

INTRODUCTION

One of the recurring messages of Bible prophets is "Repent and sin no more!" Perhaps you've heard the semi-humorous story of a man who was painting the exterior of the local church. Trying to save money, he kept mixing paint thinner with the paint so the result was a very thin coat of paint. It looked pretty good, until a couple of days later, a hard rain completely washed the thin coat of paint off the church. The upset preacher told the crooked painter to meet him in front of the church. The preacher pointed at the building and said, "Repaint you thinner! Repaint and thin no more!" (sorry.)

Last week we looked at the story when Jesus was 12 years old and his parents lost him in Jerusalem. Eighteen years elapse between the end of Luke 2 and the beginning of Luke 3. Jesus is 30 years old and He is going to begin His brief three-year ministry that will culminate in a rugged cross. John the Baptist, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth is sent by God to be Jesus' forerunner. John is one of the most colorful, interesting characters in all the Bible.

He is what we might call a First Century hippie. Matthew tells us he grew up in the desert. He wore only leather and a camel hair coat and because he had taken a Nazarite vow, he never cut his hair. He lived on a natural diet of locusts and wild honey. Can't you just see him ordering at the local McLocust restaurant? He orders a Locust burger, heavy on the honey, and the attendant asks, "Would you care for flies with that?"

John not only had an unusual dress and diet but his message was strange. He commanded everyone to "repent and be baptized." In those days, when someone converted to the Jewish religion from a pagan background, that person would go through a ceremony of ritual bathing to symbolize the cleansing from sin and the initiation into the Jewish faith. John's unique twist is that he commanded *all* the people, not just Jewish proselytes, to repent and be baptized. This new doctrine was called a "baptism of repentance." The purpose of this baptism to prepare their hearts for the coming of the long awaited Messiah.

Today, as we study this text, I hope we can learn something about the nature of real repentance. Let's start by looking at the first six verses of Luke 3:

Luke 3:1-6. In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for them. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"

In this passage, I find three important principles that can help you enjoy life. Without these keys, I don't think you'll ever unlock the door of happiness. To really enjoy life you must know

I. WHO YOU ARE IN RELATION TO JESUS (1-6)

Both secular and Christian counselors agree you will never be a balanced person until you develop a healthy self-image. The problem is many people have taken a long look at themselves and they really don't like what they see. They are so down on themselves they aren't free to love others. You can't "love your neighbor as yourself" until you truly love yourself. On the other extreme some people are so in love with themselves they spend most of their time looking at themselves in a mirror. Have you ever driven up behind someone at a stoplight and you notice the person in front of you has their rearview mirror tilted so they can look at themselves? This is the same kind of person who looks in a mirror and sings "How Great Thou Art." We can learn something from John about a good self-image. The best self-image you can develop is understanding who you are in relation to Jesus.

1. John was a voice to introduce Jesus

He realized he was not to take center stage and demand top billing. He understood his role was simply to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 40. The heart of this prophecy was a metaphor drawn from an ancient custom. When visited by a king, a city would often build a new road approaching their metropolis so the king could approach the city in dignity and honor.

It's still true today. If you have ever gone on one of our mission trips to Belize, you probably have driven on the Queen's Highway. Before Queen Elizabeth visited Belize in 1983, there was only a rough, unpaved road connecting Belize City with the capital city of Belmopan. But when they learned the queen was coming, the citizens of Belize built a beautiful, straight, wide highway to connect the two cities—it is still the best road in the entire nation. John's job was to build a straight highway so the Messiah could travel into the hearts of people. The name of this straight highway is called "repentance."

John understood his main role in life was to simply introduce Jesus to the people. Before Jay Leno took over, Johnny Carson was the host of the Tonight Show. For many years, the main job of Ed McMann was to say, "Heeeeeerrrrreeee's Johnny!" That was what John came to do. He understood his role was to tell the world, "Heeeeeerrrrre's Jesus the Messiah!"

