

Luke 3:7~14

Here we find John the Baptist, out in the wilderness preaching the “*Baptism of Repentance.*” Something Luke ascribes to be the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah, speaking of “*the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*” Which is a reference to preparing a road on which a visiting King is going to travel on. He declares every valley must be filled; every mountain brought low, every crooked place made straight, every rough place made smooth. Each one being a reference to whatever is wrong needs to be made right! Rather than a literal road, John is referring to the hearts of the people. They needed to prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord, by searching their hearts, and whatever they find wrong, they need to fix it by repentance!

As the people were coming to John to be baptized, John makes a very interesting statement...

(Vs 7) ⁷Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

Luke writes as though John made this statement to the whole multitude that had gathered around to be baptized, which is the way it appeared to be. But in Matthew’s account, we learn that this comment was directed at the Pharisee’s and Sadducees that had come.

⁵Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Though John did not single them out, Matthew makes it clear that he was speaking directly to the Pharisee’s and Sadducees... When he sees them coming to his baptism, he addresses them as a “*Brood of vipers,*” and questions them as to why they are coming, and who it was that had warned them of the wrath to come. It’s important to understand why he referred to them as vipers and why he asked them who had warned them of the wrath to come, for it sets the precedent for all that follows. Everything that John says after this is directed at the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Now, you probably don’t need me to tell you, that by referring to them as a “*generation of vipers,*” was not a compliment. The term viper that John used here referred to a small, but *very poisonous* desert snake. One that John would have been very familiar with having lived out in the desert all of his life. Not only was it extremely poisonous, but to make it even more deadly was the fact that when still, it looked like a dead branch, and was often picked up unintentionally. Such is the case as recorded in Acts 28, when Paul was on the island of Malta, where he gathered a bundle of sticks, which he placed on the fire, and when he did, a viper came out and latched onto his hand. The natives kept waiting for him to fall dead, knowing the deadliness of the viper, but he didn’t. Because of this, they thought he was a god...

John called them a *brood of snakes*, conveying how dangerous and cunning these religious leaders were and suggesting that they were Satan’s offspring. The “*serpent*” has always been symbolic of Satan... The O.T opens with the “*serpent*” (Genesis 3) speaking of Satan himself, and here, the N.T. opens with serpents, speaking his offspring. It would be through these men that Satan would seek to destroy the “*Promised Seed*” of Genesis 3:15. It was this group that persecuted Christ and His followers. It was this group that called for the crucifixion of Christ. Listen, it wasn’t the wicked and openly sinful who treated Christ so badly, it was the religious folks. Many of the sinners embraced Christ, but not the religious.

That's what made them so dangerous, outwardly, they appeared righteous. As a result of their adherence to the Law of Moses, they had an outward appearance of being righteousness before God. But it was external only, their hearts were still filled with sin. He referred to them as deadly vipers because what they taught, the righteousness of the Law, though seemingly good, was extremely deadly to all who listened to them, because it was not true righteousness at all. The only righteousness produced by the Law is self-righteousness, one of the ugliest and most hideous spirits a person can possess. Here John confronts these men, letting them know that he sees right through them. He calls on them to repent, and to turn from their wicked ways, to cleanse their hearts before God!

The Pharisee's and Sadducees serves as good examples to the fact that religion can't save you... Even though these guys outwardly conformed to the Law of God, making them good, moral men, *their heart was far from God!* This is what made it so deadly, was the fact that all who listened to them would have the false sense of security of being right with God, when the reality was they were still in sin.

For that reason, John questions them as to why they were coming, questioning the sincerity of their coming. **Had their eyes been opened to their sinful condition? Were they coming in a broken, contrite spirit to plead with god for forgiveness?**

The point is, unless you're coming in genuine repentance...there's no need for you to come...

(Vs 8) ⁸*Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, **and begin not to say within yourselves**. We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

John charges them, that before they be baptized by him, they are to *show forth "signs"* of genuine repentance in the heart. Something he refers to as "*fruits.*" Fruit is a common analogy that is used throughout scripture, referring to the works of a man, or the life of a man. It makes for a real good analogy because a tree is know by the fruit it bears. A tree that produces apples is a _____ tree, a tree that brings forth oranges is an _____ tree. A principle that holds true in the lives of men... A principle that Jesus would later use to warn his disciples to beware of false teachers (*speaking of these men*) saying, "*You shall know them by the fruit they bear...*" *Outwardly they are dressed as a shepherded, but inwardly they are raving wolves!*"

You know we often say, we're not to judge... That's not true according to the teachings of Christ. True, we are not to judge in the sense of condemning others, for I too am a sinner, standing in the need of God's mercy. The judgment of condemnation is reserved for God and God alone. But we are commanded by Christ himself to look upon the lives of men and determine what kind of man they are! Christ tells us not to base our judgment by outward appearances, but that which comes from the heart! It might be best described, as we are to be "*fruit inspectors!*"

Upon seeing these men coming to his baptism, John sees right through them, and says, *bring forth fruits worthy of repentance...show me that you have had a change of heart!*

In the same breath he adds, **and begin not to say within yourselves**, *We have Abraham to our father:* He says this because he knows what they are going to say... He knows they will claim ties with Abraham, declaring that they are the *children of Abraham*. To understand this, is to understand that God made the covenant with Abraham. God declared to Abraham that He would bring forth a nation out of him. That he would be the "*Father of this nation.*" Through Abraham, He would raise up a seed, a people, to whom God would be their God, and they His people. At the time God made this covenant with Abraham, his wife was barren and well up in her years, and they had no children. But miraculously God opened Sarah's womb when she was in her nineties, and she gave birth to a son, Isaac. In time, Isaac would marry and have children, Esau and Jacob, upon which through God's divine will, Jacob was chosen to be the one to

receive the blessing. Meaning that it would be through Jacob that the bloodline of Abraham would continue, and out of Jacob's loins would come forth this nation... Jacob had twelve sons, which later would become known as the twelve tribes of Israel. (Jacob's name changed to Israel) These twelve tribes of Israel formed the nation Israel, as we know it today.

