

## **Scripture Reading:**

**Luke 3: 1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' " 7 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." 10 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" 11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." 12 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." 14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."**

# **“John Preaches the Kingdom of God”**

**We plunge back into our series on the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts**

**This week and next we will look at John and then Jesus preaching the Kingdom of God. Matthew tells us in his Gospel that John “came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying ‘repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’” *Matthew 3:1,2***

- **We are going to talk a LOT about the Kingdom as we move through these two books.**

**Luke begins with the Angel Gabriel proclaiming that John will “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” and that Jesus “will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end!”**

**The Book of Acts ends with Paul, “preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence!”**

**The word ‘Kingdom’ appears in the Scriptures over 300 times with almost half of them occurring in the New Testament.**

**So what does it mean when we say that John preaches the Kingdom or Jesus preaches the Kingdom?**

**Clearly there is a contrast between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world and our focus will be on the Kingdom of God.**

**If we look at various verses about the Kingdom of God, we could discuss how the Kingdom of God is past... is present... is future!**

**We could discuss how the Kingdom of God is an individual entering the gate... is about our local community... is global stretching to the four corners of the earth!**

**We could discuss how the Kingdom of God is within us... how it impacts the entire world... or how it is a heavenly Kingdom!**

- **What the Holy Spirit writing through Luke wants us to understand is that the Kingdom of God is all of these things!**

## **Jesus has come and His Kingdom changes EVERYTHING**

- **Our sins are forgiven**
- **The Church, Christ's Bride is established**
- **The New Heavens & Earth have come**

**That is what John and Jesus are proclaiming when they say that the "Kingdom of God is near"**

**Let us return to the Old Testament to see what role John the Baptist was to play in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom: We will look at the two prophets quoted by the Gospel writers: Isaiah and Malachi**

- **We want to read them in the full context of what the prophets were writing: [Remember, they longed to see fully!]**

**Isaiah: 40:1 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. 2 "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord's hand Double for all her sins."**

**[Jesus is coming to save His people from their sins!]**

**3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth;**

**[quoted by the Gospel writers-- and we will see the importance of this as John preaches repentance!]**

**5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." 6 The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."**

- **Trusting in man or this world is vanity, only vanity! Our trust must be in God and His Word!**

- **Isaiah now shows that salvation is going to come from God through His Son and His Church! [shows the importance of Ezra & Nehemiah]**

**9 O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"**  
**10 Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him.**  
**11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.**

**[The Shepherd & His Sheep: Christ & His Church, His Bride!]**

- **And also with the Prophet Malachi we have the FINAL words of the Old Testament:**

**Malachi 3: " 16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name. 17 "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him." 18 Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.**

**[Again, Jesus will save His people from their sins and the Church is established]**

**Malachi 4: "1 "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this," Says the Lord of hosts.**

**4 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.**

**[Jesus will bring the new exodus: From the old creation to the New Heavens and New Earth!]**

**5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."**

- **Malachi says that John will "turn the hearts": What we saw last week with Mary as she turned to see Jesus and turned again to see Him for who He really was!**

**And this is exactly what we will see in Luke's account this morning?**

**Luke 3:3 And [John] went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins...**

- **Jesus came to save His People from their sins: There is no other way into God's Kingdom than for us to TURN from our sins and know that they are forgiven by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus!**
- **Just as the Prophet Isaiah said: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.'"**

**5 'Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'**

- **Most important point, but also a good lesson for us on the use of symbols and imagery in the Bible: Did John use a BIG bulldozer?**
- **Did he literally push any mountains down into nearby valleys?**

**Should remember this when someone insists that stars must REALLY fall from the sky when that image is used in Revelation!**

- **He is calling God's people to repentance: Telling them to turn away from all the sin and depravity that stands in the way of new life in Christ: Make the path smooth!**
- **And this path can be made smooth ONLY by real repentance!**

**" 7 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,**

- **John is not starting a new “religion” or calling the Jews back to the old temple ceremonies: He is calling on them to turn from their wicked ways... To turn to Christ.**

**8 “and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”**

- **John is confronting circumcised Jews: Members of God’s Covenant people!**
- **They had become proud of the sign and forgotten what it signified!**
- **John gives them a chilling picture of the judgment to come: Remembering that this is forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, which should remind us of what we sing in Psalm 95:**

**“10 For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' ”**

**The new image is that of the axe “resting” on the tree: Getting a bearing before the fatal stokes begin!**

- **Those who were there that day who had been given the gift of faith respond by saying “What shall we do then?” [Similar to Acts 2!]**
- **John’s response can be VERY instructive for us today: Do you want to know what constitutes real repentance? Then listen carefully to what John tells them:**

**11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."**

- **Does this mean that no one can have more than one coat? So easy to fall into the legalism of the Pharisees:**
- **The lesson is simple: NO ONE in our community should be without a coat!**

**12 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."**

- **We will see the religious leaders outraged by Jesus dining with such sinners as tax collectors!**
- **The lesson here is that it is not what profession you are in, but rather how you do your work!**
- **John did not say enter the ministry or find an honest job: He simply said don't cheat people!**

**14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."**

- **Those who say Christians can never take up arms must have a real problem with this part: John does not tell them to put down their arms: He does not even tell them to stop serving evil leaders: Temple or Herod?**
- **He simply tells them to NOT abuse their power and not to bribe people!**

**The Gospel writers do not give us a comprehensive list of all the questions and answers, but they give us the examples needed to understand what it means to "preach a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins!"**

- **What we learn is that we must bear fruit and that fruit must come in the areas where the battle is really raging!**
  - **In our individual lives...**
  - **In our families...**
  - **In our Church of the King**
  - **And even as our nation!**
    - **John was NOT a seeker friendly preacher!**
    - **He spoke plainly about the judgment to come: Even for covenant members!**
    - **He called for real repentance that brings change.**

**If you are stealing... Steal no more!**

**If you are talking back to your parents... Begin to honor them!**

**If you are distracted by worldly cares... Give them up!**

- **This type of Biblical approach to repentance and faithfulness impacts how we counsel those who come to us with “needs”:**

**If a husband comes saying that his wife is unlovable:**

**-- We say, husband, love your wife!**

**If a wife comes saying that her husband is a jerk:**

**-- We say, wife WITHOUT A WORD win them by your conduct!**

**If a single comes saying they simply cannot control sexual temptations:**

**-- We say Saint, abstain and trust God to find YOU a godly spouse!**

**I think you see the point!**

**Can we do this perfectly? Of course not and God knows that we cannot:**

**I John 1:10 “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”**

- **If we are NOT involved in the struggle that Paul describes in Romans 7 then we are NOT taking repentance seriously enough!**
- **In fact, you have likely set a new standard lower than God’s so you can be more at peace!**

**Romans 7:18 “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**



➤ **This is why it is so important that we gather for Covenant Renewal Worship each week!**

**Just as the people came to John out in the wilderness: Away from the cares of their everyday lives, seeking forgiveness of their sins and the salvation of their God!**

**If we are not faithful there: We WILL fail in all the other areas!**

**This is why it is part of our membership covenant: We make a vow to do it right!**

**John came preaching a baptism of repentance: Real repentance, the kind that the Prophet Micah shows when God's people are overwhelmed with their sin:**

**Micah 6:6 "6 With what shall I come before the Lord, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?"**

**-- Real fruit from REAL repentance!**

**Next week Jesus begins His ministry by saying the Kingdom of God is at hand!**

**May we be a people whose mountains of sin and corruption have been brought low, whose valleys of apathy and despair be filled to make straight paths prepared for the Lord of Glory**

**Communion meditation:**

**Luke 22:14** "14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

**19** And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

**20** Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. "