



The Sermon

Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Luke 3:7-17

"The Fruit of Repentance"

January 28, 2024

TRANSCRIPT

So, I want you to take your Bible and turn with me to the gospel of Luke. We're going verse by verse through the gospel of Luke, and we've come to chapter 3, and we're in verse 7 and we will be looking at through verse 17. And as always, I want to begin by reading the passage. This is the way they did it in the first century church. They would first read the passage, and then they would explain it, and they would teach the doctrine in it, and then they would exhort with it and make the application. So for that reason, to follow the pattern, really, set in Scripture itself, I want to begin by reading the text, setting it before you. You'll see it with your eyes in your own Bible. You'll hear it with your ears as I read it. I'll pray, and then we'll look at it together. So, Luke chapter 3, beginning in verse 7. The title of this message is "The Fruit of Repentance."

Beginning in verse 7, "So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'

"And the crowds were questioning him, saying, 'Then what shall we do?' And he would answer and say to them, 'The man who has two tunics is to

share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.' And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.' Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, 'And what about us, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.'

"Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, John answered and said to them all, 'As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. The winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor,' – the idea is to thoroughly clean house – 'and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'" This is the reading of God's word. This is surely God's word. Let us go to Him in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, what we have heard read to our ears is Your very word. It's true. It's accurate. It's inspired. It's infallible. It is the very plumbline by which all else is measured. And so, today, assist us. Draw near to us as we walk through this passage. Give us the understanding that we need. Cause this passage to come crashing into our hearts and lives. May this passage leave its impact upon us for all the days that we're here upon the earth. So, Father, now lay Your hand upon me for good, that I might be Your faithful servant to teach this text. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. [End]

In these verses which I have just read for us we see the heart of the preaching of John the Baptist. John was a voice crying in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord. And we would ask the question, "But specifically, what did John say?" He's a voice crying, but what did he cry? What did the voice articulate?" And here we see recorded are the actual words of John, at least in summary form; and this is one hot sermon.

John was a fiery prophet – direct, provocative, confrontational, convicting, emphatic, dogmatic, threatening his listeners with judgment and hell if they do not repent. As one man has said of the preaching of John the Baptist, "He had the wilderness for a cathedral. He had the river for his baptistry. He ate honey, but he sure didn't preach it. He preached hell's hot, heaven's sweet, sins black or white, judgment is sure, and Jesus saves." John was what we call a hellfire and brimstone preacher. You know what you call a hellfire and brimstone preacher? You call him a Bible preacher.

John was a preacher who cut to the chase. He wasn't an entertainer. He didn't come to tickle ears, he came to box ears. He never beat around the bush. He majored on majors, and he always preached in light of eternity. He was like what Richard Baxter said, "to always preach as a dying man to dying men, as never to preach again." John always went for the juggler vein. John always went to the most vital issue: "Where will you spend eternity?"

Where will you be five seconds after you die? Will you awaken in heaven in the presence of God or will you awaken in hell in its flames? As I preach this passage today, I will simply be a mouthpiece for John's message. For any anyone who does not like this message, take it up with John. Better yet, take it up with God, because this is the message that God has for us today. It's a tall dose of medicine.

So, let's walk through this together. And the first thing I want you to see is in verse 7, "the hypocrisy rebuked, the hypocrisy rebuked." And before I read verse 7, let me just remind you what the word "hypocrisy" means. It's a compound word in the original Greek language and it means one who puts on a mask, and it referred to an actor who would be given a part to play on a stage. And in Greek drama, the actor would put a mask on. It would either be a smiling face or a weeping face. And he would be given lines, and he would come up on stage and, in essence, he would pretend to be someone that he's not. He would have rehearsed his lines to give the impression to everyone who is around that he is this person. But when the play is over, he takes the mask off and he goes back to being the person he really is and he no longer play acts, but he now speaks his own words.

What's going on here is John is about to rip the mask off of these people who are coming because they are play acting as though they are religious, and they want to be baptized by John the Baptist. So let's look at this in verse 7. "So he" - John - "began saying to the crowds." And again, to draw your attention is "crowds," plural. People are just flocking out into the wilderness to hear John. And it does speak to the power of strong preaching, that people are drawn to it. Even lost people are drawn to it.

