

02/23/25 - Luke 3:1-20 - "Dear Humanity, Repent"

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[0 : 00] If you would turn with me in the Gospel of Luke chapter 3, we're going to read the first 20 verses. Let's begin in verse 1.

In the 15th 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 Iteria and Trachonitis, and Licinius, 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 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, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways.

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?

[1 : 36] Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And the crowds asked him, what then shall we do?

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

Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, teacher, what shall we do? And he said to them, collect no more than you are authorized to do.

Soldiers also asked him, and we shall, 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.

[2 : 43] As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, I baptize you with water.

But he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

So with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people. 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 to this them all that he locked up John in prison.

Thanks be to God for his work. Thanks be to God. The passage today has a little bit of weight to it, and I'm not at the liberty to minimize the weight of the Word.

[4 : 03] Yes, we just praised God and very uplifted, and it seems like the weight of such a passage just kind of falls on us and is just like, man, what a wretched man I truly am.

Right? And I think that it's important for us to submit to however the Word comes to us today and to hear it, to heed its message.

Because verse 18 is verse 18. Look with me. So with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

Regardless of the weight, regardless of the heaviness, it is, in fact, good news. Looking back in history, following Germany's defeat in World War II, Germany underwent a period of repentance of their own, of self-reflection as they came to grips with the atrocities committed during the war.

And German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, he addressed, he made his address of the Federal Republic's attitude toward the Jews.

[5 : 29] This was delivered in September 27, 1951. He says, And the moment of collective despair involved in recognizing deep sins and changing the nation's direction, this led, after the fall of the Nazi regime, this led to the rebuilding of Germany's moral foundation.

Repentance for a Christian is similar to that process that Germany experienced, but a little more personal through a Christian's life.

Repentance is not just a one-time emotional response. But a necessary starting point for real and lasting transformation.

And now for Germany, no amount of pride, no heritage, no history could shield them from facing their wrongdoings. Spiritually speaking, God calls us to demolish the rubble of past sins so that His transformative grace can reconstruct our hearts moving forward.

And what we're going to see in the passage today is that true repentance transforms our hearts, bears lasting fruit, and ushers us into the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 19] And so today, let's explore how true repentance not only leads to salvation, but also produces lasting fruit and forgiveness. The sermon titled is meant to pack a punch.

It's Dear Humanity, Repent. Because this is the message that John used to prepare the way of salvation.

So let's pray as we go in and turn to the Lord in prayer as we observe what God's Word intends for us to observe.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we come to You asking for You to help us to ready ourselves to receive Your Word with joy, with gladness, and often, sometimes, with a little bit of weight, with a little bit of punch, a little bit of rigid confrontation with our hearts.

And Father, we pray that at this time, it is not my Word, but Your Word that speaks to this body.

Empower me to do this faithfully by the working of Your Spirit through me.

[8 : 41] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So I'm going to break it up into three different sections as it goes through. I believe it will be helpful to hear along the sermon.

And so we're going to be looking at true repentance in three different lights with that one main point. First thing we need to see is that true repentance leads to salvation.

And we unpack this in verse 1 all the way to 6. Now, Luke sets the stage, historically speaking. He says, In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias, Pilate, Herod, Philip, Licinius, during the high priesthood of Annas, Caiaphas.

It's like, He's trying to make you understand. He's positioning this in history. This isn't just folklore. This is a real point in time. And the Word of God came at this time to the son of Zechariah, John, in the wilderness.

And Luke, the historian, he sets the stage using these seven historical figures to date the beginning of John's ministry, starting in sometime around AD 27 to AD 29.

[10 : 01] Only the Lord knows exactly the day it started. It was around this time. The phrase, The Word of God came to him, this echoes the classic prophetic call among all the major and minor prophets, from Jeremiah to Isaiah to Hosea, all of which we see.

And we see that it begins by the Word of God coming. And remember that as we begin to unpack this. Verse 3 continues, though. And he went with the Word.

He's carrying the Word in his briefcase. He's got the Word. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

The Word came, and he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So you see, John left the wilderness, entered Jewish landscape with one clear message.

Y'all need to repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. How do you know you're repenting? By the symbol, sign of being immersed in water, in baptism.

[11 : 21] And we must understand that repentance is not merely regret. Ah, I messed up again. It's not regret.

Repentance is a complete reorientation of someone's life. A turning away from sin and embracing of a new, a God-ordained behavior, attitude, and nature.

