

Sunday, January 16, 2022 | Reset

Week 3 | Luke 3:15-20 | “New Year, Same Truth”

Announcements:

We'll be having Bob's ordination on Sunday, January 30th, 2022. The examination will be on Saturday, January 29th.

John is meeting with potential security help next Sunday after service.

Last week, we dove into Jesus' first recorded words on earth. They came after he had been away from Mary and Joseph for nearly a week. Mary took the Lord's absence personally and demanded from him an explanation. Jesus responded by saying, "[Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?](#)" Essentially, his words not only explained his location (i.e., Where else would he have been if not at his dad's place?), but they also explained his vocation (i.e., What else would he be doing if not the work of his father?). Likewise, to reset our lives in this new year, we too must **embrace God's plan for our lives and reject all others.**

Last week, we asked the question, “What happens when we make the old mistakes in a new year?” And the answer is the same that John the Baptist gave his audience: repent. John didn't advise extremism. Instead, he calls them to repentance; specifically, repentance expressed in everyday actions. Because **repentance without the fruits of repentance isn't really repentance.** A change of behavior is evidence of a changed heart (cf. Mat. 7:24-26; Lu. 3:7-14; 1 Jn. 2:3-4). What's more, repentance is the only way to salvage a fresh start. If you still have breath, there is still time to change.

Today, we pick up where we left off last week.

READ: Luke 3:1-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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."

Now, John's preaching so stirred the hearts of his listeners that they began wondering if he was the very one who would deliver them. They thought John was the Messiah. This is what Luke means by saying that the people “were in expectation.” They thought John's message of repentance because the Kingdom of God was at hand was meant to point Israel to himself. And while it is good that people associated John with the Lord, John quickly dispels this assumption.

I want you to notice three ways in which John promotes “the Christ” over himself:

i. The Messiah's position is superior.

John says the One who comes after him is “mightier.” When John says “mightier,” he isn't making a point about the Messiah's power, though the Son of God was undoubtedly the most powerful being on the planet. John's point is that the Messiah's position is far superior to his own. By John's estimations, he was completely outclassed and outranked. So much so that John thought himself unworthy to even untie the Messiah's “sandals.”

Now, historians tell us that it was the responsibility of the servant who had the lowest rank in the household to undo their master's sandals. Along with washing one's feet, the youngest servant often did this task. The one exception to this rule was found in Israel. Hebrews thought even this task was far too menial for any slaves who were Jewish.

So, what does the Baptizer mean by this reference? John is further developing the idea of the Messiah's more significant position. As a Jew, he would've been exempt from undoing anyone's sandal even if he were to become a slave. But it seems John sees the responsibility differently when it is the Messiah's sandal. To lose the Lord's shoe would've been a great honor. Yet John does not deem himself worthy. And not because the act itself is extraordinary; as we established, this was considered one of the most degrading things a servant could do for their master. It was a task reserved for the servant of servants. John deems himself worthy because the Messiah was so great that even his sandals were too important to be unlaced by human hands. When understood in its cultural context, John's statement reveals both his own humility and the Lord's superiority.

ii. The Messiah's baptism is better.

John says he baptizes with “water,” whereas the Messiah will baptize them “with the Holy Spirit and fire.” As we talked about last week, John's baptism was, literally, for repentance. If someone wanted to prove that they wanted to change their ways, they would come forward and be baptized. The average joe would leave, making sure to be more charitable. The tax collector would go making sure to be more equitable. And the soldier would depart, making sure to be more civil. John's baptism was preparatory; it prepared people to be forgiven

whenever the Messiah eventually came to forgive them. This is distinct from our own baptism, which isn't preparatory but indicative; it indicates people who are already forgiven by the Messiah who has already come into their hearts and saved them. But, either way, the baptism itself does nothing. It is symbolic. And in both cases, the Messiah's baptism is far better.

Rather than baptize with water, John says that "the Christ" baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. Notice, it is not two baptisms with two different modes (i.e., a baptism of the Holy Spirit and a baptism of fire), but one baptism with two different outcomes. This will become clearer in the next point, but suffice to say, the Messiah's arrival will divide people. Recall Simeon's words to Mary, which foretold that her Son was "appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed" (cf. Lu. 2:34). Yes, Jesus will indeed raise those who believe in him. But the opposite of that statement is also true. If the believer rises to new heights, the unbelievers will fall to new lows. This means that baptism, in this context, is viewed as a tool that separates the metaphorical sheep from the wolves. For those who believe, they will be washed by the Holy Spirit. But for those who do not believe, they will be washed by fire.

