

How to Preach Repentance, Part 2

Luke 3:10-14

April 24, 2016

As we pointed out last week, the call to repentance is considered by many today to be something that is an addition to the Gospel, rather than the essence of the Gospel itself. For anyone to insist that there must be fruits of repentance, like John commands here, or that there must be works accompanying genuine faith that is considered by many evangelicals today to be the very essence, not of the Gospel, but of legalism. To many that sounds like works salvation, adding to the simple message of salvation by grace through faith alone. So, just to reset our thinking about this crucial issue of repentance and fruit-bearing, Gospel faith and Gospel works, just by way of introduction, I'd like you to turn not to Luke Chapter 3. Maybe I should have told you that at the very beginning, but you got warmed up, all right? Your fingers got warmed up.

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Let's actually go over to the epistle of James, the little epistle of James. I want to draw your attention in the book of James to the second chapter. James, as you know, was the, the author of the book of James, was the half-brother of our Lord. He was a pillar in the Jerusalem church, one of the elders there, and he must have been an incredibly powerful preacher if his epistle, his short little letter, is any indication. This letter, James contains some of the most unqualified direct and powerful preaching in the New Testament. And James in this little letter makes no apologies. His letter reads like a series of preaching vignettes, short little sermons woven together into a tapestry of very practical, even confrontational New Testament wisdom. James is all about wise living, which, you guessed it, involves wise works. James is commanding behavior that consistent with the Gospel.

In fact, take a look at James 2, verse 14 and following. He begins that section, there, with a rhetorical question. It's almost like a, another start of a sermon. "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" Answer: No. That kind of faith doesn't save anyone, but bear in mind, folks, that is exactly the kind

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of faith that many today profess. It's an empty profession of faith in Christ, which in reality is utterly devoid of any real fruit of spiritual life. Let's keep reading. In James 2:15 he gives an example, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Well, that's the verdict. People can call that empty, lifeless profession, they can call that faith all they want to. James tells us, though, if it doesn't have works accompanying it, it's dead. You say, James, James, James, James, James, that is so judgmental. That's legalism, James, you can't say that. Notice how utterly unconcerned he is about that charge of legalism. He just carries on, no qualifications, no caveats, no additional explanation. In fact, as we continue, you'll see his words, he doesn't back off, he gets stronger. "But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder!"

Wow! Don't miss that charge. He's clearly saying here that faith apart from works, just a mere profession of intellectual comprehension of doctrine, just an intellectual change of mind, apart from any works, that is the same kind of faith that the demons have. Those with a mere profession of faith with no obedience of faith, they share a common religion, they share a common cause with demons. And James anticipates someone who may think he is speaking too categorically here, too black-and-white, too harsh here, James verse 20, "you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?"

Now, before you believe the entire Protestant Reformation has been turned on its head by James 2:21, keep in mind there are two senses in Scripture to the word, justified. It's the word, *dikaioo*, in the Greek, and most often, *dikaioo*, to justify means, to declare righteous, to clear the guilty of charges, instead to pronounce a righteous verdict on that person. That's what we've emphasized in the church since the 16th century, and that is exactly right. That is the Apostolic teaching on

justification. We need to continue proclaiming that definition of, justified, because that is the basis of our spiritual assurance. Justification is indeed a declaration of God declaring that the sinner is righteous. And that doctrine, beloved, is always, always, always under attack to this very moment. We have to continue to fight for that truth.

But there is another sense of the word, *dikaioo*, in the Greek, and it's less commonly seen, less commonly known, but it is the very sense that James is using here. The word, *dikaioo*, can also mean, to vindicate, to prove righteous, to demonstrate one's righteousness, and that's the sense that James is using here. You can see that clearly from the context. James says, verse 21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith," his faith, "was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him,'" or reckoned to him or imputed to him, "'as righteousness,' and he was called a friend of God."

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God declared Abraham righteous in Genesis 15:6. But Abraham's faith was vindicated before others in Genesis 22 when he obeyed God through an amazing test of his faith. It was years later when he proved his trust in God in a willingness to do what's absolutely unthinkable, sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar, the promised child. Abraham didn't set out to prove his faith to anybody, but God did. God wanted us all to see it. It says in Genesis 22:1, "God tested Abraham." And he intended to demonstrate for all time, to vindicate Abraham's faith, to show us as well, that faith is always accompanied by obedience. We need to see in Abraham the proof of genuine faith. The proof of genuine faith. True faith works, folks. As some have rightly said, We're saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Genuine faith is proved by a subsequent life of good works.

