

Before You Get the Gospel

Luke 3:1-3

April 3, 2016

I'd like to begin this morning by reading a good portion of this third chapter. So follow along with me as I read verses 1 to 23 of Luke Chapter 3. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being the tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "The voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled in, and every mountain and hill made low. And crooked shall become straight, the rough places shall become level ways. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'

"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? 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 ax 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 began to ask him, 'What then should we do?' And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics should 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

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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.'

"And with so many other exhortations he preached the good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.' Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age."

We'll stop there. Well, as we've turned the page from Chapter 2 to Chapter 3, Luke has fast-forwarded the story about 18 years in time. And in the last scene, Luke 2:40-52, the 12-year-old Jesus was in the temple. As we learned from Luke, the Lord grew as a human being. Luke 2:52 tells us that "Jesus

increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." And that growth took place in the white space between Luke 2:52 and Chapter 3, verse 1. That was an 18-year span. Jesus' cousin John, you may remember, we left in his infancy back in Chapter 1. And Luke also provided a summary statement about him as well, which summarized his growth. Luke 1:80 tells us, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel." That summary statement about John's growth you'll notice is similar to the one about Jesus, but with one major difference between the two, one of the major differences is the context of their upbringing. God prepared each of them uniquely, getting each one ready for a different special purpose. Jesus grew up in Nazareth in the context of domestic life, home life, surrounded by people. He lived in submission to his parents. Jesus learned from his father Joseph. He helped his mother, Mary. He looked after his siblings, his brothers and his sisters; he must have been pretty handy around the house, right? A sinless son helping with all the duties and the tasks of the home, the household.

John, though, by contrast, while he learned from his earliest years from his elderly parents. Remember, they were

both very advanced in years; he was taught in the faith, he was raised in a righteous home, but he was soon drawn away into the deserts. And whether by nature, by the spirit or a bit of both, God took him into the wilderness, prepared him specially, uniquely for the ministry and the mission that followed. Jesus, he grew up learning how to interact with people, how to relate with others, all the refinements and the subtleties of conversations, the intricacies of the human nature, even the human sinful nature that he had to navigate through. But, by contrast John, he was more of a blunt instrument. Tact and diplomacy were not his strong suits, considering other people's feelings, other people's opinions, factoring that in, massaging conversations, navigating all the personalities. All of that, not a whole lot of practice with interpersonal relationships in the middle of a desert. That was by design. God had one purpose for John and we just read about it. John's role on the earth, John's mission in life, his reason for existence, his purpose in the redemptive plan of God, John's role, his mission were absolutely critical for the proper reception of the Gospel. It was absolutely vital for a right understanding of Jesus Christ and his mission to save sinners.

Have you ever stopped to wonder why Luke spends so much time introducing us to John? I mean, have you considered as we've worked our way through the first two chapters, have you been thinking about the amount of attention John is getting? I mean he's almost had an equal amount of airplay as the Lord Jesus himself. Luke opens this massive Gospel with the visit of Gabriel to announce the birth, a remarkable birth, but not of Jesus first. He announces the birth of John first, and then of Jesus. Two baby announcements: John first, then Jesus. After that, two birth narratives: John's and then Jesus'. Even the prophetic songs that follow, they give an amazing degree of attention to someone other than Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Most High. We are supposed to focus not first on Jesus, but on the forerunner, on a herald, who runs before the king with a message. Why? What makes him so special? All the four Gospel writers begin the story of the Gospel with John the Baptist. It's as if, before they can talk about Jesus, they need to introduce John. All four quote Isaiah 40, verse 3, "The voice of the one crying in the wilderness," and they identify John as that voice. All four focus on his work of baptism. And, yet they all record John acknowledging the superiority of Jesus, of his ministry,

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the baptism that he will bring. In fact all, in all of the four Gospel accounts, the focus on John's ministry and John's life ends as soon as John baptizes Jesus. That's the point of handoff. That's the turning point. It's the pinnacle, actually, of John's career: identifying Jesus, pointing people to him, thereby launching Jesus' ministry.

Just a note on that, it's instructive for us, isn't it? The highest aspiration of our lives, the most we can ever aspire to is to point others to Jesus Christ. And we are not, as much as I love you, beloved, we are not as remarkable as John the Baptist. This man was known throughout not just this region, but the entire world. You know in Ephesus, Asia Minor, modern Turkey, they ran into disciples of John the Baptist there. That says something about his renown. And as great as he was, as great as a man as he was, as impressive as his personality was, his highest purpose and aspiration was to point not to himself, not to get fans and followers on Facebook, but to point people to Jesus Christ. That's instructive for us.