So within this ministry framework, the ministry came, the Word came, the Word went, and genuine repentance naturally arises then when God's Word comes to us and confronts our sin and maybe our lack of dealing with sin in our lives.

I imagine John just traveling around. You see those videos of street preachers? He's out there preaching the Word of God.

Salvation is coming. And many coming to Him, feeling convicted of their sins, seeking forgiveness because of what they heard.

[12 : 53] But it's important. It's crucial to note that no amount of repentance can earn forgiveness. Not in God's eyes.

Yet, without repentance, not a single soul can be saved. Martin Lloyd-Jones says it best, repentance is not something you do to earn salvation.

It is what you do because you have been saved. Yep. In other words, forgiven people are repentant people, not just people who regret what they did, but have changed their life radically.

Repentance prepares the way of the Lord. Lord. This is what John's ministry was marked by according to Zachariah's prophecy from chapter 1.

When Zachariah, his lip was opened up, his tongue was loosed after doubting the angel Gabriel, and he immediately prophesies this case.

[14 : 06] And not only does it link to his prophecy, but it links all the way back to an echo that started with Isaiah. In Isaiah 40, verse 3-5, as it's written here in the book of the prophet Isaiah, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh will see the salvation of the Lord.

This prophecy is talking about repentance, the power of repentance. The power of repentance prepares the way for the Lord.

The power of repentance makes paths straight, crooked paths straight. Yeah! Insert that little jingle. It's true. Every valley will be filled, every mountain and hill shall be made low. It fills that which is empty. It levels that which is built and mighty.

[15 : 35] And in the most literal sense, John's ministry acted as if he was the demolition construction manager. He's going in with the crane, demolishing not just obstacles, not just little hills and things, mountains, as Isaiah prophesied, as being fulfilled through John.

This makes known a ruler that visits cities back in this time period. There would be a lot of work to opening up the roadways, making those crooked ways straight, so this grand entrance may be seen and it would be unappreciated by any obstacles.

And so when the ruler visited the city, the roads were broadened and smooth to honor his arrival. You could see the ruler coming from the horizon. And in light of Isaiah 40, John, his ministry, his work was to remove huge obstacles, demolition of mountains and filling valleys so that nothing would block the entrance of God's promise.

You see, repentance clears away the rough terrain of our hearts so that God's promise can enter without obstruction. It levels even the highest peaks and fills the deepest valleys, ensuring that Jesus Christ has access unhindered and he does all the leveling work through his spirit.

When God's people live with genuine repentance, abandoning the old and embracing the new, they shine the light of hope.

[17 : 29] You see, there's a promise in Isaiah 40, in all flesh shall see the salvation of God. It doesn't say that if everyone sees, repents,!

they're all going to experience it as a guarantee they are saved. Right? But this is a misconception about repentance because many people don't understand the depth and the weight that repentance has upon the human heart and how powerful God's spirit is in working in our hearts to level every idol in our lives and every sin that we cling to turn us to the almighty and true God.

And so this isn't a promise that you will, everyone repenting will receive salvation personally, but all flesh will see the salvation of the Lord, sometimes from a distance, but we as Christians we need to see this personally through genuine repentance, through demolition projects brought by the Spirit of God.

You see, for the church to serve as a true light in the world today, both individual and corporate repentance are essential. You wonder why we have a prayer of confession every Sunday corporately?

There you go. We must do this. And so the question asks, has God leveled you today?

[19 : 06] The second part of this talks about an altar call. You kind of go into the sermon, you get into wherever he's preaching in this area, and we see that true repentance leads to fruit.

We see that from verse 7 to verse 14. On this day, the altar call was anything but peaceful. I'm sure Mark Dever was like, Amen.

Forget those altar calls. He said, therefore, to the crowds who came out to be baptized, they're all running. And you would think that if this was the Billy Graham crusade, he'd be like, all right, one, two, three, four, five, tell this to my, you know, like, all about numbers and stats and glory and everything.

Well, John says you all better check yourself. He said, to the crowds that came to him to be baptized, you brood of vipers.

In our culture, there is no trigger warning. All right? Real communication doesn't give warnings. He warned you to flee the wrath to come.

[20 : 26] Who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourself, we have Abraham as our father.

I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now, the axe is laid to the roots of the trees.

Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

this harsh rebuke with uncompromising language and thrust is, I believe, the exact message that our overly sensitive culture today needs to hear.

if our lives do not match our profession of faith, we are in serious danger.

[21 : 47] John's only accommodation was that they bear fruit, produce good fruit. You see, this crowd operated under a sense of covenant privilege, as if they were inherently entitled to Abraham's blessing.