And James summarizes his teaching with the statement in verse 24, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." That's not overturning the Reformation, folks, that's just saying faith is accompanied by works. Genuine, saving faith is always going to be accompanied by deeds corresponding to that faith: how we live, how we behave, how we

speak, what our lives look like. That behavior of new life is what vindicates our faith before a watching world. You wonder why so many accuse the church of hypocrisy? It's because they hear a profession and they don't see a life that truly testifies to that profession. They see hypocrisy. That's why they accuse the church of hypocrisy. Listen, if we taught this, if we kept these things combined in our teaching, in our demands, in our commands of the Gospel, we could take away their, their slanderous accusation against the church.

James provides one additional example, there, in the text, the faith of Rahab the harlot. Then he summarizes again in verse 26, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead." Whether Abraham as the, the foremost example of faith, or Rahab, even a harlot, a prostitute, someone who is at the lowest echelon of society, she can demonstrate the same kind of faith. The same kind of faith. "As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead." But you can see the works of Abraham. You can see the works of Rahab. Beloved, this is such a vital, vital message for the church today. Our evangelical churches have been coached by errant theologians and ignorant preachers; we have

been soothed into lethargy and indifference about bad behavior. Folks, it's absolutely damning. We can no longer tolerate this half-Gospel, which perverts the truth by ignoring altogether and subduing the doctrine of repentance. James taught it. Jesus taught it. So did John the Baptist. Theirs is the only Gospel that saves, and it begins with this message of repentance.

So with that in mind, let's look again at the passage before us in Luke's Gospel. Turn back to Luke 3. And we're going to start by reviewing what we read last week, and then we'll move ahead a bit to learn from John the Baptist how to preach this Gospel doctrine of repentance. Look at Luke 3, Luke 3 verses 7 and following, John, "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 at 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.'"

You can stop there for today. As we pointed out last time, to preach repentance, you have to do two things, and we see both of those things here in the text. First, you must confront, that's verses 7-9, and then you must correct, that's verses 10-14. The first half of what we read here, verses 7-9, that's, that's the confrontation part of preaching repentance. We covered that last week. You may remember that we walked through six steps of confrontation, that are a part of the preaching of repentance. First thing you can see, there, just by way of review is that John called them a brood of vipers. And, and, this was not an insult; he wasn't just insulting the people, who were coming to be baptized, he was identifying the reality of their true spiritual condition. They were not truly of their father Abraham like they thought. In reality they were of their

father the devil. It's a hard truth; John confronted them with it.

John second, he exposed the nature of their religious motives. He, he asked those coming to be baptized to examine in themselves the reason for their coming. "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He's not expecting an answer; he just wants them to think about it. Were they coming because they truly sensed the danger of imminent judgment, or were they coming for some other reason altogether? Examine your motives, that's what he's saying there.

Third thing: John called them to clarify the real root of their religious works. These are religious people, these are church going people. If I can be anachronistic for a moment, they were synagogue attending people, okay? They were, they were the people like your friends and neighbors. And they were coming out and he said, "What is the real root of your religious works? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance," he said. That command implicitly questions the nature of their works. They'd already had been performing works, so he is making an implicit judgment

on the works they'd been performing. They're not truly repentance-oriented works. Are your works growing out of a root of repentance, *metanoia*, the *metanoia* in the Greek, the, the change of mind, the change of heart, the absolute regeneration that takes place in the mind and the heart? Or are your works growing from some other root? If they were to take stock of how they actually lived, no matter what their spiritual heritage, their fruits proved what really lay hidden at the root.

Fourth thing: John challenged the basis of their spiritual assurance. He said there in verse 8, "Do not even begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'" Don't even start that. If they didn't bear the fruits of repentance, then they didn't share the faith of their father Abraham, okay? And if they didn't share his faith, then claiming Abrahamic parentage did them no good at all. The basis of their spiritual confidence was faulty, it was misleading. In truth, they should be very, very concerned about their true spiritual condition. None of them was safe in the harbor of Abrahamic lineage. Apart from Abrahamic faith, they were completely exposed before the coming wrath of God, and they need to repent. John's being merciful here to preach to them.

Number five, fifth thing: John rebuked their sin of spiritual presumption. They were armed with false assurance here and they felt just fine presuming on the grace of God. I'm one of Abraham's children. I'm fine. God will forgive me. I'm okay. John rebuked that attitude in verse 8, "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 for Abraham.'" They were out in the desert a lot of stone out there, a lot of dead rocks and John said, if you presume on the grace of God, thinking that you can claim to belong to Abraham when you live nothing like him, you're in danger of being set aside. God didn't need them. He could start over with stones from the ground; cause the rocks to come alive. He could regenerate them to repentance, faith, and good works. God has that kind of power, to use stones from the ground to fulfill his unconditional promise to raise up children to Abraham. Don't presume upon God. Humble yourself.

Finally, sixth point: John confronted the people when he preached repentance to them to reveal the imminence of their spiritual danger. It was a coming judgment, it was right at the

door, the axe is raised. "Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And that was the purpose of the confrontation, to provoke in them the fear of the Lord. He didn't want them to continue on armed with nothing but false, flimsy assurance. Their false assurance would be like holding up a shield made of tissue paper and trying to fend off the flame thrower of divine wrath. Any false basis of assurance will wither instantly on that day as if it never existed.

Listen, folks, those who preach the Gospel complete with this call here to repentance and faith, those are the preachers who preach in the fear of God and with genuine love for people. Those who preach a half Gospel without the call to obedience, without a demand for repentance, you know what? They're fearful, they're hirelings, they're wolves maybe, tickling the ears of people with this false assurance. All they accomplish with those smooth, pleasant sounding doctrines of ease, all they are doing to people is hardening sinful hearts. You've heard it before, soft preaching makes hard hearts; hard preaching makes soft hearts. John's preaching here softened the heart. Many evangelical religious in our country embrace this half Gospel,

and they prefer to embrace this lie from the pit of hell, but, beloved, we, we here, have been called at such a time as this, in this late hour, to recover the preaching of repentance, to help people rediscover what the Gospel actually is because they don't know it anymore. They need to understand what it actually says, what it actually means, what it actually demands, and what it actually promises: forgiven sin, clear conscience.

Listen, if we stop here at verse 9, if we only preach the confrontation part of repentance, do you know what happens? We leave people in despair, don't we? They don't know where to go. We need to go all the way. We need to help them secure the hope of the grace of God and then pursue a life of repentance that is pleasing to God. And that's what John did. To give the correction without the confrontation that just builds hypocrites, right? Religious types who simply rearrange the furniture of their lives as external works. But to give the confrontation without the correction, well, that's brutal. That just leaves people in despair. We don't want to do that either. Once people understand through Gospel confrontation that they're in trouble, and when God assists them by his Spirit to reach out for Christ as their only hope, that is a regenerating miracle

that God does. Once they reach out to Christ for help, you can step in and be there to help them. That's what God called you to do. He didn't call you to regenerate their heart; that's his business. He called you to respond to a heart that is regenerate. That's our business. That's how we work. When these people see the confrontation, when they hear it, when they have eyes to see and ears to hear, when their hearts are open, then they become desperate to learn what they need to do.

Listen, if they're truly repentant, nothing is going to stand in their way. They will bear fruits worthy of repentance, guaranteed. Repentance and faith, those are two sides of the same coin. Those are the first signs of a regenerate life where God has been working. Once the Spirit regenerates the sinner, the first breath of that born again creature is repentance and faith, and it happens instantly. New life turns from the old; it follows the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. So take a look here at verses 10-14, because once you confront, you need to correct. After the confrontation, you need to come with correction for those who want to repent. We are gonna cover these verses, this correction aspect of preaching repentance here. We're gonna cover these verses in two outline points. I

want to make some observations here in verses 10-14, which will illustrate our first point for this morning.

First point: The power of preaching true repentance. The power of preaching true repentance. If you see that there is real spiritual power in confronting people the way John did, the way Jesus did, the way we see illustrated throughout the Scripture, you know what's gonna happen if you see that? You will have the confidence you need to preach repentance and preach it boldly. God is going to take our courageous preaching, weak though it may seem to be, he's going to use our preaching, this confrontation and correction, to effect real change in people. That's what we see here. You may feel like you're shooting nothing but BBs out of a BB gun at a huge iron wall. Do you know what you're doing actually? You're dropping mother of all bombs on that wall. Just, it's a spiritual thing and you can't see what's going on. You're preaching words and you think, Ah, I'm just, I'm not good at this. I'm not getting the words right. I can't remember, what are the steps, aahh, six steps of confrontation. I can't remember that sermon. You start preaching this and you know what? Man, you are causing all kinds of spiritual trauma in the sinner. Don't look on the outside. Don't

look on the outside. The sinner has a way of putting up a front and won't let you see anything. Don't worry; your preaching is effective in God.

That's what we're seeing here. Several groups listed here. These are the ones who responded to John's preaching of repentance. There were certainly other groups of people, as well, other types of people who came to be baptized, but Luke highlights these groups as representative to show us what John's preaching actually accomplished. This, folks, is how he prepared the way of the Lord. This is how he made his paths straight. Look at it here, first of all, there are the crowds, verse 10. These are the *am ha'aretz*, the people of the land. These are the, the *hoi polloi*, just regular folks, regular people like you and me. These aren't the poor and the destitute because John here, notice what he commands them, commands them to share what they had: extra tunic, extra food. Share with those who are truly poor and destitute. So these people aren't the poor and destitute. They're not the beggars. These crowds just represent regular folks, people like me and you. You can imagine these people as like your friends and neighbors, your family, your coworkers. They don't seem overtly bad, at least from casual

observation. Many of these folks are just busy. They're preoccupied with making a living, like many people you know, friendly, sure, but they tend to be relatively superficial, distracted, uninterested in spiritual things. That's the crowds. Okay?

There's a second group of people here a group of people who do seem to be more overtly bad, and you're supposed to get that here that they are bad people. We know from our Bible reading, right, that tax collectors were a disreputable bunch. You didn't want to hang around them. They weren't like the tax collectors of our day, you know, the IRS employees with the white collars and the nice suits. These guys were more like the Mafia. They wore suits, maybe, but they were Mafia suits. It might help you to know a little bit about how they came into their profession so you can see the significance of their inclusion here in the story. Basically, there were two kinds of taxes collected in Israel at this time. There were direct taxes and indirect taxes. Direct taxes, like property tax or head tax, they were collected by the Jewish Council. So they were the national councils like the Sanhedrin, there were local councils like synagogue councils, even officers or officials of the temple courts.

Tax collectors weren't involved in collecting any kind of direct taxes. They were involved in collecting indirect taxes. You say, What are those? Well, like toll taxes for using a road. Customs taxes for international commerce. Duties on goods that maybe you purchased in another place and brought'em back. These are taxes involving trade and commerce. To common people, direct taxes seemed maybe more reasonable. They supported the infrastructure of government, things like military and police; administrative operations of the state. But these indirect taxes, taxes on the tolls, taxes on customs and duties, these seemed like pure robbery from the Romans. They didn't like the Romans in their pockets at all, and these indirect taxes were exactly that. The indirect taxes, they represent the oppression of Rome, the, the overbearing insinuation of this pagan power to make money off of a conquered Jewish people. The Romans, they were smart. They preferred to shield their own officials from direct contact with the people, when they tried to collect this tax and they used private tax collection enterprises as a buffer. They wanted the money, they just didn't want to deal with the populace. Very clever. So, private businessmen, entrepreneurs, they would bid for the right to collect taxes from the people, and highest bidder won the contract from Rome,

advanced whatever amount of money that they bid, and then they got to work, getting your money. You might say they took up a collection, but it was not a voluntary thing. It was mandatory. And they had the brute to back it up, to recoup the amount that they'd already paid to Rome. Also, to make a bit of profit, the tax collection enterprise hired tax collectors to encourage men, in this really what's clearly an unsavory task of extracting money from fellow citizens. The job held out promise for personal benefit as well, personal profit. The tax collectors added a percentage to make the profit that was required by the whole enterprise, and then additional percentages were charged, by the way, on a fluctuating scale. It was kind of a subjective call. It was based his assessment and that went to the tax collector; went to pay off his boat payment and all that kind of stuff and also his squad of goons that beat it out of you. He had to pay those guys. These guys exercised their own judgment, assigning the percentages, assessing the value of your goods, assessing the tax you owed. You think our tax system is broken? This system was rife with opportunity for bad people to take your money. If you've ever wanted to be thankful for the IRS, this might be the moment.

But the whole thing here is driven by absolute greed. Unlike our system, which assumes altruistic motives for our government; they just want your taxes for the good of the state, right? Amen. Or oh me, you don't agree. Okay, this is Colorado. You're like, hey, man, we're Libertarians. We don't, we don't vote either way. Smaller government. Okay. All that to say, tax collectors, they were not a popular group. These were social pariahs. No one wanted to be around them. The crowds, they didn't want to be around them. One commentator named Alfred Plummer, he wrote of them, he said quote, "These tax collectors were detested everywhere because of their oppressiveness and fraud, and they were classed with the vilest of mankind. The Jews especially abhorred them as bloodsuckers for a heathen conqueror. For a Jew to enter such a service was the most utter degradation. He was excommunicated and his whole family was disgraced." End quote.

Another commentator wrote this, his name's James Edwards, he wrote quote, "Tax collectors were despised and hated. Mishna and Talmud preserve scathing judgments of them from later periods lumping them together with thieves and murderers. A Jew who collected taxes was a cause of disgrace to his family,

expelled from the synagogue and disqualified as a judge or a witness in court. The touch of a tax collector rendered a house unclean. The Jews were forbidden from receiving money, including alms, from tax collectors since tax revenues were deemed robbery." End quote. So if you're poor and you're begging out on the street, if a tax collector comes by, you're to close your hand and pull it back. You can't receive any of their money.