But, again, the Gospels do emphasize John, do they not? And we need to consider, why did all four Gospel writers enter into the ministry of Jesus that way? First by highlighting John's ministry. You say, Because that's the way it happened. Well, yeah, you're right, exactly right. And that forces us to ask a more fundamental question: Why did God send John first? Why did God plan to have it happen that way? What made John's ministry such a necessary part of the redemptive plan? Many treat John as simply the warm-up act. It's as if he's some kind of a public spectacle, sent out to get everybody's attention, just to wake everybody up. He was that, to be sure, but there's a deeper reason. And that's clear when you consider Luke's account because of all the Gospel writers, Luke spends the most time developing the ministry and the person of John the Baptist. Luke's Gospel has the longest treatment of John by a wide margin. In fact, Luke's treatment of John is longer still if you include the infancy narratives. Even longer still if you include the prophecy of John's father, Zechariah. Again, why? Why all this emphasis on John the Baptist? Wouldn't it be enough just to focus on Jesus, just to put our attention on him? What makes John so necessary?

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Well, I'm going to make what may seem at first like an audacious statement to you, but it is the Gospel truth. The ministry of John the Baptist was essential to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Without John's ministry, we wouldn't have Jesus' ministry. If we don't get his message, we don't get the Gospel message either. In fact I'll tell you, folks, without any fear of contradiction, the message of John the Baptist, that is the message that has been missing from most of the Gospel presentations in this country over the past 50 years or more. Evangelicalism has been deprived of this crucial element of the Gospel for far too long, and we are the worse for it, let me tell you. Why is it that so many in this country claim to be evangelical, they claim to profess faith in Jesus Christ, and yet they cling to the most abhorrent sins? Why do they excuse their sins? Why, when evangelicalism has been so prominent in public life over the past 50 years, why are evangelicals known for their political views and not for their holiness? Their separation from sin? Why are so many of their churches caught mimicking the world, trying to attract followers and fans by chasing cultural relevance? It's because they have failed to preach what John the Baptist preached as part and parcel to the Gospel message. It's because they have forsaken the bold call for sinners to repent of their sins.

Look at Luke 3:3, "John went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming" what? He was proclaiming, he was preaching, "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Now, let your eyes scroll down to verse 18 and notice what it says. So with many other exhortations. He preached" what? "good news to the people." The verb translated there, "he preached good news," you know what that verb is? It's *euangelizo*, which means, you guessed it, to preach the Gospel. That's where we get the name by which we are known, we are evangelicals because we *euangelizo*, we preach the Gospel. Folks, this is absolutely critical. If you don't get the concept of repentance, guess what? You don't get the Gospel either. So many pastors today are preaching a partial Gospel devoid of demands, devoid of hard truths. They back off of all that and soft-peddle partial truths to a self-indulgent culture. They're avoiding the hard sayings of Jesus, and they're staying far, far away, let me tell you, from any association with John the Baptist. He's a hard guy. He's a tough guy with tough words. "Brood of vipers." That is tough. Modern pastors offer people freedom, but it's not the freedom that comes from forsaking their sins. They offer people joy, happiness, fulfillment, but it's not the joy of a holy life.

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They offer the benefits of the Gospel that can be enjoyed apart from the demands of the Gospel.

Folks, that is no gospel at all. I don't want to hear anything except, You can be free from your sins. Because for us who know the Gospel, we want deliverance. We want to be separated from sin and Satan and the world. And we want holiness; the holiness of our God is what we are after. Apart from what John taught, which by the way is what Jesus taught as well, apart from his message of repentance, you know what? There is no Gospel. John and Jesus preached the same thing, repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And as I said, many professing evangelicals, they deny that the doctrine of repentance has anything to do with their salvation at all. Their lives show it, too. If you listen to them explain how they came to Christ, their language is devoid of any understanding of repentance. They'll say, I've asked Jesus into my heart, or, I've accepted Jesus as my Savior. Yeah, I just have a question to you, do you bow before him as your Lord? Because that's what he is. That's great you accept Jesus, but the crucial question is this: Does Jesus accept you? Your approval of Jesus is not the issue. His approval of you that's the issue of real eternal significance.

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The only people he approves are the humble and the meek. They are the repentant, the penitent. Humble repentance from sin is the entrance into the Gospel.

In fact, in Matthew's Gospel, the command, repent, is basically a summary call to salvation. John the Baptist comes in Matthew 3:2 saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And then in Matthew 4:17, Jesus came, and you know what he said? Exactly the same thing, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repentance is the bottom line when we call people to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. So it's no wonder so many evangelical churches have become impotent, powerless, almost indistinguishable from the world. They've ignored this crucial element of Gospel proclamation. And because of that, beloved, they're not faithful. If someone does not repent of his sins, that person is not a Christian. We must insist upon this because the truth of the Gospel, the glory of God, the eternal salvation of sinners, it all depends on proclaiming repentance as an essential, indispensable part of the Gospel message.

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So we're going to examine this issue of repentance in some pretty significant detail over the next few weeks. We're going to start today just by introducing John's ministry of a baptism of repentance. It's a concept that we so desperately need to recover in our time, and let me tell you, to recover in this region. I don't know how many people I have met who say they believe in Jesus Christ, but they have not repented. They don't even know what your talking about. Without repentance, not only do people remain trapped in their sins, but the glory of Jesus Christ in his Gospel is besmirched by the lack of holiness among those who falsely claim to know him. Before you get to the Gospel, you need to get to repentance. Before you can comprehend and embrace the Gospel, you need to comprehend the demands of the Gospel, what the Gospel requires. How are we going to count the cost if we don't lay before people the cost? Jesus came to save sinners. That is, those who know that they are sinners, those who want to repent of their sin so they might truly embrace what he offers, which is forgiveness and rescue from divine wrath.

So let's get started in this understanding of this monumental doctrine of repentance, which is introduced here in the ministry of John the Baptist. We're going to start with the

first point for this morning: The Desperate Need for Repentance. The Desperate Need for Repentance. Luke begins by locating the ministry of John at a particular time. It's a time of desperate need. Take a look at those first two verses. It says, "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness." In the Greek, that's all one sentence. I'm so thankful for punctuation, right? There are seven men named before we even get to John, along with all their positions of authority. You've got the emperor, the governor, these tetrarchs, high priests. You also have the scope of their authority. You've got the empire, you've got Judea, Galilee and so on. Luke moves here from imperial power to regional power. He moves from the emperor to the governor to the tetrarchs, who are petty kings under the authority of Rome. Then he moves to the high priesthood of the Jews, which was also, by the way, under Roman authority.

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In the infancy narratives, you may remember the two major figures there. Who were they? Caesar Augustus and Herod the Great, right? Thirty years have passed since then, and those two great men are now dead, going the way of all flesh. Greatness has a time stamp on it in the human life. And as they die and pass off the scene, pass on their rule, the situation hasn't much improved since their deaths. In fact, it's gotten much, much worse. And that's primarily what Luke wants us to see here. This, this section isn't just about dating these events, though Luke truly does that; it's about helping us understand the times. It's helping us understand the situation into which John and Jesus entered. If Luke had simply wanted to date the arrival of John and the beginning of Jesus' ministry, all we would need is two facts. We would need Luke 3:1 and Luke 3:23. Luke 3:1, "The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar." Luke 3:23, "Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age." Those two facts help us see that Luke places these events, dates them, at about A.D. 26. Luke puts the start of Tiberius' reign, he acknowledges that recognizes it at the time of his co-regency with Caesar Augustus, while Caesar Augustus was still alive. One of his sons he wanted it handed off to died, so he looked to Tiberius. Tiberius received the authority to exercise imperial power around A.D. 11, rather than when he assumed sole

authority of the Empire at Augustus' death on August 19th A.D.

14. So, around A.D. 11, fifteen years from that, that puts us at A.D. 26, which corresponds well with the rest of Luke's chronology. It nails it.

But Luke tells us more here. This is about the political and ecclesiastical condition of Israel when John came on the scene, and it is not good. Nothing was healthy. It had all the marks of the instability that, beloved, we're feeling in our own time. But even worse, even worse if you can imagine it. Notice after Tiberius Caesar, Luke moves on to highlight the fracturing power in the land of Israel. Under Herod the Great, Israel was a client-state of Rome and as Herod ruled with Roman backing, as client-king, as bad as he was, at least the land was unified. At least it was shielded somewhat from direct Roman rule and intervention, but when Herod died in 4 B.C., his dying actions had brought the land to the brink of chaos. So Rome intervened. Rome jumped in and divided Herod's kingdom into a tetrarchy. That's a rule of four: four sections, four regions. And placed Herod's son Archelaus in power in Herod's stead. But Archelaus was so foolish and he acted with such brutality that he caused an already unstable situation to descend into further disorder.

Romans don't like disorder in their client-states. Why? Because they can't raise any tax money in a disorderly region.

So Augustus deposed Archelaus and imposed Roman rule on the land on a more permanent basis through the presence of a Roman governor. He installed a Roman governor right in Judea and that meant that the land of Israel stopped being a client-state; it had now become a Roman province. Judea was ruled directly by Roman authority under the governor, Pontius Pilate. He was the fifth in a succession of governors since Archelaus had been deposed. So, the direct rule of Rome meant that people lived virtually with a sword at their throats. The foreign presence there was oppressive because Roman soldiers, you know they were there; there was a garrison there, and they were outnumbered by the land massively. So how did they rule? By intimidation, by threats, by extortion. Foreign presence, as I said, is oppressive. It's like having a boot upside the head all of the time, a Roman boot, a constant reminder that the Jews were dominated once again, subjects of Gentile power.

