

15] BEAR FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE

(Sunday, January 30, 2022)

Scripture: Isaiah 58; Luke 3:7-20

INTRODUCTION

There have been a number of different movements in our nation, some based on God's truth and others based on man's ideas.

1st Great Awakening - 1730 to 1755

2nd Great Awakening - 1790 to 1840

In more modern times we have seen churches use bus ministries or the seeker sensitive model.

Others have focused on bringing in people through high production value performances.

Through all these movements there have been faithful churches and individuals focused on proclaiming the truth of God's Word and sharing the gospel message.

Example of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

One thing that stands out in terms of the ministry of John the Baptist and that is he did not try to coddle or woo people.

He boldly proclaimed God's Word.

It is not that we are to start dressing in camel skins and living in the wilderness, but certainly we must be bold with the truth.

We are not to pretend to be John, but dare we shy from the truth, even that truth that cuts deep and offends.

There is an outward focus in terms of our text.

How are we seeking to share and witness to God's truth?

There is also an inward focus and call.

Are we also bearing fruits worthy of repentance?

Are we living according to the flesh or the Spirit and the truth of Scripture?

We will look at Luke 3:7-20 in three parts:

- 1] Verses 7-9: A Message of Rebuke, Repentance, and Judgment
- 2] Verses 10-14: What Does Repentance Look Like?
- 3] Verses 15-20: More of John's Ministry and Its End

1] VERSES 7-9: A MESSAGE OF REBUKE, REPENTANCE, AND JUDGMENT

Verse 7 speaks of multitudes or crowds of people who came out to the wilderness area where John was ministering to be baptized.

What is significant about this?

Some were driven perhaps by curiosity or simply fear of judgment.

Some, the religious leaders, were coming to pass judgment and be critical of John's work. Certainly, there were those who were responding to John's message in true faith and repentance.

And this is a testimony to God's work!

Notice the strong words that John shared with those who came to him.

John's ministry was not seeker sensitive; it was a brood-of-vipers-rebuking ministry.

Now in Matthew 3:7, this strong rebuke was directed specifically to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to see what John was doing.

Luke doesn't indicate that this strong message was just for some of John's audience.

Think of the significance of this rebuke in terms of Genesis 3:15, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.¹

John is expressing that the people are the seed of the serpent. There must be a true turning unto the Lord in faith and repentance.

I don't think we are to take from this text that this is how we are to greet people who come to us wanting to know more about the truth.

However, we can say this. Jesus nor any of the apostles shied away from speaking hard words about faith, repentance, and judgment.

¹ ESV Study Bible

We also see that Jesus used the expression brood of vipers in Matthew 12:34 and 23:33.

Now, it is significant that people at this time were moved to find escape from God's wrath. Fear is not salvation.

But we certainly live in a time where people are very calloused – the very opposite of fear.²

We can say further, John was not giving to anyone who came a **false sense of assurance** that as long as you go through the outward motions, all will be fine.

There must be a true turning to the Lord.

You must be born again, born from above.

Notice the words of verse 8, bear fruits worthy of repentance.

This is an expression used three times in the NT.

Acts 26:20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.³

Last week my summary of the text in terms of its call was:

Our repentance does not save us, but we must turn to our Lord in repentance. We look to our Savior and live!

² Sproul, 135.

³ Paul was speaking to King Agrippa about his ministry and not being disobedient to the heavenly vision.

There are two related warnings and two related assurances in this.

First, there is the warning and question – have you truly turned to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and repentance?

The second warning is related.

Is there really evidence in your life of seeking to serve the Lord and produce fruit worthy of repentance?

Assurance is also joined to the warning.

Those who do come in true faith will not be cast out.

No one who sincerely turns to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, will be turned away.

The greatest assurance is not found in your own obedience, but in looking to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet it is never in vain to ask the question, is there the evidence of God's work in my life?

Is there a sorrow and conviction of sin?

Is there a seeking after God that is evident in my life?

This evidence should be there and when it is, you know it is not just your own good ideas, but the sign of God's work.

John gave the same warning that Jesus would later give in His ministry.

Don't just say, Abraham is my father.

This is profound and hard truth.

God's primary but certainly not exclusive work is what we could call His covenantal work, the saving of parents and children.

Most believers, certainly not all, had the blessing of being raised in a Christian family.

But this is no automatic work as we know very well.

What a blessing to grow up in a home where God's name is worshipped, and His truth is proclaimed.

But all those who have this blessing must not trust in the blessing but look to the Lord Jesus Christ alone and live.

John further proclaimed a message of very present judgment.

the ax is laid to the root of the trees.

John brought this warning in light of the coming of Jesus Christ, the way of the Lord that He was preparing.

The application is very similar today.

The opportunity to turn to the Lord and live is not indefinite.

There is always an urgency that we see in Scripture in terms of turning to the Lord, because we don't know what tomorrow will bring.

Luke 12:20 But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?"

Heb. 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,

2] VERSES 10-14: WHAT DOES REPENTANCE LOOK LIKE?

Luke has given us an example of those who did respond to John's message with sincerity.

We have ordinary people and then the despised tax collectors and those who maybe also were looked down upon, soldiers.

John told them to bear fruit.

Their question was how shall we bear this fruit? What should we be doing?

We can observe here that what John tells the people to do is not anything new.

The call is to follow what God's Word has already set forth in terms of how we are to live.

Further we can say, John was not calling for new government programs or some special movement.

Each believer is to consider the blessings, responsibilities, and opportunities that God gives to us.

Verse 11 speaks of sharing with those who are in need.

If you have two tunics, share with someone who has none.

If you have food to share, do the same.

It is not surprising that this instruction matches what we find later in Scripture.