Given that, these Pharisees and Sadducees who had come to be baptized of John, because they were of the bloodline of the twelve tribes of Israel, (the children of Israel), who was of Isaac, who was of Abraham...they saw themselves as "*God's covenant people.*"

We see a much similar thinking today... Many are holding to "*Church Membership,*" or to the fact that they have been "*Baptized.*" As important as those things are, they are worthless to a man or woman if they are not accompanied by a change of heart! God is not going to look to Providence Baptist Membership book, or the fact that you've been baptized. God is going to examine our lives...looking for signs of genuine repentance.

John charges them that they "*Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance...*" But before they can say anything, John charges them that they show proof that that you've had a change of heart! And don't even start to say, "*We are the children of Abraham.*" *That doesn't mean anything!* God can raise up children unto Abraham from these stones... Just because you are of the lineage of Abraham doesn't mean anything! That will have *no bearing* on how God determines *who is just!* God is going to judge a man based on the fruit he bears...God will look upon the man's heart...

(Vs 9) ⁹*And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

The "*axe is laid to the root of the tree*" depicts judgment... When God judges men, the fact that you are a child of Abraham won't matter. The fact that you are a member of a church, or the fact you've been baptized...won't matter. None of that will play a factor in determining whether you are just before God or guilty before God. What does matter is the kind of fruit you bear! A reference to the "*works*" of our hands, the things we do...God will judge men on the basis of their works!

Now, that statement tears some people up! They'll say, "*hold on preacher, you're preaching salvation by works, and the bible is clear, we are not saved by works!*" And they may cite Ephesians 2 as evidence...

⁸*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹**Not of works, lest any man should boast.***

To which I fully agree...no one will be saved by the works of the Law! That's the context of that passage. There Paul is referring to the "*works of the Law.*" Referring to the fact that no one will be saved, declared righteous before God and escape the judgment of God by conforming to the Law. Something the Jews thought was what justified them over the Gentiles. The Jews thought that by conforming to the Law of Moses, they were just before God, and given that the Gentiles didn't, they were guilty before God. But the truth is, no one is justified by the Law, for the Law was not given to justify us, but to condemn us, to make us aware of our sinful condition. The Law was given to render us guilty before God, and then point us to Christ for justification! All who would, by faith, turn from the Law to Christ would be just before God. They would no longer be living to the Law of God, but living in submission to the Son of God.

Is a man **saved** by works? NO. No man will be saved by his works, for the bible clearly teaches that salvation comes by faith! But, having said that, whether or not a man truly has placed his faith in Christ *will be manifested by his works!* **Though we are not saved by our works, our works bear evidence that we are saved!** If a man has repented of his sin, and turned from this world and the things of this world

and his own life...the life he now lives will bear witness to that! Here John is calling for these Pharisees and Sadducees, to show some proof that they have turned from the self-righteousness in the Law.

⁹And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

“**Hewn down and cast into the fire**” is a picture of the end times, when God will judge the wicked, and cast them into the lake of fire, HELL! These Jews that John is speaking to here serve as a prime example that religion won’t save you! They conformed to the Law to the letter, but as we know, that can’t save the soul! The only thing that can’t save the soul is a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ! And in order to have a relationship with Him, it requires that a man repent of his sin, and turn from this world and the things of this world, turn from living to themselves, taking self off the throne, yielding to Christ his proper place. To all who do that, it will be visibly apparent by how they live their lives, the fruit they bear.

(Vs 10) Given all the talk about “**bearing fruit**”...the people asked...¹⁰...*What shall we do then?*

¹¹*He answered and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*

Listen, a genuine repentant heart will bear evidence by a change in ways. Repentance must be tied to action, or it isn’t real. Faith without works is dead... John declares to them that they are to give to the needy, feed the hungry...Instead of hoarding up everything for yourself, share it with others.

¹²*Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?* ¹³*And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*

The publicans or “*tax collectors*” were known for their crooked dealings with people. They would cheat people out of their money. They would inflate the required taxes a family was required to pay, then pocket the overage. John looks to them and simply says...stop cheating people. Be just in your dealings with others. (**The account of Zacchaeus**)

¹⁴*And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.*

A better translation... *Don’t extort money by threats and violence... Don’t falsely accuse people of things you know they didn’t do... Be content with what your pay... The soldiers often took advantage of the weak, using fear and the threat of violence to extort money from them... John says stop doing that...*

The point with each one is the same...turn from anything you’re doing, that is wrong and start doing right. Treat people the way they should be treated. Show love and compassion for people and their needs! John simply looked at each individual and pointed out their wrong and told them to make them right! Repent!