Several of Herod's other sons, those who had survived Herod's murderous suspicions about their loyalty, some of those surviving sons were granted tetrarchies by Rome. As Luke tells us, Herod Antipas, he became tetrarch of Galilee, the region that is North of Judea, also the Decapolis. And to the East of the Jordan River, which was populated mostly by Gentiles. Herod Antipas, he's the main Herod throughout the Gospel narratives. His brother, Philip, he became tetrarch in the region of Iturea and Trachonitis like a rough, wild land where the people up there were archers. They were, were wild people, a lot of bandits up there. But Philip was up there to the northeast to the Sea of Galilee. Lysanias, he became the tetrarch of Abilene, bordered on the province of Syria, the north most stretch of Israel. Not much is known about him. And I'm going to spare you the pain of trying to outline the Herod family tree because it is an absolute mess. He had ten wives. Five of them had sons and daughters and they were all intermixed. All these intrigues, jealousies, incestuous relationships among the Herodian family. It was a vile illustration of the corruption and the degradation of human depravity.

That's why Luke points it out. He wants the reader to remember and to think of it this way, that family was in charge. They were making decisions that affected your life; to that was added the shame of the corruption in Israel's religion, which was represented by the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. It was Quirinius, whom we read about in Chapter 1. He had installed Annas into the high priesthood in AD 6 and he continued, Annas continued into AD 15. But Annas got on the wrong side of the Roman governor, Valerius Gratus, and that began a succession of high priests that ended here with Caiaphas, who is Anna's son-in-law. Annas, he liked to keep it all in the family. It's called nepotism. And that is why Luke mentions both Annas and Caiaphas here. Even though Caiaphas was the official high priest, Annas remained the de facto high priest. He was ruling from behind the scenes. He's the puppet master here pulling all the strings. He held power, as I said, through nepotism, and made sure the right money was paid to the right people at the right time because he wanted to get his sons and his relatives into positions of power, influence, and authority.

Annas was a conniving weasel, corrupt, not at all a believer, obviously. But the high priests were from the party of

the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the liberals of the day. They only held to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and they didn't acknowledge any of the rest of Scripture, especially the prophets. They didn't like the prophets at all because the prophets were always haranguing them about issues of righteousness and all this stuff. They didn't like that. So they rejected that. They said, Nah, just the first five books of the Bible that's all for us. They were big proponents of human free will, emphasizing man's right and responsibility to choose, his ability to choose. And at the same time as they emphasized human free will, they conveniently rejected the idea of the immortality of the soul, which means they didn't believe in resurrection or an afterlife at all. So they, they rejected, get this, they rejected the concept of future judgment. That's convenient, too. Free will for me, no accountability before God or anybody else. Sounds pretty American, doesn't it? Their lives reflected their doctrine. Or, you might say their doctrine reflected their lives. Annas and Caiaphas were entirely corrupt. Their only interest in keeping the priesthood, the high priesthood at all, was in keeping control of the temple and all of the temple environs and all the temple activity. Why? Because money came into the temple. The high priests were the bankers, they were the money guys, they were striking deals with the

vendors and money changers in the temple, the loan sharks. They made lots and lots of money fleecing the flocks, all the while the people suffered.

Now, all of this political restructuring, all of this religious corruption, all this had a profoundly demoralizing effect on the Jews. As a Roman province with a Roman governor sitting on a throne in Jerusalem with Judea belonging to Rome, not to the people of Israel, this was a significant step backwards in the quest for Jewish independence and autonomy. With the corrupt leadership running the temple, anyone with a sincere heart, anybody who embraced Biblical doctrine, who pursued lives of holiness, you know what? They were out. They were marginalized. Nobody listened to them. They were set aside by the carnal interests of money and power. Wolves were in charge. Wolves were shepherding the flock. As you might say, Dracula was in charge of the blood bank. And all of this, all of this while the people suffered, it did serve the purpose of increasing people's interest in hearing about the Messiah. They wanted to know those stories. There was what was called, theologians will call it, Messianic Expectation. It was in the air.

But for most, their interests were not spiritual, they were political. People hoped in military conquest, and they touted racial pride, superiority of custom and tradition, connection with Abraham. They wanted the Messiah, the Son of David to come, but they wanted him to come to depose the governor, to drive out the Romans, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, right from Jerusalem. In fact, it is interesting, they were so carnal, so worldly minded, it's interesting that most of the population didn't fuss too much about the ecclesiastical corruption. They didn't fuss too much about the temple being corrupt. Most people had made peace with their false religion because the practice of external religion that allowed them to salve their consciences, their guilty consciences. They could salve it with sacrifice. I've done my part for God; I'm forgiven; I'm okay. All the while it left their hearts, their attitudes, their thought life completely untouched by truth. People were not in a repentant frame of mind. Israel wanted the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, but for all the wrong reasons. They wanted the benefits of divine redemption, but had no interest in the demands of redemption, repentance and faith.

Again, not unlike today, right? People don't change, folks. From beginning of time to the very end, we're the same. No matter the culture, no matter the time, no matter the history. These people thought that they wanted the Messiah to come, but when he actually arrived, they found an altogether different sort of man than they had expected. They didn't like him too much. That will happen with us, too. If we preach the whole Gospel, demands and all, you're going to find most people reluctant to embrace it. That is why Jesus told us, "Though many are called, few are chosen." It's a narrow gate. It's a difficult way that leads to life, and there are only a few who find it.

All that to say, the political situation in Israel, it was dire, it was desperate, it was oppressive, it was a reminder that they remained under God's judgement. And when the Word of God came, it bypassed the corrupt structures of political and ecclesiastical power altogether; ignored them. And the word of God sought out, instead, an isolated, prepared man named John. That's point two. Write this down: The Prepared Preacher of Repentance: The Prepared Preacher of Repentance. Take a look at verses 2 and 3. "The word of God came to John the son of

Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness.'" Who is John? What is the best way to describe him? He has no imperial significance, like Tiberius Caesar or Pontius Pilate. He doesn't even have regional power or authority like the tetrarchs or the high priests. John is simply a wilderness voice. John 1:19 and following says, "When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' [...] 'What do you say about yourself?'" You know what he said? "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." That was John's own testimony about himself, which is why all four Gospel writers record the same thing about him, making the connection he intended for them to make; back to Isaiah, Chapter 40, verse 3.

Where did John get this notion about himself? Look back really quick at Luke 1:76 and following, the prophet song of John's father Zechariah. Luke 1:76, What did he say? He said this, "and you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most

High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins." Where did Zechariah get that idea? Well, from the Holy Spirit who had filled him to say those exact words in Luke 1:67, but that corresponded perfectly with what Gabriel had revealed even before John had been conceived. Look back at Luke 1:16 and 17. Luke 1:16 and 17, says this, John "will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him," that is the Lord their God, "he'll go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." How does the Bible describe people before salvation? It describes them as disobedient, and when they become Christians, what do they need to do? They need to turn and submit themselves to the wisdom of the just. People don't want to do that, folks. They don't want to submit to anybody.

Go ahead and back to Luke Chapter 3. A prepared prophet creates a prepared people, ready for the Lord, ready for his ministry, and that's why I said, folks, at the beginning, that without John's ministry, we wouldn't have Jesus' ministry. If we

don't get his message, we don't get the Gospel message either. Before you get the Gospel, you need to get the message of repentance because it's integral to the Gospel itself. Notice here, Luke 3, John is a wilderness voice. Twice Luke mentions John's emergence from the desert, but unlike Matthew and Mark, he doesn't tell us anything about his attire, his wardrobe. He doesn't say anything about his diet. For Matthew and Mark, those details were important. They were writing to Jewish audience and they were important, those details, because they connected John to the prophet Elijah. But Luke, he wants Theophilus and all of his Gentile readers, and that's all of us, he wants us to see something else about John. He doesn't want us to get lost in those details. He wants us to focus on this detail. As we mentioned earlier, John was, according to Luke 1:80, he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel. That day's come. John has emerged from the wilderness. And you can imagine him like leathery lizard crawling out of the rocks and crags. He's coming out of the wadis and the ravines. He's still got locusts between his teeth.

What is the significance of him emerging from the wilderness? What is the significance of that to the people that

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he is speaking to? Well, first of all, John is clearly not part of the system. He's not a member of the establishment. That's apparent just by looking at him. He held no political post. He held no ecclesiastical authority, so you know what? That means he's got no interest to protect. He's got no salary, he's got no ulterior motives, no designs. He's got no system to perpetuate, no allegiances to maintain, no loyalties to uphold. He speaks for God and God alone. Why? Because his loyalty and his allegiance are to God and to God alone.

Secondly, coming up out of the desert where he lived the majority of his growing up years, John is unencumbered by the things that the rest of us are encumbered by, that is, commitments to people. John is uninfluenced by human relationships. John has not been tainted by rubbing shoulders with sinful humanity, and he's not been affected, really, by the rest of humanity for that matter. So he couldn't care less what people think about him. You can count on him not to be a man-pleaser. You can count on him to tell the unvarnished truth, to speak without apology, with deference to no one. All this means that John is a trustworthy voice. You believe what he says. And that's really an interesting part of his own self-awareness, his

own self-understanding. He represented himself in John 1:23 that I read earlier not as, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, but simply as "a voice crying out in the wilderness." There's no definite article there. He didn't say, I'm the voice. He said, "I am a voice." It's not that he thinks of himself as one among many, just many to listen to, but rather he pretty much thinks nothing of himself at all. He is a voice. And that's it. The emphasis, then, is not on him; it's on the message himself. He simply is the conduit of divine communication. He's the mouthpiece of God. No one cares about the bullhorn. They care what's coming out. No one gets caught up in the microphone, the amplifier, the speakers. What matters is what's coming out, what's produced. And in John's case, the one who is projecting the sound is God.

Same time, you shouldn't forget that John is not just a disembodied voice. He's not without significance. Quite the contrary, John's ministry is of great magnitude, great weight, eternal significance. John represents the restoration of the true priesthood. He, he represents the return of God's prophetic voice to Israel after a 400-year silence. John was called to this ministry by God. He was providentially credentialed. He was

providentially prepared. He was uniquely qualified. It comes briefly and quickly in the text and you have to slow down to see it. But Luke reminds us of that back in verse 2, that John is the son of whom? Zechariah, right? And that takes us back to what was recorded in Luke 1:5, that Zechariah was not just any ordinary person, he was a priest. He was of the division of Abijah, and he served according to the custom of the temple, and he was burning incense in the sanctuary when Gabriel visited him.

So John is a priest. He comes from a priestly line. He's not an iconoclast; he's not some wild-eyed maverick who smashes his way through all the, Israel's ancient customs. John's born into a priestly family on purpose, to remind people what the priesthood was actually for: to point Israel back to God. His heart is singly focused, attuned to God's interests, not man's. Folks, that's how all preachers and teachers of God's word should be, right there. Luke also reminds us in verse 2 that John was entering into the ranks of the prophets. An established cadre of men whose been called into the prophetic ministry. It's easy for us Gentiles to miss the import of the statement there, "The word of God came to John," there in verse 2. But it's

really a clear indication that John was being called as a prophet of God. The word for, word, there is not the common word *logos*, it's the less common word, *rhema*. The word, *logos*, it's pretty broad in its different uses. It could be referring to a single word, sometimes referring to an entire theology like the Apostolic Gospel. Ephesians 1:13 says, "The word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation." That's the word *logos*. But *rhema* can refer to a single phrase or statement, such as, in this case, John's calling into ministry. And it just so happens that what Luke writes parallels the calling of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:1. It's almost word for word in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It says in Jeremiah 1:1, "The word of God which came to Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah." You know what the word there for, word, is in the Septuagint? *Rhema*. This is the calling. This is the calling. This is his day of his public appearance to Israel in his public office of a prophet. John, born into the home of a priest, both Zechariah and Elizabeth were of the tribe of Levi, so he had the right credentials. He's born into a godly home. Both of his parents were, as it says back in Luke 1, "They were righteous before God. They were walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord." So, he was raised in the faith. And then he was prepared by God out in the harsh, isolated conditions of

the desert. John here is providentially prepared to be this preacher of repentance. An extremely important figure. Yes, he thought of himself as a voice, but he looms large on the pages of Scripture. Even if he's rightly eclipsed by his cousin, Jesus Christ.

But you know what Jesus said about John? Turn over to Matthew, you gonna have to turn back in your Bibles to Matthew Chapter 11, verse 7. Matthew 11 verse 7, I wanna show you what Jesus thought of John, the significance of his ministry. John's disciples, you may remember in that chapter, Jesus in Matthew 10 had sent out his disciples to go preach the kingdom and then some of John's disciples came and were asking Jesus, "Are you the one we are to look for?" And Jesus answered those questions in the affirmative. Yes, everything you see, the fruit of my ministry coming out, all the truth, I am the one. And John's disciples went away and Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John. And look at what it says in Matthew 11:7, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" That's supposed to be a bit humorous. No, you can see reeds shaking in the wind anywhere; you don't need to go to the wilderness to see that great sight. So, "What then did you go

out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?" They're picturing John right then. Uh, no, that's not what he is. "Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet?" Oh, "Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, "Behold I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there is arisen no one greater than John the Baptist." Jesus acknowledged not only the significance of John, but the significance and the essential nature of his ministry preparing for Christ's own ministry. Without John's ministry, we wouldn't have Jesus' ministry. Pretty important.

So what was his ministry? What was his central message? It's Repentance. Point three, point three for your outline there: The Necessary Baptism of Repentance: The Necessary Baptism of Repentance. We're just going to get an introduction to the message of repentance at this point because the rest of the chapter that we read earlier it's going to help us understand repentance very clearly, but notice in verse 3 just this, "John went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of

sins.” So when John came out of the desert wilderness, he went into the region of Galilee, it was also called the Judean countryside, north of the political district there of Judea, which was governed by Rome. But it was west of the Jordan River. Plenty of water. John 3:23 tells us he was “Baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there.” That’s right between Galilee to the west and the Decapolis which is to the east of the Jordan River. And I want to be careful here as we get into this lest you get the wrong idea that John came preaching salvation by works. That is, get baptized, get forgiveness. You do one, you get the other. That’s not what he’s saying, and we need to be very careful here and accurate. When you understand the terms and the nature of what John was doing when he baptized people, you’ll see that baptism and repentance were internal attitudes first, and then they were expressed outwardly in works. Forgiveness it was based on an internal heart change, not external work. The external work was simply the sign and the symbol of what had happened on the inside. That’s what Annie went through today. This is a different baptism than John’s. But she went through baptism not to get saved, but to symbolize and show what had happened when she was saved. She was put to death, buried with Christ, raised into

newness of life. External work, the sign and symbol of what has taken place on the inside.