You know, because they have Abraham's blood running through their veins, they're special. Yet, the gospel shatters the notion that our forgiveness comes not through association, but through transformation by God's Spirit, by way of repentance.

repentance. This realizes that not a single person on earth is entitled to anything from God. Not a single person.

Whether your grandma took you to church, great, praise the Lord. Whether your father is a pastor, great, praise the Lord. Or if you've been raised in the Christian home, the gospel condemns the delusion that we are saved without a new life.

A new life. In reality, those who believe they deserve grace without change continue to remain unworthy. John the Baptist, I mean, this is a good moment.

[23 : 09] This is a good time to campaign, to become mayor. Right? He could have flattered everyone. He could have said, yeah, come.

He could have flattered the unconverted. He could have spoke vaguely in sort of like broad strokes as maybe not to offend or cause any offense.

But instead, God's word of which came to him confronted sin with dialed in precision. And they were in danger.

When the crowd questioned John, his responses were both very direct and surprising. John emphasized, they're saying, what do we got to do?

And John emphasized that generosity should be the hallmark of a repentant life. as freely as we have received, so too freely we give.

[24 : 21] Right? He says that in a remark to private citizens. They should share with others. If they got two tunics, it went away.

Don't hoard. It's not yours anyhow. Right? A mark of generosity. Don't take this pragmatically like, okay, well, honey, I need to repent genuinely, so we need to go through the clothes closet.

Find my tunics. Right? This isn't pragmatism. This isn't repentant pragmatism. Right? It's the theme of generosity.

It's a heart of generosity. And even with your food, to share your food. Don't hoard your food. And tax collectors must charge only what is fair. Right? And soldiers should not engage in extortion, rather, not extortion, obtaining money by force, right, or by threat.

Empty your wallets. And so there's a theological concept that we see here as a mark of genuine repentance, it's generosity. But yes, the way we cling to money, the way we cling to material possessions, is a strong indicator of authenticity and the health of our spiritual lives.

[25 : 45] It's a theological reality that we can't neglect. John's warning is chilling, right?

I would catch you off guard. I'm sure a couple people were taken aback. back. But without repentance, the axe is literally poised on top of the root.

It's not picked up, but it is ready to fall. God will not hesitate to cut off the hope of those who rely on their selfish merits to achieve their salvation.

This is a wake-up call because y'all can fool me. We can fool each other. We can fool our neighbors, our family, but we cannot fool God.

God's God's God's word. Perhaps today you recognize that God's word has not flattened every obstacle of your life.

[27 : 11] You may cling to certain sins, growing more comfortable in the practice of sin rather than being disturbed.

by that comfortability. And this places you in greater danger than you may realize today. If you believe that you are saved but lack a repentant spirit of ongoing repentance, of genuine repentance, you may not truly be saved today.

This is for those who are desensitized to their failures. that are kind of like, whatever, I screwed up again. This is for those who are desensitized rather than disturbed.

This isn't for those who desire victory over that struggle, that try and try again. Right? Because repentance is ongoing.

But, if you are desensitized, comfortable in your sin, you better check your heart. Without genuine repentance, no fruit will flourish.

[28 : 31] And that fruit is a sign that you're in trouble today. Jonathan S. Ward says, true repentance is never too late, but late repentance is seldom true.

R.C. Ryle says, the man who never feels the burden of his own sins and never groans under them is a man who knows nothing of true repentance.

But we can't forget verse 18. With many exhortations, he preached good news to the people. The good news is that whether you are here today as a true convert or a false convert, the gospel calls you to get your act together now, today, through repentance.

Stop using God's grace as an excuse to postpone repentance and commit your lives to the Lord today. Be baptized, truly repentant.

Stop coddling God's grace as an excuse to repent tomorrow. Repent now and come by your faith to Jesus Christ.

[29 : 58] This is good news. We see in this last section from 15 all the way to the end, verse 20, that true repentance leads to Jesus, exactly who I'm pointing to today.

It says in verse 15, 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 one, the strap of whose sandals I am unworthy to untie, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Let's pause there. John's words cut deeply into their hearts. They're asking these questions.

They're pondering in their hearts.

They're confused to say the least. Right? And they've forgotten their own unworthiness. And John gets eschatological.

[31 : 16] He gets in the end times. Right? And now this isn't saying that we have to be overly brash with this because Hebrews does say Hebrews 4 16 tells us to approach the throne of grace with confidence.