There were two rabbinical schools of thought in the first century Judaism: Hillel and Shammai, two famous rabbis. These two men disagreed; their schools disagreed on many points of doctrine, many points of practice, but they came together in unity on this point. Both Hillel and Shammai taught, that it was permissible for Jews to lie to tax collectors, and they could do so with impunity. They could do so and not incur sin. That's what they taught the people. That's how much tax collectors were despised by the Jews, obviously. Think about, why did someone become a tax collector, then? Well, that's because they had no other avenue, or at least they thought that. It took a certain kind of sinner to become a tax collector. It took someone who, who just didn't care anymore. Right? Ah, forget social convention, forget what people think about me. Who cares? I've

already lost my reputation. I might as well have some money, too. Sins are already so bad, family standing already so low, whose greed maybe was altogether so consuming. None of that mattered to them anymore.

And tax collectors, as you might imagine, attracted other seedy characters as well. They surrounded themselves with the ruffians, that they hired for protection and for extortion. Their profligate lifestyles and their tendency to blow money on booze and partying that attracted all the worst kinds of people: prostitutes, lowlifes, all the worst kind of outcasts. Well, that's the tax collectors, right? They're mingling with the crowd.

Third group of people in the text, you've got the crowds, the tax collectors, and then the soldiers. The soldiers: what are the soldiers doing here? It's not like they had discretionary time to go out into the desert and get religion for themselves. Like, like all soldiers they're enlisted into the service of some government official. So their time, their life is not their own. So what are they doing here on the scene?

John's ministry, as we see in the first part of this chapter, it bordered on the western edge of Perea, and that was ruled by the tetrarch named Herod Antipas, and of all the Herodian rulers descended from Herod the Great, Herod Antipas was probably the most competent. He was probably the one who remained in most favor with Rome. And part of the favor was the fact that he, like the Romans, hated insurrections. He hated any popular uprising, any sign of rebellion.

So anytime, anytime he saw something that might give a hint or a lead to insurrection or rebellion, do you know what he wanted to do? He wanted squelch it immediately, just stifle it. So, when he hears about John the Baptist, large numbers of people going out to him in the Judean, the Perea wilderness, Herod Antipas dispatched a contingent of soldiers to investigate. Someone liked John, with his magnetism and charisma, this power of influence. This guy might sway a zealous crowd. He might rise up, lead them against the government, so Herod Antipas had to make sure John was not some kind of political zealot, fomenting a popular uprising in the desert. So the soldiers are there. Isn't it interesting that even the sign of oppression, the sign of hostile investigation, can be an

opportunity that the Lord uses? Don't turn away the tax men, folks. Don't turn away the people at our government that come near to us. Sometimes there's a reason for it.

The word translated, soldiers here, it's not the exact word used to refer to a Roman soldier per say, okay, *stratiotes*. It's related to that word, but it's actually a participle form of the verb *strateuimi*, which means literally, to serve in the military. And that's the word that Luke used. More accurately, the form of the verb he used was to refer to men in military service. This is the proper word to refer to the soldiers in the army of Herod Antipas, who were not all Roman soldiers; in fact, most of them weren't. Soldiers serving under Herod Antipas weren't strictly Romans; most of the soldiers serving him were of mixed ethnicity, just like the army that served his father, Herod the Great. Josephus tells us in *Antiquities*, he says that the army of Herod the Great consisted of his guards, which were primarily Judean troops, but along with Thracians, Germans, and Galatians. Other sources tell us the armies of the Herods were filled with Gentile mercenaries of all kinds recruited from the Romans, from their legions or even from the Parthians, that's in modern day Iran. Others were from the Germanic tribes or the

Thracians, which again that's in southern Europe. Some even say Gallic missionaries, that's modern France, Gaul, France. So, the predecessors, the Europeans, and the Iranians were conscripted into the armies of Herod the Great. They were mercenaries, they protected for hire and Herod Antipas also had soldiers and an army like this. Probably other tetrarchies as well.

That's just a brief introduction into the groups that Luke describes here: the crowds, the tax collectors, the soldiers. And we want to ask this question here at this point: Why does Luke highlight these three groups? Others came, too. Why these? Do you notice any groups here that are not listed? Who's missing? No political leaders, right? No religious leaders are here. There are no Herodians, no Roman officials. There are no scribes, no Pharisees, no Sadducees, no temple officials. We know they came. John 1:19 tells us that the Jews sent priest and Levites from Jerusalem to John, but that was only for investigative purposes, not because they had any interest in repentance. They didn't care about the message. In fact, John 1:22 says these priests and Levites, these officers of the temple, they insisted that John be clear, absolutely, abundantly clear, about his identity, saying, "Who are you? We need to go

and give an answer to those who sent us. So, what do you say about yourself?" So the religious leaders, they weren't there to humble themselves in repentance. They were there as judges. They were there to determine John's orthodoxy, to determine his identity. To see, are you claiming to be the Messiah? We'll see about that.

In fact, in Luke 7:28 to 30, Jesus told the people, "I tell you, among those born of women, none is greater than John. Yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (When all the people heard this," John 7:29 says, "and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)"

You know who hates the message of repentance? The religious establishment. It totally turns things over for them. They like a system in which they are in charge and people are kept confined by their works, not a heart of repentance, not, not completely vertically devoted to God, but where they're beholden

to them, they're beholden to the system. So the Pharisees, the lawyers, the scribes, the religious leaders, the political leaders, they don't show up there. Why does Luke, then, highlight these three groups of people in particular? Because, folks, these groups illustrate for us the true power of preaching repentance. The effectiveness of preaching repentance. And we need to see that. This is the point. You and I need to be convinced that this uncomfortable, confrontational aspect of preaching repentance that it's worth the trouble. That's it's worth risking relationships over. Yes, it's pleasing to God to preach repentance, but it is also effective in accomplishing God's purposes. Are we just wasting our time here? No, we're not. It is effective. It's effective for accomplishing what God wants to accomplish in the heart.

Listen, the crowd's coming forward, convicted by John's confrontation. They show us the power of repentance preaching to reach just regular people: the masses, people who are caught up in all the ebb and flow of life, people who are superficial, in deep, and everybody in between, people who are distracted and focused, and everybody in between. Your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, your family, when you preach repentance to them

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by the grace of God, he makes this message of repentance effective in their hearts. None of this is our own doing; it's by the Spirit of God. The crowds show us the sufficiency of preaching repentance and that points to the absolute sufficiency of the Gospel to save. It's about the breadth of repentance. It's ability to reach and convict regular folks like most of the folks that we come in contact with.

It will also reach those who seem the furthest from God's grace. That's the tax collectors. The tax collectors here show us the power of repentance to preach sinners of all kinds, even those we consider to be the farthest flung, the farthest gone. This is about the depth of repentance here, and it points to the infinite reach of God's grace to reach the farthest-flung sinners. I am so thankful for that message, aren't you? I love the saying of Corrie Ten boom, "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." We sang about it this morning. The love of God: To write of it would drain the ocean dry if all the ocean would turn into ink. You couldn't write about it enough. God's amazing grace, the penetrating preaching of repentance, it reaches all, breadth and also depth, to even the very worst of sinners.

Final group, soldiers, what are they there for? What are they showing us, here? The soldiers here show us how the power of preaching repentance crosses all boundaries, ethnic and racial, social and cultural. You understand this. I mean, I, I know that some of you have served in the military. Many of you have not. Soldiers live in a completely different world than civilians do. They do experience life and death from a very different vantage point. Military life is a different culture altogether, one that civilians really have a hard time understanding and appreciating. But this preaching of repentance, this confrontation of John's preaching, it penetrated these hardened soldiers, as well. Jews and Gentiles alike, those as close as Palestine and as far away as Europe and Iran. Whether these soldiers grew up in Israel, Parthia, Gaul, whether they were ethnically and culturally Thracians, or Parthians, or Romans, John's confrontational preaching humbled every single heart. Culture did not matter.

Repentance is a message that cuts to the heart of people of all kinds. Why? Because the heart is the same from person to person. We are all, every single one of us, created in God's

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image and all of us trace our origin back to Adam and Eve. All of us trace our sin back to the fall of Adam. All humans, mankind, the law of God is written on all of our hearts. We all have consciences that either accuse us or excuse us. We all, alike, sense the guilt of our sin through the feeling of shame. We all react to our feelings of shame by some form of hiding. If we don't repent and turn to God and flee to him and come clean, we want to hide. That's what our shame does to us. We either run or we ignore or we counter-accuse or we deflect or we blame-shift. That's what shame does.

So, just as sin is a universal reality, so also the power of preaching repentance has universal effect. No culture, no tribe, no tongue, no nation is insulated by its culture, by its tribe, its tongue or its nation from God's power to bring about repentance. That should be encouraging news, beloved. It should be encouraging, strengthening news. No one can escape the powerful, incisive message of repentance that reaches to every single sinner, the crowds, the tax collectors, even those rascally soldiers. I know what they're like. You just need to make sure you bring it. Bring it! Preach the confrontation and then be patient and pray and watch the Spirit work.