1Tim. 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. **18** Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, **19** storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

I believe the basic rule of giving is the tithe.

As God prospers and blesses, we look for opportunities to do even more.

You stand before God not simply before men in terms of giving.

Verse 12 speaks of tax collectors who came to be baptized. Here is a beautiful testimony to God's grace.

One lexicon speaks of the tax system as having two levels. There were the true **publicans**, those who held tax farming contracts for the Romans.

These people were usually foreigners, but they worked with **underlings**, the tax collectors mentioned here, who were taken from the native population.

"The prevailing system of tax collection afforded a collector many opportunities to exercise greed and unfairness. **Hence tax collectors were particularly hated and despised as a class.**"⁴

Matt. 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47** And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

⁴ BDAG, s.v. τελώνης.

What did John tell these tax collectors to do?

It is pretty straightforward.

Collect no more than what is appointed or commanded for you to be able to collect.

Luke 19:8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

Soldiers also came to John.

It is thought that likely these were Jewish not Roman soldiers, members of the forces of Herod Antipas stationed in the area along and maybe even those who were part of the Judean police.⁵

They were given three instructions.

1] Don't intimidate - don't shakedown money by force or threat.

2] Don't make false accusations - **to put pressure on someone for personal gain, harass, squeeze, shake down, blackmail.**⁶

3] Be content with your wages.

1 Timothy 6:8 states that having food and clothing you are to be content.

Wow! We often don't really follow this command very well.

3] VERSES 15-20: MORE OF JOHN'S MINISTRY AND ITS END

⁵ MacArthur Study Bible

⁶ BDAG

We might like to know more about John's ministry. How many people did he baptize? How well did he prepare the way for the coming Messiah?

Scripture doesn't give us statistics like we might want to know.

We see the testimony here in Luke and the other gospels that there were those who responded to the preaching of God's Word.

And perhaps to show how significant John's ministry was, we are told that at least some people were confused about John and Jesus.

Was John the Messiah some thought and reasoned in their hearts?

It is clear from our text, John was not the source of this confusion.

God was doing a great work through John and so it is not entirely surprising that some were confused.

John gave a very clear answer about his calling and the coming Messiah.

John had a calling to baptize with water.

But one mightier than John was coming and John said, I am not even worthy to loose His sandal strap.

Think of the significance of what John is saying in verse 16.

There is a false humility that says, I cannot do anything for God because I am just too lowly.

There is a true humility that recognizes how totally unworthy we are, and yet if God has given us a calling, we do it.

There is always a danger in thinking, wow, look at what I am doing, I must be special.

No, you're not.

We are nothing before the Lord.

We are not even worthy to touch Jesus' sandal strap. *Think of that.*

And to drive that point home, John spoke of how Jesus would not simply baptize with water but He would bring a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire.

No matter how many talents and gifts God has given you, **it is certain that you can never baptize someone with the Holy Spirit and fire.**

MacArthur comments that the reference to fire is separate from the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Grammatically it makes more sense to see fire and the Holy Spirit joined together.⁷

Those who accept him will be purified as by fire (cf. Mal. 3:1ff.) and strengthened by the Holy Spirit.⁸

⁷ ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ

⁸ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 115.

Verse 17 then speaks of the coming judgment that our Lord will bring.

And it makes sense to see there are two aspects to this judgment.

There is a separation in this life of the wheat and the chaff which leads to the ultimate separation on the day of judgment.

I think if anything is pretty clear from our text is how different John's message is compared to the message that most generally that is shared today in terms of gospel preaching.

Let us never think we are special because we truly follow the pattern of John.

Let us pray that we will have the courage of John to speak God's truth in terms of salvation and judgment.

How long was John's ministry?

It would make sense to see that John started his ministry about 6 months before public ministry of Jesus began.

Jesus's ministry lasted approximately 3.5 years. John's ministry was from what we can observe shorter than that and part of that time was his ministry while still in prison.

John's ministry may have lasted about 2 years.⁹

We learn from this that length of ministry is not the sole judge for how effective we might be for the Lord.

Some of God's most faithful servants did not serve very long, though some have been given many more years of service.

⁹ <http://timeline.biblehistory.com/event/john-the-baptists-ministry>

The end of John's direct ministry in terms of public preaching and baptism came because John rebuked Herod for his evils, specifically his illegal marriage to Herodias.

Herod Antipas' brother, Philip, had married his niece, Herodias.

Sometime after this, Antipas encouraged Herodias to leave Philip and marry him.

This was all very disgusting and totally against God's Law.

Luke tells us that this was not the only rebuke John brought, but this was the rebuke that led to his imprisonment and eventually his death.

R. C. Sproul wrote:

"Throughout the history of the church, it has been the function of the church not to be the state but to be the conscience of the state. God establishes government for the purpose of sustaining, protecting, and maintaining the sanctity of human life. When a government fails to do that, it has been demonized, and it is the responsibility of the church to stand up to that government and say: "Stop. God won't tolerate you people who have no regard for human life or ethics."

It is not the duty of the church to be the state, but it is the duty of the state to be the state. When we speak to the state about abortion, we're not asking the state to be the church; we're asking the state to be the state, to do what it is tasked by God to do: protect human life. This isn't China or Russia. This isn't the Third Reich. This is the United States of America that kills and sanctions the killing of more than half a million babies every year. Where is the church? Intimidated, terrified, cringing."¹⁰

CONCLUSION

¹⁰ Sproul, 140-141.

Are we living according to the flesh or the Spirit and the truth of Scripture?

Two points of application.

Gal. 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Boldness in preaching the gospel and in speaking God's truth to government officials.

Prayer

Hymn 432

BENEDICTION - JUDE 24-25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *Be* glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.