John the Baptist stands as one of the greatest men of history. He is the last Old Testament prophet. He was cut out of the same cloth as Moses, Elijah, Amos, and Joel. I want you to see what Jesus had to say about John. In Matthew 11:11 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; (that's a pretty high compliment but listen to what Jesus is about to say about us) yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." That's a great transition into the next point:

2. You are a child of God

Jesus is talking about two different kinds of birth. Did you catch them? First, there is physical birth (born of woman). Of all the people who had, up until that day, been born physically, John was the greatest. But then Jesus is referring to another kind of birth. Of those born of the Spirit,

born-again Christians, the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John. So, if you are a born-again Christian, you are a precious child of God. By yourself, you may not be very much, but in Jesus, you are a deeply loved child of the heavenly Father. I John 3:1 is one of my favorite verses: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God!"

Here's how I can develop a real healthy self-image. When I look at myself, I'm not very impressed. I am weak. I fail. I stumble. I struggle with the same thing Paul fought, the good things I want to do, I don't do them. The bad things I don't want to do, I find myself doing them. Like Paul I confess I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. I admit it but that's okay, because when I look at who I am in Christ, I rejoice that I am forgiven, blessed, redeemed, and my Heavenly Father is lavishing His love on me!

Personal Lesson: Who you are in Christ is more important than what you do for Jesus

One of the most glorious truths in the Bible is that you are in Christ. Who you are is more important than what you do. Let's try a little confession. If you are a Christian, repeat these words aloud after you read each phrase: I am in Christ...Christ is living in me...I am a born-again Christian...I am a child of God...I am deeply loved by my Father...There is nothing my Father won't do...Because I am a child of God...I can face whatever trouble life throws at me...My God is able to deliver me...I am more than a conqueror...Through Him who loves me!

The second thing you must do to really enjoy life is to know

II. WHAT REAL REPENTANCE IS (7-14)

Luke 7-14. John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." "What shall we do then?" The crowd asked. John answered, "The man who has two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some of the soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

He didn't candy coat his message. John is using sandpaper, the real rough kind. John uses sandpaper to rub the multitudes raw: "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? What is John's purpose for using this sand paper message? John is preparing the surface for the gospel so it will stick. Now, it wasn't very nice for John to call these respectable Jews a bunch of poisonous snakes. It would be like me standing before you during the welcome time and saying, "Greetings you bunch of sorry rattlesnakes, who told you to slither in here on your bellies?"

John is acting like a true Old Testament prophet, not like a New Testament pastor. There are times when a pastor must be prophetic, but a pastor is always busy trying to lead and feed his sheep and he only shears them once a year, not every week!

Actually John was saying something more than just calling them snakes. He calls them a "brood of vipers" which means a family of snakes. What did that mean to Jews schooled in the Old Testament? In Genesis 3 Satan is pictured as a serpent or a viper, and God says to the serpent, "I will put enmity between...your seed and her seed" (Genesis 3:15). So when anybody said you were the seed or the brood of a viper, it was the same as saying you were sons of the devil. That's exactly what Jesus said in John 8:43 to another religious crowd, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." So John's first word is an indictment of his listeners: You are people in Satan's grip. You are his children, with his nature.

Next, John says God demands repentance. Then he says there is "fruit in keeping with repentance." (vs. 8). He changes metaphors; he drops the analogy of a wicked, sinful, serpent-like heart and starts talking about fruit trees. He says the axe is already at the root of the tree. He is trying to say we each have a sinful root and we must repent—and when we do, there will be a certain kind of fruit (behavior) in our lives. After John preached the people began to ask him "What should we do?"

In his answer we see the four steps of real repentance:

1. Conviction of your sin

That means you must *realize* you are a sinner. When these Jews started asking John what they could do to show they had repented, they were experiencing the conviction of personal sin. Jesus told us one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin. When you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit pitches a holy fit every time you stumble and sin. You will feel miserable about your sin. Lost people don't have this built-in conviction. They have a conscience, but a conscience can become deadened. One of the ways to *know* you are a child of God is to ask yourself, "Do I experience a powerful conviction whenever I am disobedient to the Lord?" But that's only the first step.