So let's walk through these terms just one by one, get a little clarity on the concepts, get an idea in our head about what John was doing. We'll look first at the word proclaiming, then, baptism, then, repentance, and then, forgiveness of sins. First, John came proclaiming. The word there is *karusso*, *karusso*, which is the word for preaching the Gospel. It's used 60 times in the New Testament, and get this, it's always used referring to the proclamation of the Gospel and its themes: salvation from sin, righteousness, rescue from judgment and wrath to serve God by faith. It's the preaching of Christ and his righteousness. In fact, the Gospel is sometimes summarized by the noun form of the verb *kerygma*. *Kerygma*. Jesus summarized the Gospel and joined it together with the concept of repentance at the end of Luke's Gospel in Luke 24, when he's walking with the two forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus. The text says there in Luke 24 that Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead," and then what? "And repentance and forgiveness of sins should be

proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.”
It's important to note that proclamation, that preaching started with John right here in Luke 3:3.

Second word, not just proclaiming, but the second word John came proclaiming, baptism. Baptism, what's that? Baptism is a word transliterated into the English directly from the Greek word *baptizo*. It means quite simply, to immerse, to submerge in water. Going all the way under. There were some mystery religions in Jewish sects in the region like the Essenes. They used baptism as a cleansing ritual to initiate new members into their group. They borrowed the ritual itself from Judaism. Jews practiced baptism also as a right of initiation not for themselves, but for proselytes, Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. So basically, Gentiles were converts to the Jewish faith. They learned from the law and the prophets the excellence of the revealed religion of Israel, the excellence of Israel's God and they wanted to join themselves like Ruth did to Naomi, your people shall be my people; your God my God. And part of the entrance into that Jewish religion, the Jews required the Gentiles to go through ritual purification: baptism. To wash off their Gentileness. To wash off their impurity. They were

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separating themselves from their own defiled race. Gentiles need to be washed from head to toe. Immersed in cleansing waters. So this ritual of baptism, it symbolized the need of cleansing, a Gentile acknowledgement that they were indeed unclean creatures. They were defiled, and they could only join the believing community by admitting that they were unclean, forsaking that uncleanliness, and they were becoming clean through washing.

Now, all that's good, okay, when Jews are baptizing Gentiles. But when John started baptizing Jews, that's another matter altogether. What? You want us to be baptized? We're Jews! And that's why John said in verse 8, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. Do not even 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 to Abraham." Don't even try that with me, John is saying. Don't claim your physical lineage to Abraham that that exempts you from admitting that you, too, are unclean. Just as unclean as a Gentile, just as in need of washing. You are unclean. You're filthy before God. The Jews needed to admit, along with the Gentiles, the words of Isaiah 64:6, "We have all." We, Isaiah puts it in the first-person plural: "we," me and all the other Jews. "We all have become

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like one who is unclean. All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, all our iniquities, like the wind, blow us away.”

As I said earlier, most of the nation, they didn't want to hear that. They wanted to hear that they're okay, that they're doing pretty good. Give us encouragement. Come on, don't be so harsh. Don't look at all my bad stuff. Come on, look at the good stuff. They wanted to see themselves as noble victims of other people's crimes, the innocent party that received more than its fair share of abuse and suffering from the nations of the world. Admit that we are as dirty as a Gentile? Are you kidding me? They are the ones that they..

So John had to rebuke them sternly in a way that only he was prepared by God to do there in verse 7, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits.” You want to say that you're repentant? Bear fruits showing it. I guess that takes us to the third word, the main point of what we're learning today. For Jews to admit that they were no better than unclean Gentiles, you know what they had to

do? They had to humble themselves. They would have to take a good, hard look in the mirror of God's law and admit their sinfulness from the inside out. They had to admit their defilement, their need for cleansing. That could only happen if they had a profound change of mind. That is what the word, *repentance*, is a profound change of mind. The word is *metanoia* and that has the word for mind, *noia*, imbedded in the word, *metanoia*.

There's been a popular strain of theology in our day in evangelicalism. It really has been rebuked, discredited, many have come to repudiate its doctrines, but the effects of this erroneous theology remain with us even to today. I run into people all the time who've bought into this. And they teach that the word *metanoia*, change of mind, means, merely intellectually changing your mind about who Jesus is. Here's how they say this goes, they say, Yea you once believed that Jesus was just a man or something less than he really is and that you've received new information and you have realized that he's more than that. He's the Son of God, he's the Savior, he died on the cross for your sins. They teach that that in and of itself is repentance. It's just changing your mind, and by that you gain eternal salvation,

and you should never ever question it again. Get this, even if your life never changes, they say you can point back to a date and a time when you changed your mind about Jesus. You're good to go. And anybody who tries to have you question that, you just point them to that date. You point them to your baptism certificate. I'm not overstating this at all. I wish I were, but I'm not. I run into this all the time, beloved, and it makes my work as a pastor really, really hard. That is not repentance. That's an inoculation against the true Gospel. That's a change of mind that happened only at the place of the intellect. And if it happened at the intellect only, it's not repentance. It's not what's talked about here. That's merely an intellectual understanding of the words. It may be even an ascent to their truthfulness.

I grant that those notions are true and accurate, okay? But it lacks the change in the will and the affections. That is the core part of the word *metanoia*. True repentance, true *metanoia* involves all three of these fancy Latin words: *notitia*, *assensus*, *fiducia*. *Fiducia* refers to the change of will and the affections and that won't happen unless the understanding, the *notitia*; and the ascending to the truthfulness of the Gospel,

that's the *assensus*, won't happen with that. Many people, though, understand, but few ascent intellectually to the truthfulness of the message. They get the terms, they just don't agree with it. And then,, then of those who understand the terms, there are many who even assent to the truthfulness of the Christian faith. Our churches are filled with people like this who stop short of anything more. Fewer still, though, possess and demonstrate that crucial element called *fiducia*, the change in the affections, as demonstrated by a new direction of the will, a new direction of the life. They stop short of that. Don't make me change anything. Don't make me change anything, I want to do this or that. I have things that are priorities to me and this is one of them. Listen, you don't add Jesus to your life as if he's just another element or a token or a trophy on your shelf. He's not a get-out-of-hell-free card, get into heaven. You don't flash his name before the gates. He's a replacement. He replaces everything that you are; all your dreams, all your hopes, and all your ambitions, all your sin, all your self-righteousness, all your idolatry, all your vacations, replaces all of that with himself. You happy with that? I sure am.

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The Apostle Paul described true repentance in the Corinthian church, 2 Corinthians 7:10 to 11 when he said this, “For godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.” In other words, “In every point, you’ve proved yourselves repentant.” That’s why John the Baptist’s question challenged those Jews who were coming forward for baptism. He said to the crowds, “Who warned you? That is what prompted this sudden change of your dull minds. This change in your cold affections, this change in your stubborn wills, what is really driving you? What is motivating you to go through this rite of baptism? Prove yourselves by bearing the fruit of repentance.” I can’t tell you how many times I’ve described this concept of repentance to those who’ve grown up in evangelical churches and you know what? They look at me with suspicion. Sometimes even with dismay, even anger. This is not what they heard in their churches growing up. And even though I show them using passage after passage of Scripture that this is the truth, that this is what Jesus taught, embracing the Gospel

demands your repentance, you know what? Sadly, so many people refuse. They walk away. They've wandered.

We, beloved, have wandered so far from the historic protestant faith—what the Reformers taught, what the Puritans taught, what the Apostles taught. They don't even recognize it when they hear it. They've been inoculated against the true Gospel and those who inoculate them. Those who proclaim a false or half Gospel are one day going to give an account for creating a host of false converts who fill the churches, unwilling, unable to hear anything but smooth words of false assurance that they've been hearing all their lives. But God have mercy on us. There are few, though, when they hear it, who embrace the message of repentance. They forsake their sin, their self-righteousness. They forsake their pride, their justifications for sinful thinking. They humble themselves. They admit their desperate need. They embrace repentance. They find in the Gospel a precious healing balm for weary sin-sick souls.

For those who were truly repentant, there's a fourth word. For them: Forgiveness of sins. "As far as the East is from the

West," beloved. That's how far God separates the sins of those who've been forgiven, for those who've come to hate their sin, their sinful selves. Forgiveness is the most welcome news at all. It's what they're after. It is the good news. It is the Gospel truth. And people who are repentant care for little if anything else; and they have all their sins wiped away. That's what John came preaching to the crowds. And he came because he was setting their expectations about what they were going to find in Jesus. That the Messiah's rule begins with the heart; it begins in the mind, with the thinking. But once that is changed, radically changed, it extends outward from there. For the Kingdom of God isn't an external political reality; it is an internal, spiritual reality. Jesus' reign over those whose hearts are truly his—it's for all those whose hearts belong to him by repentance and faith. They and they alone, they are the ones who find forgiveness of sins. In John's day, those who came forward to submit to his baptism had to humble themselves to enter into the waters of cleansing, to recognize their need for full immersion in cleanliness, immersion in the grace of God. They demonstrated their repentance there in the waters of baptism and bearing fruits consistent with true repentance. But those who rejected repentance, some of them even went through baptism,

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didn't they, but they remained in their sins. The symbol was just a symbol for them, just a picture, that denied the internal reality in their hearts.

Well, we've see the need, we've seen the preacher, we've seen the baptism of repentance. So much more to say. We're going to get more clarity on that fundamental doctrine next time. But beloved, just know this: Before you get the Gospel, you need to get this concept of repentance. Embrace it. Make sure that you, having been instructed in this, that you're not spreading a false or a half Gospel. Call people to repentance. It's a part of the Gospel. Help them to see that they need to forsake sin and self and the world and all its allurements. They need to turn and embrace Jesus Christ alone. You know why? Because he tolerates no sin, he tolerates no rivals, he tolerates no other gods before him. Amen