Okay, I can tell by looking at the time that we're not going to be able to finish our outline today, but that's good because if the Lord doesn't come between now and next Sunday, and if we don't die collectively, we're gonna have another Sunday, so we'll, we'll pick it up there. But for now, let's just get a good start. Okay? There's a lot to learn, I know. It's, it's just, our first point, the power of preaching true repentance. Here's our second point. Our second point is, the practice of teaching true repentance. The practice of teaching true repentance. And again you gotta insert a word into your outline, the word, teaching. Okay, the practice of teaching true repentance. Listen, beloved, when you trust God in your evangelism and you do what John has taught us to do here, the confrontational aspect of preaching repentance, when you exercise the courage to lovingly confront people like this, you're gonna get different responses, okay? Many are gonna turn away from the message. They're gonna cut off the friendship. You're not gonna see their, their number showing up on your phone anymore. They're not gonna call. They're not gonna come around. They either ignore you or marginalize you. They may feign interest at first, then they'll lose interest. Some will, some will just right away heap scorn on you, distracting

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Greeley

themselves from their own guilt by putting you down, making you feel foolish. Others may show interest at first, but once you get into the details of what repentance really requires, as you bring this correction to their lives, they'll peel away.

But listen, there will be others. There will be a precious few who come under divine conviction, and they're going to want to know more. Those are the people that you want to help with the teaching of true repentance. Teaching repentance this is the corrective part of preaching repentance, which comes after the confrontational part. Teaching repentance, like we said, involves two basic things, okay? You've got on the one hand, when you preach repentance, you've got to confront, and then you've got to correct. And when you do the correction, it also involves two things. First of all, you want to look for signs of true spiritual conviction. True spiritual conviction. Then, when you see those signs of conviction, you want to tell those people what to change and how to change. In many cases, you're going to teach them a process of true Biblical change, but we'll save that for next week.

Let's consider the first issue for today. Look for signs of true spiritual conviction. Look for signs of conviction. As we saw last week, we'll just review it here. John had just confronted the crowds who came out to be baptized. He exposed their true spiritual condition here. He challenged their motives for coming. He exposed the root of their religious works, and he challenged the basis of their spiritual assurance. He rebuked that spiritual presumption and all that confrontation, like I said, was in hopes that these crowds would hear the warning of verse 9, that they were facing a very clear and present danger from God. Judgment was imminent. The axe is raised and it's aimed at the root of their lives. The fires are lit. The flames are rising, roaring, greedy to consume their dead lives. Branches, trunk, roots, swallow them whole.

They need to repent. Look at those verses again, verses 10 to 14, "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 him to be baptized and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' 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.’”

Now we don’t know, obviously, the heart of these people. We don’t know the future of these people. They’re anonymous to us in the text. They don’t have any names. They remain unknown. They’re simply known by the description that Luke has given us and then the details here. But, Luke has portrayed for us three groups of people who are showing signs of true spiritual conviction. You say, how can you tell? Well, these three groups of people, they couldn’t be more different, could they? But all three of them ask exactly the same question, what shall we do? Or better yet, what should we do? They were asking about moral obligation. What ought we to do now that we have heard this? These people want to know what repentance entails. They’ve heard John call for fruits of repentance. They want to know what will demonstrate the fruits of repentance. What should we do?

The verb is *poieo*, which refers to, doing something, okay? That is to say, it’s not a theoretical thing. It’s not something

that's Just a, a frame of mind that you get in. This is something actual, something practical. What should we do? They are asking about something that they understand will be accomplished by effort. It will be manifest in something visible, something identifiable. It's interesting the verb shows up actually multiple times in the text, same verb, *poieo*, in each question, verses 10, 12, and 14. But the verb also shows up in verses 3, 8, and 9. Look at verse 3. It says, "Make his paths straight." Same verb, *poieo*. In verse 8, it's, it's the word, bear, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance." That is, do fruits. The warning in verse 9, "Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit," same word, *poieo*. The non-*poieo* tree is cut down and thrown into the fire. Then again, verse 11, the word, *poieo*, is translated, do. "Whoever has food is to do likewise." What's the, do? It's to share. That is seven times if my math is right. The crowds wanted to know what to do, and they are asking the right question.

You say, Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, time out. Wait a second. Why is that the right question? Didn't the rich young ruler come to Jesus with essentially the same question? Wasn't he seeking salvation by works and he went away sad? That's a very

insightful observation. Thank you for making it. It's a great question. Let me address that for you. Turn over to Luke. You're in Luke. Turn over to Luke 18 for a moment, Luke 18 in verse 18 to 23, and we're going to consider, just as we close here, this bright evangelism prospect. This guy who walked up to Jesus unprompted and asked him what seemed to be such a hopeful question, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Well, that sounds strikingly similar to our passage, right? Same question. Do you remember how Jesus answered him? Jesus said: look at it there, "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" He was basically quoting the second half of the Ten Commandments. Here's what the rich young ruler says. He says, "All these I have kept from my youth." Well, that's pretty bold. He's definitely not a kid growing up in my family. But "All these, I have kept from my youth." He says, okay, let's just take him on face value.

Do you notice one difference between this man and the crowds, the tax collectors, soldiers? None of them are declaring to John their own righteousness. They had just endured the confrontational preaching of John the Baptist, that call to

repentance. And after hearing that, and only after hearing that, after dealing with the exposure of their spiritual bankruptcy and exposed to their spiritual danger, that is when they asked the simple question, what should we do? No such confrontation had happened here. Take a look at verse 22. Jesus says, you want salvation by works? Okay, let's go all the way with that. Do all the works. When Jesus said to, "when Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven,' and then, 'come, follow me.'" When the rich young ruler, heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich."

Now obviously, Jesus didn't contradict the entirety of teaching of Scripture that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. So why did Jesus just prescribe the liquidation of his entire estate followed by a single summary act of charity, and then this call to follow him? Because Jesus was doing for the rich man exactly what John had done for the crowds who came to be baptized. He confronted the rich young ruler. He was exposing the fact that this man loved his stuff, his money, his possessions. He loved his extreme wealth, and he did not want to part with it. The rich young ruler had a log sticking out of his

eye that blinded him. It was called the love of money, and he was unable to judge himself or anything else clearly. Not only had he failed to keep all of the commandments Jesus listed here, he had been committing idolatry, the first commandment, by worshipping his wealth. He'd failed to love the Lord God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. He was unwilling to love his neighbor as himself. So when he departed from Jesus, you know what? He revealed his heart, his commitment to continue loving himself. No love for Jesus, which means he remained stubbornly committed to his violation of the greatest commandment.

Go ahead and turn back to Chapter 3 now. Listen, the crowds, tax collectors, soldiers, the issue is not what question they asked, even though they asked the right question, as we'll see. What distinguished them from the rich young ruler is that their hearts had already been prepared by the preaching of repentance. They had been prepared by confrontation. John's ministry was having its intended effect. They asked the right question. In fact, Joel Green, the commentator, points out, quote, "The question of the crowds, 'What then shall we do?' is repeated by the tax collectors in 3:12, the soldiers in 3:14, a

lawyer in 10:25, a ruler in 18:18," that's what we just saw, "a Jerusalem audience in Acts 2:37, a jailer in Acts 16:30 and a zealous Jew in Acts 22:10." These are referring to Paul, there. And get this, he goes on, "Apart from the one exception in 18:18," that's the rich young ruler passage we just looked at, "Apart from the one exception in 18:18, "in each case the question is provoked by instruction, preaching, or a miraculous event in immediate context. This query demonstrates in an explicit way that the redemptive visitation of God demands response." That is exactly right, folks.

The preaching of the Gospel, the preaching of repentance, it demands a verdict. Don't be so quick to dismiss any call to change behavior as salvation by works. That's not only naive and simplistic, it's biblically inaccurate and it could be very spiritually damaging. The call to repentance is a call to change your direction, to change your behavior. The call of the Gospel is a call to new life, means a new direction and, yes, it means new behavior. Who, after all, would deny the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is Christ he is," what? "a new creation," right? A new creation. "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." What is that referring to if

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not at just the most superficial level, some aspect of behavior: words, speech, acts? Let's go deeper, internal: thoughts, attitudes, motives. It goes even deeper: Are you regenerate or are you not? That's something you cannot do on your own, and that is why it's completely and wholly of the grace of God. Repentance and faith, it goes deep, to be sure. It delves into the very heart. It bores into the mind and it changes the thought life at the level of belief and trust, then affection and volition; and that new way of thinking, based on the regeneration of the spirit, the new birth, it results in an entirely new life.

For the crowds, the tax collectors, the soldiers to ask, almost like a chorus who are singing in perfect unison, what should we do? Listen, that's exactly the right question. This is an issue of moral obligation. Something must be done. When we come back next week, we're going to learn more about what that something is. For now, we are out of time. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do give thanks to you that you have saved us through this amazing message of repentance, calling us

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to put our faith in Jesus Christ. We are grateful that we have been the recipients of your grace.