

The Preaching Of John The Baptist

Luke

By Richard Caldwell, Jr.

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Founders Baptist Church

24724 Aldine Westfield

Spring TX 77373

Website: www.foundersbaptist.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/smbconline

Good evening. If you would, please turn to the gospel of Luke chapter three and we begin reading tonight with the seventh verse. We will read down to verse 18.

He [that is, John the Baptist] 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? 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. 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.”

And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?”

And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”

And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”

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.”

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, 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 with fire. 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.” So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.¹

Let’s go to our God together and let’s ask his blessing on the preaching of his Word tonight.

Father in heaven, I thank you for the opportunity that is mine tonight to declare the truth concerning the gospel, to declare the truth concerning your Son. And, Lord, I pray that we would each of us be aware and ready when it comes to giving you our full attention. Lord, keep us from distraction. Keep us from that which would steal your Word from our hearts and minds tonight. And so I ask that your Holy Spirit would take your Word in hand and deal with our hearts and deal with our lives in a way that brings change, eternal, fruitful change. And I pray for anyone in our midst tonight who doesn’t know your Son. Lord, our desire and our request is that tonight you would open their heart. Grant them your light. Grant them the understanding of Jesus and bring them to Christ. Lord, we trust you. We know that you do all things perfectly and all things well and so we lift this to you tonight in Jesus’ name, for his sake and of his honor. Amen.

I want you in you own mind to complete the following sentence. Don’t say it out loud, but just think about it. John the Baptist came preaching what? John the Baptist came preaching... Now what is the first word that comes to your mind?

How many of you thought repentance? And that is true. He came preaching repentance. But let me give you two words that don’t normally come to people’s minds when they hear about the preaching of John the Baptist. John the Baptist came preaching good news. How many of you thought good news? Liars. That is just not true. Brood of vipers.

Well, maybe it is true. And maybe what helped us is verse 18, because notice what it says.

“So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.”²

Now how can it be—because it is undeniable when you look at verse seven—that John’s preaching was confrontational? Do you think that is a fair way to put it, confrontational? Verse seven.

“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?’”³

That is pretty confrontational. How can it be that this man comes preaching in such a blunt fashion, a straightforward in your face fashion, how can it be that his preaching could be described as good news?

¹ Luke 3:7-18.

² Luke 3:18.

³ Luke 3:7.

If today someone began a sermon by referring to their audience in the way that John referred to his, as I just did, you brood of vipers, I wonder how many would consider that to be someone who is characterized by preaching good news? I wonder if they would be characterized as unloving or crude or combative. And yet the Holy Spirit tells us that John's preaching was the preaching of good news. How can that be?

Well, here is how that can be. It is because people are from birth on the wrong road. People are from birth deserving of the wrath of God. And if people stay on the spiritual road that they begin life on, if they stay on that road, they will surely perish. They will die and they will spend eternity separated from the accepting presence of God in a very real place of unquenchable fire. And if that is true—and it is—then the most loving thing you could ever do is confront their sin with the truth. When there is sin, it is loving to confront it. And when you announce to them that their sins can be forgiven, that their lives can be changed, that God will forgive them and receive them, that they can have a relationship with the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Lord Jesus Christ, when you announce that to sinners that there is a way for them to be reconciled to God, that is the preaching of good news.'

But the good news will make absolutely no sense and there will be no sense of urgency for it, if men are not confronted with the very thing that kills them and that is their sins. So though John was confrontational in his preaching, he didn't stop with the confrontation of their sins. He went on to tell them the rest of the story and to present to them the offer of God's forgiveness of their sins and that is why John was a preacher of good news.

So we are going to come back to this passage more than once. Tonight we are just going to begin. We are going to look at all of it from verses seven to 18. We will come back to it next Sunday and look at it from a different point of view, a different angle. But tonight I want us to look at these verses and really ask and answer one question. What does true gospel preaching consist of? What does true gospel preaching look like?

There is a lot today that is referred to as preaching, gospel preaching. But if we take John the Baptist and his preaching as our model, because the Spirit of God tells us that he was a preacher of good news, if we take his preaching as our model, what might we learn tonight?

And I want to point out five or six things. So if you want to jot these down you can think about them throughout the week.

Here is the first thing we can say based upon verse seven. Gospel preaching will not deal with sin superficially. Or we can say it another way. Gospel preaching calls for the deep recognition of sin. Gospel preaching doesn't avoid sin. It doesn't sugar coat sin. It doesn't empty the word sin of its meaning to the point that no one ever feels uncomfortable about their sin. True gospel preaching deals with sin for what it is: rebellion against holy God, an offense to a holy God, something that is deserving of the

wrath of God. And it is not just on the surface of our lives, sin is at the core of the fallen human condition. Out of man's mouth comes the abundance of his heart. The heart of man, the book of Jeremiah says, is deceitful above all things and incurably sick or desperately wicked. Who can know it? That is man's condition. We are, by nature, the book of Ephesians chapter two tells us we are by nature children of wrath. That is, people deserving of the wrath of God.

Now that is what John does in verse seven.

“He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers!’”⁴

And literally that is offspring of snakes or generation that has been begotten by vipers. Now when you talk about a snake, obviously your mind goes all the way back to the book of Genesis when the devil tempted Adam and Eve and he appeared to them in the form of a serpent. And throughout the Scriptures now the devil is often referred to as a serpent, that old serpent the devil. In fact, later on in the ministry of Jesus he is going to tell some of these religious leaders that their father is not Abraham, their father is the devil.

And if you talk about an accurate perspective of the true nature of fallen human beings, it is true to say that they, we all once belonged to the kingdom of darkness. We are the offspring of sin. We are the offspring of vipers. And so the first thing he confronts in verse seven is the truth about their nature.

“You generation or you offspring of snakes.”

You are sinful. You are wicked. You are like slithering snakes attempting to escape a brush fire by running into water.

Remember what John is doing. He is baptizing people. People are coming out into the wilderness and are wanting to get baptized. In fact, he is going to say, “Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” It is like a forest fire and snakes slithering into the water. This is their nature. He warns them or he tells them of God's perspective of their nature. They are sinners.

Something else he does as he confronts their sin, not only the truth about their nature. He also tells them the truth or he confronts the truth about their motives. What he says in verse seven:

“Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”⁵

Why are you coming? Are you really a candidate for this baptism? Because the baptism by itself, this is what John is saying, the baptism he is offering by itself won't do anything for them. What is called for is not baptism. What is called for is conversion.

⁴ Luke 3:7.

⁵ Ibid.

What is called for is true repentance, not a religious act, not something superficial, not something you can just simply do through some sort of religious observance. No, what is called for must be accomplished in the heart. God must do it. There must be a true turning in one's heart from your sin to God. That means you recognize your sinfulness, you brood of vipers. It means that you come for the right reason. Who warned you to flee. Did God warn you to flee? Is this the response of a truly convicted heart, convicted by the Spirit of the holy God who is in heaven? Is this why you are coming?

Something else that he confronts in his preaching as he confronts their sin, the nature of their sinfulness, the motives for why they are coming for baptism. Why are you coming? Who warned you to flee? But also when you confront sin there is the truth about the consequences of sin. What does sin deserve? What is coming? Well, wrath is coming. God's anger upon sin, God's judgment upon sin. You see, it is coming.

Men in their natural state deserve the wrath of God. That means we are headed for the wrath of God unless something happens. Unless there is forgiveness, unless there is conversion, unless there is salvation we are headed for wrath. And the ultimate day of wrath is in the future and that day of judgment is coming as it is coming with the messiah. Christ himself will be the judge one day. And have you ever heard someone say something like this?

“Well, this world is so awful, I really believe that this is what constitutes hell. You know, I don't believe in everlasting suffering. I think that this is really sort of as bad as it could possibly get. Some people have experienced their hell on this earth.”