Next, there will be

2. Contrition over your sin

This word means to be broken or contrite over your sin. It means you feel guilt and remorse over your sin. It is more than feeling sorry you sinned; it means you have a sense of spiritual sorrow.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." Notice there are two kinds of sorrow in that verse. Worldly sorrow is the feeling of regret a person has when they do something bad. They feel bad they did it, but they keep on doing it. Godly sorrow always produces repentance. It is a sense of sorrow that you have hurt the heart of God by your wickedness. Many people are simply

sorry they got caught. That’s not true contrition. Godly sorrow is experienced when you sin, and nobody but God knows you’ve sinned—but that’s enough for you to quit. God knows and it breaks your heart. The next step is

3. Confession of your sin

Do you notice the progression here? The first two steps are what takes place on the inside. The Holy Spirit brings you under conviction, and you experience true Godly sorrow. This next step is not something you experience, it is something you do: You confess your sin. You ask, “Who do I confess it to?” Or if you are an English teacher you ask, “To whom do I confess my sin?” The answer to that is simple. You always confess your sin to God, because sin is always against God.

Remember, when King David came under the conviction of his sin of adultery and murder, he said to God, “Against You and You only have I done this wicked thing in your sight.” (Psalm 51:4) There are times when it is appropriate to also confess your sin to someone against whom you have sinned. But it’s important to realize the Bible never commands us to confess our sins to those who weren’t involved in our failures. Here’s a good principle: The circle of confession needs to be only as large as the circle of the sin. The word “confession” means to “say the same thing.” (homologeō). When you confess your sin to God you are agreeing with Him that what you have done is wrong. So, look at these first three steps of repentance. I need to issue a warning here. Many people have been deceived into thinking these three steps comprise all there is to repentance. You can take all three of these steps and you *still* have not repented. Look at Proverbs 28:13, “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

Did you notice those two important words, “confess” and “renounce?” It’s not enough to come under conviction; it is not enough to feel contrition or sorrow of your sins, and it is not enough to confess your sins. You must also renounce your sin. That means to stop doing it. That leads us to the fourth and final step of real repentance. It is a

4. Change in your behavior

When John was asked what this “fruit of repentance” was, he told them when they truly repent they would change the way they act. The person who was selfish would start sharing his coat if he had one he wasn’t wearing. Tax collectors would stop stealing from the people. Soldiers would stop extorting money and stop complaining about their wages. In other words, people would start acting differently. Repentance means to stop sinning.

It means you are not only broken over your sin, you are broken from it. The Greek word for repent is *metanoia* which means “to turn.” Repentance is turning from your sin. It is not a temporary turning; it is a permanent turning. Have you ever known someone who seemed to repent and then they turn back to their sin? They didn’t truly repent. The Bible talks about a person like that in the most inelegant, disgusting words in all the Bible. In 2 Peter 2:22, Peter quotes and applies Proverbs 26:11 which says, “As a dog returns to its own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.” Peter is talking about people who at one time seemed to have repented and been saved but then they go back to their sin. Can you imagine anything more inelegant to repeat

from the pulpit than a dog that vomits and then returns to eat that which he has regurgitated on the ground? That's a horrid thought, but that's what a dog does. Does this picture a person who was saved and then they lost their salvation? God never calls one of His children a dog. The reason a dog returns to his own vomit is simply this: He is still a dog; it is the nature of a dog to do that. This is a picture of a person who has undergone synthetic repentance. They seemed to repent but their inner nature had not been changed.

You may say, "Well, I knew of someone who lost their salvation." No you don't! They never had it in the first place if they don't have it now. They never truly repented. Sometimes you'll see people walk and aisle and admit they are sinners, they will cry big tears of remorse, and they will confess they have done all kinds of horrible things but there is no true repentance until there is a permanent change in their behavior. They are what I call "Alka-seltzer Christians." They dunk in the water and fizzle for a while—and then they disappear. The only difference is they give *us* the headache! Repentance is not a temporary turning from sin; it is a permanent change in behavior. That's the fruit of repentance.

Personal Lesson: Repentance alone won't save you. You must turn from your sin and turn to Jesus.

Repentance before God is one of the most frequently recurring messages in all the Bible. No less than 969 times, God thundered, "Repent!" It was the first message Jesus preached. Matthew 4:17 says, "Jesus Christ came preaching, 'Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" The last message Jesus left with the church was a message of repentance. Some people think the Great Commission was His last message to the church, but almost 60 years after Jesus gave the Great Commission He gave this message to the church in Revelation 3:19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten, be zealous therefore and repent!"

In the Bible, "repentance" is often paired with "faith." The sequence is always "repent and believe." It's never "believe and repent." Repentance alone, without faith in Christ is useless. Judas Iscariot was convicted that he betrayed Jesus, he felt sorrow, and even confessed he had betrayed innocent blood. He probably would have never done it again, but we don't know, because he didn't put his faith in Jesus. He killed himself.

Here's the best picture of repentance I can show you: I am walking along in my sin, heading toward an eternal hell, separated from God. My face is toward my sin and my back to toward God. I come under conviction, I have sorrow over my sin, I confess I'm a sinner, and then I change direction. I turn away from my sin (negatively that's called repentance) and at the same time I turn toward Jesus (positively that's called faith). I cannot turn from my sin unless I turn to Jesus and I cannot truly turn to Jesus unless I turn from my sin. Let's look at the final section of this passage. You will never truly enjoy life until you know

III. WHAT JESUS CAME TO DO IN YOU (15-20)

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize

you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. I admire John because of his humility. It would have been easy for him to try to imitate the Messiah. He was a popular prophet and he could have increased his crowds a hundred-fold if he had even suggested he was the Christ. But he was quick to say the real Messiah was greater than he was and the Messiah would do some amazing things. Let's see what Jesus wants to do in each of us.

1. To plunge you in the life of God (baptism in the Holy Spirit)

Remember, the word *baptizo* means "to immerse, to plunge, to dip." John is saying, "I've been plunging you in water, but the Messiah will immerse you in the Holy Spirit." There is a lot of confusion today about what the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" is. Some Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians claim everyone has to have this experience and it will always be accompanied with speaking in tongues. Without a doubt, John was referring to what was going to happen to the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, described in Acts 2. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He confirmed it with these words recorded by Luke in Acts 1:4-5: On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water; but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

I'm sure the disciples wondered what Jesus was talking about, but they obeyed Jesus. On the Day of Pentecost, 120 of them were gathered in an upper room praying. There was a supernatural sound of a mighty wind blowing, and small blazes of fire appeared above the heads of the disciples. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to praise God in a new kind of language that was understood by the many visitors from all around the world. The result of this baptism in the Holy Spirit didn't cause them to stay there having a good time. They went out into the streets and preached Jesus. The former coward, Peter, stood up before thousands of people and preached with holy boldness. His invitation sounded a lot like the message of John the Baptist. It was "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

What does it mean to be baptized in the Holy Spirit? To us, it means that we are to stay constantly immersed in the life of God revealed in the Holy Spirit. When you are dipped in water, you are totally surrounded by the liquid—you are overpowered by it. To be baptized in the Holy Spirit means to be so totally immersed in the holy life of God that you are overpowered by it.

Let me explain it in a very simple way. It sure has been hot lately. Let's imagine you are burning up and you are standing beside a beautiful, clear, swimming pool. Your bare skin is roasting so you take a little cup and dip it in the water and splash it on your head. Sadly some Christians are content with a teacup kind of commitment. "Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord." But let's say you aren't content with splashing a little water on your head. You walk to the end of the diving board and you jump into the cool, clear water. You are totally immersed in the pool. The water

supports you, almost as if you are flying. You can't really walk the same, and you can't talk the same underwater, and you can't even breathe; you are under the control, the power of another element: Water. When you finally come up for air, you are refreshed and renewed.

I don't think being baptized in the Holy Spirit is some kind of spooky, scary, experience. I think it is a refreshing experience of being plunged totally in the life of God. Oh, that some of you today would seek to jump into the swimming pool of God's holy life, cup and all! But John said Jesus would baptize us in the Holy Spirit and with fire. I believe that means Jesus came

2. To purge you of your sinful life (Fire)

Now, when we get to chapter twelve of Luke Jesus makes the statement, “I came to send fire on the earth, and what will I do if it is already kindled?” (Luke 12:49) I'll talk a lot more in depth at that time about this metaphor. But for now, you only need to know that in the Bible, fire was a symbol of cleansing and judgment. The immediate statement referred to the forgiveness of sins, removing all that is worthless, useless, and lifeless. When John says Jesus will baptize you with fire, it means you will be immersed in the cleansing, refining fire of the Holy Spirit. When you are immersed in the life of God, holy living is always the result. Fire has a way of destroying those things that are impure and evil in your life. You must always respect fire because of this destructive characteristic.

In 1665, the bubonic plague swept through London. Thousands of people were dying from this plague spread by the multitude of rats that infested the city. Some experts believe the entire population of the city would have died except for the intervention of a strange remedy. In 1666, a small fire broke out and soon the entire city was engulfed in flames. When the blaze, known as the Great Fire of London, finally burned itself out, most of the city lay in ruins. How tragic. Not really, because they made an amazing discovery after the fire. The rats were killed, and the fire stopped the spread of the plague. The same fire that destroyed buildings of the city saved the city.

The fire of God in your heart will do the same thing. It will cleanse you of the recurring sins that threaten to destroy your effectiveness and your joy. Jesus came to immerse you in the wonderful life of God and to keep you clean and holy before Him.

Personal Lesson: You will either be immersed in the holy fire of purity—or the harmful fire of punishment

Actually, there are two fires mentioned in this passage. Back in verse 9, John says the Messiah will collect all the “unfruitful” trees and burn them. This speaks of the fire of eternal judgement. This described the punishment that will come to everyone who never demonstrated the fruit of repentance. Again in verse 17, he points out the Messiah will burn the chaff, “with unquenchable fire.” The wheat will be gathered into Heavenly barns. Wheat is the “fruit” of the plant. Chaff is nothing but a dried husk. It has the shape of a kernel of wheat but it is empty. What a vivid description of the thousands of people around us whose lives are nothing but a hollow husk of the real life available to us in Jesus. The other fire is the Holy Spirit fire of cleansing. Every one of us will face the fire. It's your choice; which fire will you face?

Verse 18 says John preached the good news. You may think he only preached the bad news. But the good news is not so good unless you consider it against the backdrop of the bad news. The bad news is there is going to be a final, fire-full, fearful, punishment of sinners. The good news is you can be delivered from it. The bad news is "the wages of sin is death" the good news is "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." You will never enjoy life until you realize the fearful fate from which you have been delivered.

CONCLUSION

A Dutch theologian, Johannes Halkendijk, tells this story that took place in World War II. During the Nazi occupation of Holland, the Nazis planned to deport Jewish children to concentration camps. A Dutch resistant group had been formed and one arm of this resistance decided to do what they could to save these children. A group of 300 people, children and resistance leaders, were gathered together and hiding. What they did not know was that someone in their own group betrayed them to the Nazis. They were found and taken to a detention center.

There they heard they would be taken not to a concentration camp, but to a crematorium where they would be killed. When the day to be taken away came, both Christian resistance leaders and Jewish children boarded the same cattle cars together to share the same fate. The trip lasted a few days. One morning, just after sunrise, the crowded train stopped and word was given they were to get out of the train. They got out, expecting to find themselves surrounded by Nazi guards. They expected to see the crematorium belching out ugly smoke. Instead, they were standing in the middle of a sunlit pasture with majestic snow-covered mountains in the distance. They were not in Germany but in Switzerland. What they did not know was that on the first night the train had been taken over by some of the Dutch resistance fighters. Instead of delivering them to their deaths, the train had transported them to safety. As a result, these 300 people were not recipients of the death they expected, but of a new life. That's what has happened to every one of us who are saved.

If we got what we all deserved, we would face the fire of judgement for our sinful nature and our sinful behavior. But thanks be to God! He has saved us and delivered us through Jesus—so now we can *really* enjoy life!

OUTLINE

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2. You are a child of God

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The four steps of repentance:

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2. Contrition over your sin

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3. Confession of your sin

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes