.)

- Lest we think John was only preaching “hellfire and brimstone” judgment --

<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

- John did what every preacher and teacher should do. He taught BOTH judgment AND grace. Darrel Bock writes: *“A preacher of God’s message must be balanced in delivering both messages. Forgiveness cannot occur except where one realizes responsibility for sin and repents of it.”*<sup>v</sup>

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Sin against God requires judgment. Jesus came to bring both judgment for sin and a way to escape that judgment by trusting Him as Savior and Lord.
- The “takeaway” for anyone who hasn’t repented for sin and trusted Christ is simple: Now is the time to act in order to escape the raging fire of wrath.
- The warning has been sounded to evacuate to eternal life with Christ. Choosing Christ means choosing new life forever!
- The “takeaway” for those of us who are followers of Christ is to recommit to share the good news of Christ so people can avoid that judgment.
- Our other “takeaway” as Christ-followers is to remember that although Jesus has eternally saved us from our sins, repentance is still an important part of accessing the full, abundant life in Christ.
- To quote Darrel Bock again, *“Although those who have received forgiveness are not judged eternally when they continue to sin, they still suffer the consequences that sin inevitably brings. On the other hand, seeking forgiveness means that we can claim the reality of the forgiveness Jesus has made available once for all...When we are forgiven after turning to God, such forgiveness should yield a transformed character as a response to the grace of God.”*<sup>v</sup>
- This week let’s remember and be grateful that we CAN repent and change because Christ paid the price to give us that eternal escape from the “wrath to come. (3:7)”

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.frontlinewildfire.com/going-down-with-the-ship-why-some-people-refuse-to-evacuate/> <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-refusing-to-evacuate-20160817-snap-story.html> <https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2020/09/some-californians-refuse-to-evacuate-as-wildfire-threatens-emerald-triangle-marijuana-crop.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Lk 3:7). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>iii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 225). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>iv</sup> Bock, Darrell L.. Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (pp. 117-118). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>v</sup> Bock, Darrell L.. Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (p. 118). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.