Have you ever heard anything like that? Well, do you realize? John was declaring that that is not true. There is a day of wrath that is coming, the judgment of God. And men are headed for that wrath and yet there is a way to flee from it. There is a way to run from that judgment. There is a way to be delivered from that judgment, but John is declaring it is not just by being baptized. It is not through just some religious act.

And this is what gospel preaching will do. It will deal with man's real problem and man's real problem is not what he does. Man's true problem is who he is. He is a sinner by birth due to the fall of Adam in the garden at the very beginning. We were all born sinners, deserving of God's wrath and headed for God's wrath.

Notice a second thing that characterizes gospel preaching. Not only does gospel preaching confront sin, gospel preaching confronts false confidence and magnifies the need of the sinner. Look at verse eight. John declares this.

“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.”⁶

The first part of the statement:

⁶ Luke 3:8.

“Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.”⁷

Listen. If you want to be baptized, what happens first is conversion. What happens first is repentance and where there is true repentance there will be evidence of it. And he is going to talk about that evidence in just a moment. So what is needed is not something superficial, but something profound, a work of God in your heart.

But now as soon as man is confronted with his sinfulness and of his need for God’s forgiveness, what does man almost always begin to do? He begins to reason within himself why those words calling for repentance can’t really be directed at him.

I mean, John, if you are talking about sinners, I mean, if you are talking about people who really deserve God’s wrath, you can’t be talking to me, John. Don’t you know? I am a Jew by birth. Don’t you know that I am a son of Abraham? Have you not read all those Old Testament promises made to the offspring of Abraham and I am one of the offspring of Abraham? Surely you cannot be saying that God’s wrath is something that I should be afraid of, that I am somehow a candidate for the judgment of God.

Well, John confronts what is going on inside of them. He confronts it because, no doubt, just due to wisdom and discernment he knew something about the human condition, but he also confronts what they are thinking because the Spirit of God is speaking through him and God is directly confronting man as man reasons within himself and tries to excuse himself. And God is saying to men, “Listen. Don’t put your confidence there. You are going to be disappointed. You put your confidence in your heritage. You put your confidence in your blood lines. You put your confidence in your religious acts. You put your confidence in these things and you will discover one day that your confidence has been misplaced. Don’t say within yourselves, ‘We are sons of Abraham, we have Abraham as our father.’ Because let me tell you something. God doesn’t need you.”

You see, that is what he says in the last part of the statement in verse eight when he says this. He says:

“For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”⁸

You see, the one in need is not God. God has no need. He has all the ability to take this entire world out of existence and speak something in its place just by his Word.

No. The person who is in need when we talk about salvation is not God. It is men. We stand before God in desperate need.

Have you ever heard the gospel presented as though God is needy?

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Oh, please come to Jesus because, you see, somehow if you don't there is something missing in God.

Listen. It is right to plead with sinners. It is right that we would display the broken heart of God over sin. It is right that we would present God as loving and willing to be reconciled with men on the terms of the cross. That is right. But what is wrong is to present salvation in such a way that man is sovereign and God is standing there, you know, twiddling his thumbs and just waiting for someone to respond to his offer of salvation. That is just not true at all.

Though God is sovereign, he needs nothing. And what we must enable men to see through preaching, the Spirit of God must enable men to see in order for them to be saved is we are the ones in need. God is not the one in need.

Do men excuse themselves in our day? Different arguments, of course. But as the gospel is preached, do men say to themselves, "You know what? That really doesn't apply to me. You can't be talking to me, Richard. Don't you know? I am a Baptist. I mean, I was raised in a Baptist Church. I mean, I grew up in the Baptist Church. Surely you don't mean that I am a sinner. I was raised in a Christian home. Have you noticed, Richard, I am in church all the time? I mean, isn't that the way you go to heaven by trying to be a good person, being religious, observing, you know, religious things? I mean, isn't that the way to God?"

I want to show you something. I know you know this well, but look at Luke chapter 18.

By the way, if you have witnessed to anyone lately you know this. If you talk to the average person on the street, average guy, average gal and you say, "If you were to die do you know for sure you would be in heaven?" What is the average response you are going to meet with? Either yes or I hope so. And then if you follow that up with this question, "Well, let me ask you this. How does someone go to heaven? What is required in order for someone to be saved? What is the requirement?" What is the average answer you are going to get? Live a good life. Be a good person.

Well, why do you think God should accept you into heaven?

Well, because I am a good person. I try to do the right thing.

That is just how men think. In our falseness we think that we must somehow earn God's favor or that we have the capacity to earn God's favor, but that is not the gospel. Notice something very interesting. Luke chapter 18, look at verse nine. Jesus is telling parables and it says this.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I

thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified.⁹

What man? The tax collector who recognized his sinfulness and cried out for God’s mercy on the basis of God’s answer for our sins, because he literally said, “Let me be propitiated.” He is asking God to forgive his sins on the basis of God’s remedy for man’s sins.

This man went to his house justified, right in the sight of God, accepted in the sight of God, rather than the other. You see, the other man didn’t go home justified. He goes home. He is still in his sins.

I want you to let this sink in. I know this is simple, but let this sink in. If we take this parable as Jesus meant for us to take it, here is what you can know about the Pharisee. He really did fast twice a week. He really did give tithes of everything that he got. He really was not—in terms of just his moral life—he was not an extortioner. He was not an adulterer. He did not deal with people in an unjust fashion. He was very religious, highly religious. In the minds of men there is no better righteousness than the righteousness of a Pharisee.

And yet Jesus said, “This man was not right with God.”

For everyone who reasons within himself, “My religion will make me right with God, or my good deeds will make me right with God,” never forget that Pharisee, because I will guarantee you, you are not better morally and religiously than he was. But he was not justified, because the way to being right with God is not your work. It is Christ’s finished work. It is faith in Jesus Christ that makes a man or woman or young person right with God. Justification is by grace alone. It is by faith alone. It is in Christ alone.

Look back at Luke chapter three. That is what gospel preaching will do. It will absolutely make clear that every confidence that man has apart from Christ is a false confidence. And it will magnify the need of the sinner. You need something you cannot provide for yourself. You need to be saved. The answer is not for you to save yourself. You can’t save yourself. You need someone to save you. God must save you and he saves men and women through the work of his Son. Jesus saves people.

Third, gospel preaching conveys the urgency of the need, the universality of the need and the inescapable nature of the need that men have before God. Let me say it again. Gospel

⁹ Luke 18:8-14.

preaching will convey the urgency of the need, the universality of the need and the inescapable nature of the need.

Look at verse nine.

“Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.”¹⁰

There is the urgency of it.

By the way, this is an illustration. This is not the only message that John preached. Luke is giving us a taste. Have you ever wondered? What would it have been like to have been there and seen the ministry of John the Baptist? That is what you are getting. This is one of the messages he would have preached. This is a glimpse into his ministry. And he is preaching and he is giving this vivid illustration of trees that do not have good fruit and the axe has already been laid at the root. These trees are just about ready to be cut down. I mean, it is now. It is this moment. It is urgent. And one of the things we have to convey to this world is: When is the time for salvation? When do you need to be saved? If you have not been made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, when do you need to be saved?

What is the answer? Right now. Right now. It is that urgent. This could be your last day on this earth. This could be the last night that you live. The need for salvation is now. The axe is already at the root of the trees. Notice the universality of this need.

“Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit...”¹¹

When he says “Every tree” that makes clear this is an individual issue. He is not talking about salvation in groups. He is not talking about judgment in terms of a nation or a group. Every tree that doesn’t bear good fruit is cut down. So every one of us must examine ourselves and ask: Do I have real salvation? Do I really know Jesus Christ? Has the Lord saved me? Because any tree, every tree that doesn’t bear good fruit will be cut down.

And then notice the inescapable nature of this need, because he says in verse nine:

“Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down.”¹²

It is inescapable. And what happens to this tree? It is thrown what? Into the fire.

And as we go a little bit further through this ministry of John the Baptist it is going to become apparent. He is talking about judgment.

¹⁰ Luke 3:9.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

The wrath of God is coming. The axe is at the root of the trees. Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire which means there is going to be this unquenchable judgment.

Does this sound like good news yet? But this is good news preaching. No superficial dealing with sin.

And then as we deal with sin, we have to take away man's false confidence, the way that he tries to excuse himself from the message and then we have got to convey to him that the need is urgent and it is every man's need and if he ignores the message and rejects Jesus Christ, the judgment is inescapable.

Notice a fourth thing about gospel preaching. It will declare the true meaning of repentance.

Now John was preaching repentance. We talked about where repentance is this morning.

By the way, next Sunday we are going to take an in depth look from these verses and the ones that just preceded it. We are going to take an in depth look at what real repentance is. But for tonight realize it is a supernatural work of God whereby man's mind, his heart is changed and he turns from his sin to turn to Christ, turns from his sin to turn to God.

But what John would do in his preaching is he would illustrate exactly what that looks like, exactly what that means.

Look at verse 10.

“And the crowds asked him, ‘What then shall we do?’”¹³

Now just stop there because I want to make a comment on this. One of the things that gospel preaching should do is answer the question of the convicted heart. Right? God's Word is preached. Men are convicted of their sinfulness and of their need. And they cry out, if nowhere else, within their heart, “What then must I do? What must I do to be saved?”

I don't want to take too much of a rabbit trail, but I do want to address something. We who believe that God is sovereign in salvation—and we do, don't we? We know who saves—I think can be guilty of a major, major error. You see it a lot in reformed churches and in reformed circles. And that is you meet with sinners who are under conviction and they cry out. Sometimes they will say it to you verbally.

“Well, what must I do to be saved?”

¹³ Luke 3:10.

And here is something I don't see. When you go to the book of Acts chapter two and there is Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost. They are pierced to the heart. And they ask, "What must we do to be saved?" What did he say in Acts 2:38? He said:

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."¹⁴

Right? I mean, he points them to repentance and then the evidence of that repentance is baptism. What he did not say was, "Just go seek the Lord about it. You know, it is not in my place to give you that answer. You just go seek the Lord."

And I think there are more and more reformed people who sort of have that answer, because they realize we can't save people. We sort of leave people with no guidance, with no leadership with respect to what do I do with this broken convicted heart. And so they are asking John here. They are convicted. What shall we do?

And what does he do? He doesn't say, "Well, just go seek the Lord about that."

I mean he gets very practical, doesn't he? He gets very practical. He says, "Let me tell you what repentance looks like. When you have repented, here is how it is going... here is the kind of fruit that I am talking about."

"And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.'"¹⁵

And I don't want to preach next week's sermon tonight, but one thing you can see here, can't you, is when a work of repentance has really been done in a person's life, one of the evidences is they will move from this self centered, narcissistic view of life to caring about someone else. Now I am ready to share. Now I am ready to help.

You were selfish. When you repent of that self centered existence and out of faith in God and his Son, will you now give your life to help and serve others?

Notice this, verse 12. And, by the way, again, this is this sort of insight into what John's ministry must have looked like. He was preaching sermons and then people were asking him questions. And he was responding to their questions. Verse 12.

"Tax collectors also came to be baptized."¹⁶

You know, some of the most despised people in that day and age, that society, because tax collectors were famous for being a part of the whole rip off deal, not just taking from people what was required, but more than what was required.

¹⁴ Acts 2:38.

¹⁵ Luke 3:11.

¹⁶ Luke 3:12.

Verse 12.

Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”

And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”¹⁷

And, folks, please don't miss this. John is not preaching moralism. He is not saying you are going to be saved by changing your life and living in a more moral fashion. No, what he is saying is this. Where there is true faith in God, true submission to God, now you are going to care about what pleases God. And if you care about what pleases God, you will want to help others. If you care about what pleases God, you are not going to extort people. And in that specific realm where a tax collector was living, it would show up true faith was going to show up in a changed life in terms of the way that he conducted his business.

It is also interesting. He didn't tell them to quit their job. He told them to do it in an honorable fashion. Do it in an honest way.

Notice it doesn't stop there. Verse 14.

“Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats...’¹⁸

And a Roman soldier in that day could be guilty of that sort of thing. You must stop that.

“...or by false accusation...”¹⁹

And notice something. It gets down into the very simplest sorts of things in our heart. He says:

“...and be content with your wages.”²⁰

I mean, one of the evidences of a truly repentant life is a new contentment with the will of God. What is he doing in this preaching? He is explaining what repentance looks like. He is not just declaring repentance. He is illustrating repentance.

Can I ask you? Have you repented? Have you turned from your sin to trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, a changed heart, a right relationship with God, an eternal destiny in heaven? Have you trusted in Christ?

¹⁷ Luke 3:12-13.

¹⁸ Luke 3:14.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

I say to you, “If you truly trust in Christ, there will be fruit. There will be clear evidence that God has done this supernatural work of conversion in your heart. It is going to show up in the realm in which you conduct your life.”

A tax collector’s salvation would show up in the way that he did taxes. A soldier’s salvation would show up in the way that he did soldiering and a student’s salvation will show up in the way they go to school. And a husband’s salvation will show up in the way that he treats his wife.

When we are saved, it shows up in our life.

Is there fruit of salvation in your life? Gospel preaching declares the meaning of repentance.

Here is a fifth thing. Gospel preaching declares the majesty of Christ and the offices of Christ. Verse 15.

Now as John is carrying out this powerful ministry—and he was a powerful preacher—and here were these people. Remember. The Lord is at work. You have people looking of the Messiah. There is this expectation about the coming of Messiah. And so there... the brain is working. Here is this absolutely unique individual. You have never seen anyone like him. And so, verse 15:

“As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ...”²¹

I mean, is this the Messiah?

“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.’”²²

I am not worthy to take his shoes off.

What has John just done? He has pointed through his preaching he has pointed the multitudes to the majesty of the one whom he is presenting. He is presenting the Christ and he wants their attention to be fixed, not on himself. In fact, later on John says:

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”²³

John is pointing. He is doing his job. He is pointing the people to their Savior. He is pointing the people to the Lamb of God who takes away their sins. He is pointing the people to the Messiah.

²¹ Luke 3:15.

²² Luke 3:16.

²³ John 3:30.

And, folks, that is what even to this day that is what we do in gospel preaching. We don't preach us. We preach Jesus. We point people to Christ. And in doing that, John also points them to the unique offices of Jesus.

Because he says this.

“He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”²⁴

By the way, one of the most misinterpreted, misapplied verses in all the Bible right there. Have you ever heard people talk about Jesus baptizing with fire and they are talking about some sort of charismatic experience? He baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Well, when they use the verse that way, they have completely ignored the context. Because what this verse is saying is that Jesus is both Savior and Judge. You will either come to know Jesus as your Savior or one day you will meet him as your judge. He baptizes with the Holy Spirit. That speaks of salvation. But he also baptizes with fire. That speaks of judgment.

You say, “Richard, how do you know that is what he is talking about?”

Look at the very next verse, verse 17.

“His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing.”²⁵

Right? You have a threshing floor. And as you thresh there is going to be wheat and there is going to be chaff. What do you do with wheat? You gather it. You save it. You store it. You put it into your barn, right?

Verse 17.

“...to gather the wheat into his barn.”²⁶

But, folks, what do you do with chaff? You burn it.

He gathers the wheat into his barn...

“...but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”²⁷

What do you see? You see salvation and you see judgment. Christ is both Savior and Judge.

If we only preached Jesus as Judge, we are not preaching good news. But if we never preach Jesus as Judge, there is no reason for the good news. And so we point to the

²⁴ Luke 3:16.

²⁵ Luke 3:17

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

majesty of Christ and we point to the fact that he is both Savior and Judge and we exhort people to embrace him as Savior.

Look at verse 18.

“So with many other exhortations...”²⁸

You see, John is not... and, by the way, this is also something to note about gospel preaching. John did not preach a message like this in a spirit of let me just give you the facts. Here are the facts about Jesus. Do with it what you will.

No. What is the word used here? With many other what? Exhortations. What do you do? You don't just tell people about judgment and salvation, sin and salvation. You beg them. You plead with them. You exhort them to turn from their sins and to trust in Christ and be saved. You convey with your attitude and with your spirit God's own heart that takes no pleasure in the death of anyone, but desires the salvation, desires it, not decrees, but desires the salvation of everyone.

I will tell you what my heart is tonight, that no one sitting in this room will be in hell one day, that everyone sitting in this room will be in heaven one day. And therefore I must tell you that the only way to heaven is Jesus.

He said:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”²⁹

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”³⁰

And so I exhort you to receive Jesus.

Verse 18.

“So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.”³¹

There is a way to be forgiven. There is a way of eternal life. There is a way to be reconciled to God. There is a way to spend eternity with God in his accepting presence, though we don't deserve it, though we were by nature children deserving of God's wrath. God has made the way to reconcile us to himself. That is good news. And that is what we preach.

²⁸ Luke 3:18.

²⁹ John 14:6.

³⁰ John 3:36.

³¹ Luke 3:18.

So I ask you tonight. Will you receive the good news? Is there anyone sitting here right now that you know if you were to die this night, you have not yet trusted in Christ as the Lord who saves sinners? Would you tonight... if you were to cry out from your heart to me, "What must I do?" The answer would be to repent, turn from your sins, turn in faith to Jesus. Embrace him in your heart. Put your whole weight upon him for eternal life.

We can say it together, can't we? If God, if Jesus doesn't save sinners, I am lost. But because Jesus came to save sinners, I have hope and I have placed my faith not in anyone else or anything else. I have placed my faith in him, his finished work to make me right with God. And on the promise of God, I know that I am a child of God and that my eternal destiny is heaven because I have trusted in his Son.

Would you trust in him tonight? Would you cry out to him? You know the wonderful news? It can happen right there where you are sitting right now. The moment you call out to Christ you will be saved. It is not about walking an aisle or signing a card. Faith in Christ.

And then where there is true faith there will be fruit. The initial fruit will be you will want to let everybody know what the Lord has done in your life. You will want everybody to know that you are a believer in Jesus Christ. And it is in the waters of baptism where you evidence that genuine faith. But then there is another kind of evidence that begins to show up in the life. Your life has changed. God has actually performed that miracle in your soul. You are a new creation and for a soldier it might show up one way and for a tax collector it might show up in another way and it shows up in our families. It shows up in every walk of life that we really are now Christ followers.

May God do that saving work in your soul.

Let's bow together for prayer.

Lord, thank you for the privilege it is to declare your Son, to declare your kindness, your mercy, your grace and love that you have demonstrated in the sending of your Son into this world to save sinners. I thank you that everything the Bible says about him is true, that he was born of a virgin, that he lived a sinless life, that he died on the tree in the stead of sinners, that he has been raised from the dead and that he saves anyone and everyone who will look to him in true faith. We, Lord, whom you have saved, we bow before you tonight and tell you, "Thank you for opening our eyes and bringing us to your Son." And we pray, we intercede on behalf of anyone in this room who doesn't know your Son as yet. We ask that you would save them, that even tonight, Lord, they would turn to Jesus. We ask for this in Jesus' name.

And all of God's Church would say amen.