It says, "they were going out to be baptized by him." As you recall last week, we looked at a baptism of repentance, that those who had repented of their sins were to make a public profession now of this change of heart and trust in God's grace by being baptized by John in the River Jordan. And as they're flooding out and they're lining up, this gives every the appearance of what a successful preaching ministry John the Baptist has. I mean, the crowds are enlarging and the line is being extended of people who are now waiting to be baptized. And they look so religious, and they look so spiritual, and they look so sanctimonious. And this is why we call John "John the Baptist."

Now, I want everyone to know there were no Baptists back then. That didn't start until England in about the 16th century. More correctly, he's John the baptizer. John is the one doing the baptizing. The word "baptize" means to dip or immerse or sink into water. And so they're just coming out of the woodworks to come be baptized by John and to give this appearance that "I am right with God, and I've repented."

But notice how John responds here. He says, "You brood of vipers." Wow. He wouldn't last long in an American church. I can tell you, they would give him an apple and a road map and send him on his way. But John's a straight-talking preacher; and John, because he's a prophet, is enabled by God to have great discernment and to peer into the lives of these who are coming; and he just puts his arms, in essence, around the whole group and just lumps them up and he says, "You brood of vipers."

Now, "brood" means offspring, and "vipers" refer to poisonous snakes with razor-sharp fangs that inject lethal venom into their victims and spread death. John's comparing them to a bunch of vipers, a bunch of snakes. And in reality, he's calling them children of the devil - unconverted, unrepentant, masquerading as if they are right with God, when they're only compounding the issues with God by putting on such pretense; and John saw right through them. He pronounced them to be religious frauds, counterfeit candidates for baptism. John does not baptize them, he blasts them. He doesn't immerse them, he indicts them, and he rips the mask off of them and rebukes them for, in essence, playing church and giving the appearance of being religious, when, in fact, they are only seeking the approval of men, not of God.

But in the middle of verse 7 he asked this question, "Who warned you to flee" - that means to run away from - "the wrath to come?" - because the wrath of God is looming on the horizon and it is coming. "Who warned you?" And you know what the answer to that question is? The entire Old Testament from beginning to end issued a warning: "Cursed are you who breaks the law of God." And the psalmist, and Solomon who said in Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the end of death." And all of the prophets, they all spoke with one voice, "There is judgment that's looming on the horizon, and the wrath of God like an erupting volcano is about to come spewing forth and devour sinners."

This word "wrath," it's a Greek word *orgē*. It comes into the English language as *orge*. And *orgē* means heated passion, and used in an immoral carnal way refers to sexual orgies where there is heated passion. But used here of God, it refers to the heated vengeance of God against all sinners who are outside of His kingdom and those who are living in sin.

When I fly down to Orlando and work with Ligonier Ministries, on I-4 there's been a billboard there for quite some time. And, in essence, in so many words, it says, "Smile, God loves you." And when R. C. Sproul was alive, he could just go off on that billboard. "God has demonstrated His

love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God so loved the world, that gave His only begotten Son." That's half the story.

The other half of the story is that "God is angry with the wicked every day." And that's what John is saying here, that, "The wrath of God ought to be driving you to salvation, to repent and to seek the forgiveness of sin. But instead, you've turned this into a masquerade party, as you've got this mask on. You need to heed this warning of the entire Old Testament to flee from the wrath to God."

And that's a message that you and I need to hear again today. As we go through the gospel of Luke, this is somewhat of an isolated passage that will talk about eternal fire, unquenchable fire, and the wrath of God. But as we find ourselves here today, we need to remind ourselves that God is a God of wrath and a God of vengeance and a God of fury, and it is God who has created hell, and it is God who has ignited the flames of hell for every sinner who dies without Christ. Hell is a real place where real people go to suffer real pain in a real fire without end, forever and ever and ever. And there are many different reasons why you and I need to commit our life to Christ. But perhaps the most serious one is this, that the wrath of God is coming, and God will settle His accounts, and God is not forgotten. And this is the message of John.

This leads to verse 8, "the fruit required." On the basis of verse 7, here are the action steps. This is what you must do. It begins, "Therefore." And great preaching begins with a "therefore." There has to be a "therefore" in every sermon. On the basis of the truth that was just stated, "Therefore," this is what you must do: "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance." What John is saying is, "If your repentance is real, prove it with the fruit of repentance. Prove the reality and the validity of your professed repentance, because the profession of faith will not save anyone. It's the possession of faith that saves."

Hell is filled with people who say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and perform many wondrous

works in Your name?" And I will say unto them in that day, "Depart from Me, you who work iniquity, I never knew you." No, talk is cheap. You've got to back it up. And what is the fruit of repentance? It is a dramatically changed life from the inside out that redirects and reorients the entire direction of your life.

The word "repentance," *metanoia*, means a radical change of mind that produces a radical change of life. It totally reroutes you and does a 180 from going according to the course of this world to now turn you around and be headed towards glory in heaven, to get you off of the broad path and to pivot to go onto the narrow path. This fruit of repentance for which John calls for is a changed life, the evidence of it. There's the root and there's the fruit. If the root has life, there will be the fruit of a changed life. If the root is dead, there will be will be no life change.

So, how can you know if your profession of faith is real? How can you know if you have a living testimony? How can you know if your faith is genuine and real? The answer to that is, if the root is alive, there will be the fruit of repentance. The fruit of repentance includes love for God rather than love for yourself, love for the truth of God and His kingdom rather than love for this world. The fruit of repentance involves turning away from a life of sin and pursuing now Christ and holiness. The fruit of repentance involves self-denial and humility and trusting God and His grace alone for salvation, and submission to the law of God and obedience to it from the heart.

John then says in verse 8, "And do not begin to say to yourself." John knows exactly the wheels that are turning between their ears. He knows exactly what they are thinking, and so he's trying to cut them off at the pass as if to say, "I know what you're thinking, and do not be thinking this."

"And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father.'" And this is largely a Jewish gathering of people, and they have taken a false confidence in the fact of their lineage, their forefathers, "Being rightly connected to Abraham, so therefore we're in good stead with God. We were

born into this." They were trusting in their national citizenship, their family heritage, the practice of religious rights. "We were circumcised on the eighth day. We were brought to the temple on the fortieth day and presented for purification. We know the law of God. We grew up in a home in which the law was taught." They were trusting in their family ancestry and family background.

We would say today, "Well, my daddy was a preacher and my granddaddy was a deacon down at the church, and I started going to church nine months before I entered this world. I've been going to church a long time. I've been baptized." John says, "Don't be thinking that is going to get you into the kingdom. It's not your physical birth. It's going to necessitate a spiritual birth for you to enter the kingdom."

So John then says in verse 8, "For I say to you," - and that is very personal, very direct, very emphatic, very bold - "I say to you," - and great preaching gets to the "you" - "that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham." What does this mean? He is telling them that their hearts are harder than stones, that they have a hard heart, and that God and God alone can raise up out of the rocks of their heart true children of Abraham who are born again. It is only God who can bust up the broken heart. It is only God who can take out the heart of stone that is lifeless and dead spiritually and put in a heart of flesh, and then put his Spirit within a person and cause them to walk in His statutes. That's something that only God can do.

The application here is obvious for you and me. We cannot gain entrance into the kingdom of God just because we came from a solid Christian family, just because we belong to a Bible-preaching church, just because we attended a Christian school, just because we attend a men's bible study or women's bible study. That's not enough to enter into the kingdom of God. You must personally repent in your heart and in your soul of your sin, be grieved and be broken of it, and turn away from that kind of living and turn to God and come to Him through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and embrace Him by faith.



Verse 9, John does not let off the gas pedal. In verse 9, the preacher's tendency might be now to back off and try to win the crowd over a little bit and tone down his rhetoric. But instead, John now steps up his rhetoric and comes even stronger. And in verse 9, the third heading I want you to see is "the judgment rendered."

He begins verse 9, "Indeed" - which really has the idea of in truth, in reality - "the axe is already laid at the root of the trees." The trees represent each one of those who are coming with religious pretense, wanting to be baptized, but who have never repented in their hearts, just going through all of the outward motions of religiosity, but there's no internal personal relationship with God. And what John is saying, "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees," the root here is their heart, it is their soul. The trees represents the exterior, the root represents the interior of their lives. And he says, "God's axe has already been laid at the root of the trees."

And "axe" here represents divine judgment, wielded by divine wrath. It's not a blunt butter knife that God has taken up, but it is an axe, it is an instrument of war. It is an instrument for cutting down forests. It inflicts severe damage and destruction wherever it is wielded. And here it depicts the causing of eternal destruction and eternal damnation. That's what John is saying.

And then he says, "The axe is already laid," as though we're not waiting for the end of time and the final judgment to find out how this will be. No, God's axe has already cut into your unconverted root and you are already judged and you are already condemned, and the final judgment will simply be a mere carrying out of what has already been determined. It's already, this moment. Every unconverted person has the sharp axe of God already embedded in their soul. Divine judgment has already been declared and the verdict rendered.

As I said, the final judgment will be merely a mere formality of what has already taken place. I want to give you two verses to back that up. The first

comes from the lips of Jesus Himself, John 3:18. And by the way, just two verses after John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." Two verses later Jesus said, "He who does not believe has been judged already." The courts have already met and the verdict rendered, judged already this moment. You're condemned as you walk in this life.

And then Romans 1:18 is the other verse, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness in unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth and unrighteousness." That's a present tense verb "is revealed." Not "will be revealed on the last day," God's wrath is now already revealed against every unbeliever. This very moment, everyone who is outside of the kingdom of God is under the judgment of God. That's sobering, is it not? This should give us a sense of urgency in our evangelism. This should give us a sense of immediacy about reaching others for Christ, and it should make everyone here today who has not yet committed their life to Jesus Christ to wake up and to do so this very moment.

John then says at the end of verse 9, look at this, "so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down," every tree, without exception – no matter how many times you've been baptized, no matter how many times you've been circumcised, no matter how many times you've gone to the temple on the Sabbath, every tree, every life that does not bear fruit; there is no love for God, supreme love for God, no self-denial, no confession of sin, no turning away from pride, no obedience to the word from the heart, no pursuit of personal holiness, though you're coming to be baptized – is cut down.

This verb, "cut down," it's used in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:30, "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off," amputate it, deal seriously with it. You're about to be amputated from life itself. In Matthew 18:8, Jesus said the same, "If your foot makes you stumble," meaning your foot is taking you to the wrong place to fall into temptation, "then cut off that right foot," amputate it. "It'd be better to go to heaven maimed than go to hell with every member of your body."

But then it becomes more intense. He says, "is cut down" – cast down – "and thrown into the fire." We know what this fire is. I can go back to the nursery; five-year-olds know what this fire is. It's the fire of hell. It's the lake of fire. It's eternal fire. It's unquenchable fire. It is the number one representation of hell. And I remember R. C. Sproul telling us in class one day that if you thought about hell for more – seriously, focus for more than five minutes, you would go insane. And yet the one who does not repent will be cut down and thrown into fire – not dropped into hell, plummeted down by God into hell.

This word "thrown," that you see in verse 9, I looked it up, and it refers to hurling a missile or a weapon at an enemy with much force and intentionality. God is not reluctantly casting unrepentant souls into hell, God is aggressively and powerfully throwing them down into hell and sealing it shut.

I must warn you that if you have not truly repented of your sins, you are already condemned by God this morning. This very moment, if you have not repented, your soul is in peril, it is in great danger. You are but one heartbeat away from hell. You are but one car wreck away from hell. You are but one stroke or one heartbreak from hell, one heart attack from hell. If you have never truly repented, you could be in hell tonight before your family even knows you're dead.

Jesus, when He told the parable about the rich man who kept building bigger barns and bigger barns and bigger barns and he was so caught up with the things of this world, he gave no thought to his soul, he gave no thought to God, he gave no thought to eternity; and then in the middle of the night, God took his life. And Jesus said in Luke 12:20, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you." So is the man who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Oh, this is a strong dose of medicine that John has. He's not backing off. And it disturbed the people, and rightly so. We would wonder, "How in the world could they not be concerned to hear this?" And so this leads us to

verse 10, the question's raised, and the same question will be raised three times: "What shall we do?"

So you'll notice in verse 10, "And the crowds," - which, no doubt, are continuing to expand - "were questioning him," - that doesn't mean that they were challenging him, it means they were consulting him and inquiring of him and seeking answers because they were disturbed, they were convicted, they were shaken; and they were saying, verse 10 - 'What shall we do? How do we make this right? What does the fruit of repentance look like?'"

And so Jesus gives this first example of the fruit of repentance. He says, "The man who has two tunics" - a tunic is a garment worn next to the skin and under an outer cloak, so it's under like a coat and next to the skin - "is to share with him, him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." And the brilliance of John's answer is he understands that love for God will demonstrate itself in love for your neighbor.

And so the basis of what John is saying here is when you truly repent, you've given your life to God, and your whole life belongs to God. You're not your own, you belong to Christ and to God now. And so therefore, all of your possessions belong to God. Your house is no longer your house, it's God's house; and you paid for it, not with your money, with God's money. And the food that you eat is not your food. You didn't grow it. You can't cause seed to germinate. It's God's food. And the shirt on the back of your torso, that's God's shirt.

So everyone who has truly believed and repented of their sins realize that they are simply a steward of what God is entrusted to them. A steward means you're just a manager. You're not an owner, you're an overseer of someone else's possessions. And John is saying here that if you repent, then this will be evidenced in your life. You'll hold your possessions with an open hand. You'll not be greedy and clutch them with a clenched fist, you will be open-handed and share what you have with others as you see they

have need, just like God has been open-handed with you and provided for your needs.

Now, there's more that can be said here, and I do want to say this, that the Bible also says, "If a man does not work, neither let him eat," 2 Thessalonians 3:10. And so if a person chooses not to work and lacks the initiative to go out into the field and to work to provide for himself and his family, then let him starve to the point of death. And that gnawing in his stomach will get him off the couch and will get him out on the streets to find a job, whatever that job is, so that he can feed himself and feed his family. So this is not saying that whenever you see someone on a street corner with a hand out that if you've really repented you should give them something. No, give them a job, not food. Give them training, not food. Let them earn their own food.

What John is saying here about giving a tunic and giving food I think principally applies to caring for widows and caring for orphans who cannot get out on the street and work. And it principally applies to those who are physically impaired, maybe blind, maybe lame, and they cannot work and they cannot provide for themselves; then you are to step in. And it may be that they have just lost a job, and during this transition until they can find this next job, then step in and help. I mean, this needs to be said to balance what John is saying here. But a true evidence of repentance will be your generosity toward others because God has been so generous with you.

In verse 12, "And some tax collectors came and they said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?'" They're under deep conviction and for good reason. They're the most hated people in the entire nation. A tax collector is a Jew who has been hired by Rome to go to his fellow Jews and bilk them of tax money, and anything over and above a certain amount that they can get they can keep. So you can imagine the extortion that was taking place. So these tax collectors were hated by the Jews because they had been, in essence, bought by Rome to get from their friends all the money they could, and you can keep whatever you can skim off the top.

Well, they hear John preaching and they're sweating, and they're under deep conviction, and their heart is pounding, "Teacher what shall we do?" Verse 13, "He said to them, 'Collect no more than what you have been ordered to. You may continue to carry out this occupation, you may continue to work for Rome, it's just they have given you a set amount that you are to collect and turn in to them, and included in that is your salary. You may not go over and above and beyond the set amount that has been assigned to you from Rome to collect taxes. And the measure, the evidence of your repentance is you will now deal justly, you will deal equitably, you will do what is right as it relates to other people. You will not be swindling other people out of their money. You will not be consumed with greed.'"

And in verse 14, "Some soldiers were questioning him, saying," - this is amazing. Soldiers? These are Roman soldiers. These are Gentiles who have been sent down into the Holy Land just to be - for security to keep everything under lock and barrel, to prevent any riot or any kind of a government takeover. And so the soldiers have come out into the wilderness to hear the preaching of John the Baptist. Who knows, maybe just keep an eye on things so that this isn't going to be an uprising against Rome. And as they're hearing the preaching of John about the eternal flames of hell and the necessity to repent, they have come under conviction, their conscience is throbbing, and they say, "What about us?"

Verse 14, "What shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force." These soldiers had abused their power and authority and would go into homes and take things unlawfully from other people, and there is no way for them to be stopped. And you can imagine the abuse that has been taking place. And John said, "If you have truly repented in your heart, you will no longer dominate and intimidate other people, and you will deal equitably with others," and then John adds, "or accuse anyone falsely. Oh, they would trump up charges, make up charges so that they had some self-justification to take the possessions of Jews.

At the end of verse 14, John says, "Be content with your wages." Be satisfied with your wages with whatever you have. Each one of us needs to ask ourselves as you look at your own life, "Do you see the fruit of

repentance?" not just that you're here today, not just that you've been baptized, not just that you come from a certain religious background, not just that you're a citizen of the United States. Do you see the fruit of repentance like John the Baptist has called for here? It's a total reversal of the way that you once lived.

We come, finally, to verse 15, "the threat reissued." John will not back off. I mean, this message is like a train coming out of the station, it's picking up speed and momentum. There are no breaks on this sermon. Verse 15, "Now while the people were in a state of expectation" – what that means is what is John going to say next? How can he say anything any stronger than what he's already said? What is required of us? And it says, "They were all wondering," meaning reasoning and thinking, trying to get out ahead and anticipate with expectation what's the next heavy that John is about to lay on us. They were wondering in their hearts about John and as to whether he was the Christ. That tells us how strong the preaching of John was. And the movement of the people that are coming out, "Is this the Messiah? Is this the One, the Messiah who's going to overthrow the yoke of Roman oppression?" Even the Roman soldiers are coming to him, saying, "What shall we do? Even the tax collectors are coming to John. "The Messiah will overturn society and the nation and make it right. Maybe this is the Christ."

Verse 16, "John answered and said to them all," – in other words, let's get this straight – 'As for me, I baptize you with water. This water doesn't take away sin. This water does not clothe you with the perfect righteousness of God. This water does not reconcile you to God. There's no power in the water. The water is simply a symbol of the reality. The reality will be carried out by the One who's coming right behind me.'"

And so he says in verse 16, "But One is coming who's mightier than I." That is the Christ. That is the Son of God, the Son of Man. "He's coming right behind me. He's right on my heels. He's about to step out of the shadows and into the spotlight. In fact, He's going to come to this very same river, and I will be baptizing Him only to fulfill all righteousness. He is the Savior, He is the Lord, and He is mightier than I. He alone has might to forgive sin. He alone has might to change lives. He alone has might to

change one's standing before God and one's eternal destiny. He's the One, not me."

And then he says, "and I'm not fit" - I'm not competent, I'm not capable - "to even untie" - to loosen or unfasten - "the thong" - meaning the leather strap - "of His sandals." This is the most menial task that a servant could perform in his master's house is when his master comes at the end of the day and comes to the front door, the servant would meet the master at the front door and get on his hands and knees so his master would not have to bend down and the servant would untie the leather strap that's holding his sandal in place. And what John is saying, "In comparison to Him, I'm not even worthy to do this. I'm not even worthy to get on my hands and knees in the dirt and untie His sandals who is coming."

He says, "He will," - and here's why - "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John says, "I can only baptize with water; that's nothing. He will baptize you with the reality. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit; that's for true repenters. He will immerse you into the fullness of the Spirit's power. He will literally plunge you and baptize you into the ocean of the Spirit's might, and the Spirit of God will be in you and upon you and dramatically alter and change your life. And it is only one who is God who can send the third Person of the Trinity. It's even a statement of the deity of Jesus Christ, that Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, will baptize you with the third Person of the Trinity. No mere prophet or teacher could do that, only one who is fully God."

And then he adds at the end of verse 16, "and fire." Oh, He'll baptize with fire. Every false repentor, everyone who's religious but lost, everyone who is the hypocrite who puts on the mask of religiosity but who has never truly repented in his heart, Christ, who is coming, will baptize this one in fire. He will plunge you into the lake of fire and never let you up throughout all eternity. He will submerge you into brimstone into the lake that burns eternally. And He alone has the authority to damn human souls who will not repent and bow the knee to Him. These are strong words from John the Baptist. These are words that you and I need to hear today. We don't hear much of these truths today.



And then look at verse 17. John will not take his foot off the gas pedal. I mean, John just keeps pushing down. He's standing on the gas pedal. This message is getting stronger by the moment. Verse 17, "His winnowing fork" - referring to that belonging to the Master, the Lord Jesus. A winnowing fork is like a pitchfork that a farmer would have. And he would bring in his wheat during the harvest season, and with his pitchfork he would throw it up in the air and the wind would blow and the wind would cause a separation, and the kernels that are very valuable, the grain, it would come down onto the threshing floor so it can be gathered up and put into the barn. But the exterior, the husks, are so lightweight that the wind just blows them away, and they have no value. They can't be taken to market and sold. They can't be eaten.

And this winnowing fork creates the separation. And what John is saying is there's coming a separation. There's going to be a separation within families, as one spouse is going to be separated from another spouse. Children are going to be separated from their parents. There's a great separation that's coming. There's going to be a separation within churches. There's going to be a separation between those who merely profess to have repented and those who actually possess the repentance.

So, look at verse 17, "His winnowing fork is in His hand" - that means it's not on the shelf, it's not out in the barn, He's got it in his hand right now, and within moments He is ready to wield it, it's ready to be used right now - "to thoroughly clean" - or clear - "His threshing floor," - He will deal with everyone individually and He will assign you to your eternal destiny and where you will be. He says - "to gather the wheat into the barn," - the wheat here are the truly repentant ones, and they will be put into the barn, which is a place of safe storage. It's referring to the kingdom of heaven - "but" - sharp contrast - "He" - the coming Christ - "will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Christ Himself will cast this chaff into the fire and it will burn and burn and burn, but never cease burning, with unquenchable fire. This fire will burn as long as God is alive. This fire will burn as long as heaven exists.

There will be no end to the burning of the fire in hell. There will be no annihilationism. There will be no probation. There will be no moment's rest. There will be no time out. There will be no purgatory. Once in hell, always in hell. Once in the fire, always in the fire. There has to be this unquenchable fire because God is holy, and because God is righteous, and because all sin is committed against the High King of heaven. It is cosmic treason of the highest order. It is anarchy and revolt against heaven's King. And just one sin committed against Him will cast one and throw one down into the unquenchable fire.

That's how holy God is. That's how righteous God is. That's how just and powerful God is. And that's how wicked just one sin is. No sin will ever be swept under the carpet. No sin will ever go unpunished. Every sin in the history of the world will be punished to the full measure of the law. Every sin you've ever committed, every sin I've ever committed, will be punished to the full measure of the law. And the wages of sin is death. Every sin will either be punished in hell or punished in Christ at the cross. Where will your sin be punished? Will it be punished in you in hell, or has it been punished in Christ on the cross? This is, in essence, the message of John the Baptist.

You can see the seriousness of this message. You can see a seriousness with which you must consider your own soul and your eternal destiny. We will all stand before God, and we will all give an account, and just one sin to come up in that day will be sufficient to damn our soul forever.

There is only one sacrifice for sin that has been made, only one atonement, and that was made by Jesus Christ at the cross. And if you have never repented of your sins, if you have never believed upon Jesus Christ, I plead with you, I beg you, do so in the next three seconds. Do so in your heart right now where you sit. Do not leave this house of worship today under the wrath of God. Do not leave here trampling underfoot the precious blood of Christ. Do not leave here today insulting the Spirit of grace. Do not leave here without God in your life, by repenting of your sins and receiving the mercy and the forgiveness of sins that He alone can give you.

No one here today will be able on the last day to say, "God, I didn't know." You will not be able to plead the ignorant card. God will point you back here to this day. And if you die without Christ, you will hear this sermon in your conscience and in your mind forever and ever and ever. In hell you will have memory of your life and every opportunity that you had to believe in Christ. And if you die with without Christ, you will have the haunting memory of the message of John the Baptist, and you squandered it, you wasted the opportunity.

Every sermon throughout Luke's gospel is not going to be as heavy as this one. But this text today is as heavy as it can be. May your heart be receptive to the truth of Jesus Christ, and may you be a lifelong repentor and follow Christ. You cannot afford to be wrong about this. You can take a wrong turn on your way home today and you can recover, you can make a wrong investment and recover, you can take the wrong medicine and recover, but you cannot, you cannot avoid this. You cannot turn away from this and ever recover in eternity. May God help each and every one of us to be certain that we have believed in Jesus Christ and that we have repented of our sins.

[Prayer] Father, would You now bless the preaching of John the Baptist to our hearts today? May we think about it even as we sit in our chair this very moment. May we think about it in the car as we drive home. May we think about it at lunch. May we think about it tonight when we put our head on the pillow and go to sleep. May we think about it when we wake up in the middle of the night, that we must repent in order to enter the kingdom of God. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you.