Yeah, you don't have to God our Father. But God's word does never once encourage us to act in presumption or irreverence towards him and his holiness.

Consider this, John had every reason to boast, just like Paul through his epistles. He had every reason to boast and being respected as a spiritual figure, but yet he understood that Jesus Christ must increase, but he must decrease.

John 3 30. And so the gospel directs our attention not to man, not to elevate man, but to elevate Jesus, pointing to Jesus Christ's worthiness, not our own worthiness.

We scrap all of our good works and efforts. They're dirty rags, they're filthy rags, and it emphasizes the one who baptizes us in both the spirit and fire, and for anybody who has come out of

Pentecostalism, this is a single internal act.

[32 : 40] This is not a chronological act. Spirit first, then fire. It is one prepositional statement with two prepositional objects. It is one act internally expressed in two parts, single.

And so what does this mean? It signifies that the internal work of salvation is initiated by God. He regenerates, He indwells, He seals us by His Spirit.

He intercedes for us. He enlightens us. And when this transformation truly takes place in us, by Jesus Christ baptizing us by His Spirit and fire, a single act in two different parts, we see that we are cleansed by His Spirit, we are purified by His fire.

As expressed in the hymn that we sing, how firm a foundation, when through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply, the flame shall not hurt thee, I only design, thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

Just as gold is purified and all the impurities come to the surface and separate from the gold, this is the power of repentance.

[34 : 07] It forces us to separate from our sin. Genuinely. You see, Jesus' baptism is far superior than John.

Water merely cleanses the surface, but fire and Spirit reaches the core. Baptism with the Spirit makes all things new inside and out.

And the passage closes, so with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

But Herod, the Tetrarch, who had been reproved by him, stepped on Herod's toes, was reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done.

He added this to them all. And what did he do? Threw John in prison, locked the door, and threw away the key.

And as the narrative ends, John's message was naturally rejected. Naturally rejected. rejected. I challenge every YSU student here today, go down to YSU, preach this message.

[35 : 31] See how that turns out for you. Right? It was naturally rejected. The gospel was too discriminating.

Herod was to be the hero of his story, not John, not some Messiah to come. Herod is the man, no one else. And as the narrative concludes, John's message was naturally rejected because the gospel is offensive.

But guess what? The gospel is true. It is true. We see that this is good news in verse 18.

Although judgment and repentance may not be embraced as anything good, it's kind of hard religious, legalistic stuff.

Not embraced as good news to anyone. But it still remains essential to the gospel whether you agree with it or disagree with it. Without a complete and final resolution to evil, in the end times of the winner with a fork, throwing chaff into the fire, and that being an illusion of humanity who do not repent, yeah, without a complete and final resolution of evil, there can be no good news.

[36 : 58] You have to have bad news in order for good news to be good. And it's not too late for God's word to penetrate our hearts and to be purified by his spirit deep within our souls.

It is far better for our souls to be refined by his fire of grace today than face the consuming fire of judgment tomorrow.

Spurgeon says, sin and hell are married unless repentance proclaims the divorce. Do not miss this message.

today. Although it may be unpopular, may not resonate within our culture today of self-reliance, self-worship, self-elevation, it remains true.

Everything secular culture represents is opposite of the gospel. It is not us, but Christ. And in the broader context of the gospel, the rejection of John that he experienced here foreshadows the rejection of Jesus Christ.

[38 : 17] The one with the axe, he's the almighty lumberjack with the axe who will cut you off. He is the winner with the fork in his hand, ready to separate the wheat and chaff.

God, it was he who died and rose again for you to save you from being cut off, to rescue you from the fire.

What other reason do we need to surrender to him, to the good news of the gospel? It was Jesus who died for our sin and our sin was nailed through his hand, through his feet.

Our sin, my sin. What a mess that we have indeed created. What a grace that he provides.

Puritan Thomas Watson said, till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet. May the bitterness of our sin be confronted and completely conquered in our lives and in our hearts, to make our sin be bitter, so that Christ will be sweet.

[39 : 53] True repentance transforms our hearts and bears lasting fruits and ushers us into the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

This is available today. If you need prayer as we close today, I would encourage you to come find me, Carmen, or Rick.

We would love to pray with you, to walk this journey of genuine repentance. repentance. You may have thought that you were a Christian for 20 plus years, and today something finally clicked.

We'll praise the Lord. Let the good news find you today. We want to walk with you on this journey. I would encourage you to respond in action and let the fruit of that action testify to your repentance. Let's pray. Thank you.