Needless to say, John's baptism of water is mediocre in comparison to Jesus' baptism. John's baptism was essentially an IOU to God. Jesus' baptism was either a person's IOU paid in full or come due.

iii. The Messiah's judgment is greater.

Expanding on the premise that the Messiah's baptism is better, John says that Christ's "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."

This is farm imagery. A "winnowing fork" is what is known today as a pitchfork. **<INSERT PICTURE>** During harvest, the wheat needed to be separated from the stalks and husks, collectively called "chaff." So, farmers would take their pitchforks, toss the wheat in the air, and let the wind detach the grain from the chaff. Because the grain kernels had weight, they would fall back to the earth. On the other hand, the chaff was dried out and lightweight, so, once thrown into the air, it would float a bit, leaving the grain to fall. Once the threshing was done, the farmer would collect the grain and put it into a barn, whereas the chaff was collected and promptly burned.

In John's metaphor, Jesus is the farmer, his fork is the baptism, the wind is the Holy Spirit, the believers are the grain, and the unbelievers are the chaff. The Messiah has entered the fields. He has collected his harvest. The sifting has already begun. Either you believe in Jesus and

become the grains to be preserved forever. Or, you do not believe in Jesus and so become the chaff to be punished with "unquenchable fire."

John's message was a preview of what was to come. While he offered people a choice, he was not the judge. He was merely the messenger. John prepared the way; he was not "the Way." When the Messiah came, a choice would have to be made.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Those who want a fresh start to their new year must point people to the Truth.

As we pointed out, John's preaching made people think that he was the Messiah. When questioned, however, John pointed people away from himself and toward Jesus. Remarkably, he did this with everybody. It didn't matter who John spoke to; he always told the truth. Last week we saw how John spoke truth to crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers. Then, in the very next verse, we see that John also spoke the truth to kings.

READ: Luke 3:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

John shows us that humility is not timidity. John the Baptist spoke truth to commoners and kings alike, but when given the opportunity, he directed the spotlight away from himself and centered it on Christ (cf. Lu. 3:10-20). We all have our roles to play. It may be a supportive one, but it is still an important one. The sooner we take our place as second fiddle, the sooner our lives start making music.

Moreover, given that John spoke to Herod—a powerful politician—this passage is particularly applicable to how we ought to interact with our own government officials. It is common for us to excuse the shortcomings in our political "heroes." We do it when it comes to our own failures; why not when it comes to the faults of those we voted for? But people of integrity, like John, call out the wrongs they see locally **and** politically. They are not what the KJV calls "respecters of person" (cf., Ac. 10:34-35; Rom. Ron. 2:11-16). Regardless of the consequences, they will not cower before popular opinion nor court political gains. The message they bring to men **without** power is the same as what they bring to men **with** power: believe, repent, and be forgiven. Why? Because there is only one Messiah, and he did not come from the "left" or the "right," he came from above. And once we see that all stand on equal footing before the King

of kings, we will stop making excuses for our civil servants—past, present, and future—and start holding them, along with ourselves, accountable to the same standards that God holds all men to.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

Those who want a fresh start to their new year must point people to the Truth.

John pointed people to the truth. And any who want a fresh new start to their new year will likewise speak truth into the lives of those around them. In some cases, this might mean telling a friend they need to be more like Jesus. Or, in other cases, it might mean introducing a friend to Jesus. Given that governments tend to be corrupt, Christians are responsible for keeping the proverbial "tax collectors" and "soldiers" in line with the law. And yes, even if we were to be given an audience with the most influential people on the planet, may we speak the truth in love.

Video Description

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TEXT: Luke 3:15-20

John's preaching made people think that he was the Messiah. When questioned, however, John pointed people away from himself and toward Jesus. Remarkably, he did this with everybody. It didn't matter who John spoke to; he always told the truth. Last week we saw how John spoke to crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers. Then, in the very next verse, we see that John also spoke the truth to kings (cf. Lu. 3:18-20).

John shows us that humility is not timidity. John the Baptist spoke truth to commoners and kings alike. Likewise, any who want a fresh new start to their new year will speak truth into the lives of those around them. In some cases, this might mean telling a friend they need to be more like Jesus. Or, in other cases, it might mean literally introducing a friend to Jesus. And, given that governments tend towards corruption, Christians are responsible for keeping the proverbial "tax collectors" and "soldiers" in line with the law. Even if we were to be given an audience with the most influential people on the planet, we must speak the truth in love like John.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: