

John Came Preaching

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Date: 03 February 2013

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[0:00] Take your Bibles this morning, would you?

And open them to the Gospel of Luke and find chapter 3. Luke chapter 3. And I'm going to read verses 1 through 20. Luke chapter 3, 1 through 20.

And we shall endeavor to make it through that entire portion of chapter 3. Luke records here in chapter 3, 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 Ituria and the region of Trichonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene.

Now that's not Texas, by the way. While Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the Word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

And he went into all the region around Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, 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?

[1:54] 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.

And even now the axe 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. So the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 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. Then tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, Teacher, what shall we do?

And he said to them, Collect no more than what is appointed for you. 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.

Now as the people were in expectation and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I is coming whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.

[3:09] He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire, his winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

And with many other exhortations he preached to the people, but Herod the tetrarch being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this above all, that he shut John up in prison.

Let's quit right there. In fact, that's where I planned to quit. It was on a roll. I thought I'd just read on. But we'll take that up next time. You might remember, and it's been a number of weeks, but when we last looked at Luke's Gospel, Luke related to us a certain story about young Jesus.

In fact, he was just a preteen, 12 years old. And we studied that passage. And so chapter 2 ends with preteen Jesus returning home with his parents.

And the very last verse tells us that he increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. And that ends chapter 2. And, by the way, that ends what the Bible tells us about Jesus prior to the beginning of his ministry.

[4:39] In fact, there's a large gap there, isn't there, from age 12 to somewhere in the early 30s when Jesus began his ministry. So we have that big gap. And that's where chapter 2 ends for us.

And so then when we come to chapter 3, Luke focuses on two men. Actually, he's been focusing on these same two men from the very beginning of the Gospel.

But here he's going to really get more specific about these two men. And who are these two men? Well, of course, John, who is called the Baptist, and Jesus, who, of course, is the Christ.

So John the Baptist, then Jesus the Christ. And you'll notice here that Luke is very methodical in how he presents these two men to us.

He begins with a word about the men themselves, about each one of them, who they are. And then he gives us something about what each one came to do.

[5:41] Now, he doesn't mix this. He's going to take up John first and then Jesus. And so he takes up John, the man, and his mission. And then he's going to focus on Jesus, the man, and his mission.

All right. So Luke begins with John the Baptist. And that's what we have here in verses 1 through 20. We have the man and we have his mission, the mission of John the Baptist.

Luke begins with John's call to the ministry, and he ends this section with John's imprisonment. And eventually he's going to be executed by Herod.

Luke then takes up the man and mission of Jesus the Christ. And other than a few more references about John, the balance of the Gospel of Luke is about one man, and that being the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is as it should be, of course.

In fact, John himself said in John 3, 28, he said, I am not the Christ. Many were questioning and wondering if John the Baptist was the Messiah. And he said emphatically and dogmatically, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.

[6:56] And then he said this. He said, He must increase and I must decrease. All right. So after we're done with John here in Luke chapter 3, again, other than a few other references to him, the rest of the book is about Jesus, of course.

Now, before we consider the main idea of this passage, which is a very important subject, before we get to that, let me set the stage. And really, it's Luke who's doing this.

What can we discover about the times, the historical setting, kind of the landscape of that part of the world when John and Jesus began their ministries?

What can we say about that? What can we learn about that? Well, Luke begins this chapter, chapter 3, in a similar way that he started chapter 2. He kind of gives a brief word about the political landscape of the day, the situation of the day.

Only here in chapter 3, he not only gives us kind of the political situation, but he also gives us the religious and spiritual situation of the times when John and Jesus began their respective ministries.

[8:14] Now, what does he say about that? Well, in verse 1, Luke kind of lays out this, we might even call a kind of veritable rogues gallery of political and religious leaders.

And he begins by saying this. Now, it's the 14th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Tiberius Caesar. Tiberius is the Caesar.

He's the ruler of the Roman Empire, ruler of really most of the known world of the day. Tiberius. Now, Tiberius was the stepson of Gaius Octavius.

Who was he? Well, we know him by this title, Augustus Caesar. And we read about him, studied a little bit about him back there at the beginning of Luke chapter 2 in connection with the birth of Christ.

All right, so Tiberius Caesar is the ruler. And Luke mentions that, I think, just to establish the fact, kind of a reminder, that God's people are under the dominion of a pagan empire ruled by a godless emperor by the name of Tiberius.

[9:26] And then, next, Luke tells us about Pilate. He says, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea. Now, we know that name too, don't we?

Pilate, of course, was the local authority of the day. There were Jesus, John and Jesus would begin their ministries. Historical records outside the Bible paint a pretty grim story about Pontius Pilate.

We don't have time to really delve into it, but just suffice it to say that Pilate was a very arrogant leader. Very arrogant. And not only arrogant, but as is usually the case with those who are very prideful, very arrogant, he was a weak leader.

And many of his decisions caused troubles in that region of the world, which made Rome a little bit unhappy with him. Eventually, they would remove him from office because he kept causing troubles among the Jewish people.

And you know and remember Pilate's connection with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. So you're kind of getting the picture, the political picture of the day.

[10 : 34] And Luke goes a few steps further. He says, Herod being Tetrarch of Galilee. Remember, Jesus is going to come out of Galilee. And who is this Herod?

This Tetrarch. Tetrarch just means four leaders, four rulers. And Herod was one of them. Well, this is Herod Antipas.

There are a number of Herods in the Bible, a number that ruled in this day. This is Herod Antipas. He's the son of the cruel Herod the Great.

At least that's what he wanted to call himself. And he was called that. Herod the Great, and you might remember him, in connection with the birth of Christ. It was Herod the Great that had the male babies, two years and younger, all murdered in his attempt to snuff out this would-be king of the Jews, remember.

So Herod the Great was a wicked, wicked ruler. And Herod Antipas was his son. And he was a pretty wicked fellow as well. It was Herod Antipas that we read about there in verse 20 that had John the Baptist put in jail, put in prison, and eventually would have him beheaded.

[11 : 43] And he would also, of course, be the Herod who participated in Jesus' mock trial that led eventually to his crucifixion. So you kind of get the idea, the picture here.

There is the Caesar, Tiberius, and Pilate is ruler of the local government, and Herod is ruler of Galilee, Herod Antipas.

And then he also mentions Herod Antipas' brother, Philip. Philip, he says, his brother Philip, Tetrarch of Aeturia and the region of Traconatus.

Now, we don't really know why Philip is mentioned here. Here he is another one of Herod the Great's sons. And he was a ruler at the time.

And Luke is just kind of setting the political landscape of the day. And then he adds also Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene. And we don't really know anything about this guy.

[12 : 38] We certainly don't have any real clues to why Luke mentioned him. But here they are. Here are the political leaders of the day here in this part of the world, the stage upon which John would begin his ministry and eventually Jesus would begin his ministry and so forth.

It was a political landscape, a political kind of landscape of godlessness. Although they worshipped many gods, they were godless in the sense that they did not appreciate or recognize the one true God.

And these rulers were cruel, many of them. Now, what does Luke tell us about the religious and spiritual landscape? And is that important? I think it is. Luke goes on to mention two names.

He says, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. Two high priests, which has caused some liberals and moderates to say that Luke made a mistake here.

You can't have two high priests. There's just one. And indeed, there was just one. Caiaphas was the official high priest of the day. But he was the son-in-law to Annas.

[13 : 57] And Annas was his predecessor as high priest of Israel. But Annas had been deposed by the Roman authorities.

And so Caiaphas was now the high priest. And yet, we understand from history that really Annas was the one who was pulling all the strings of the day. He was the one who was the real power behind the high priesthood.

And so that's why Luke refers to them both, two of them, as high priests. Now, the important thing to note here is that both Annas and Caiaphas, but especially Annas, were corrupt leaders.

Very corrupt. They were far from being religious leaders, spiritual guides of the day. They were politicians, purely. And they used their religious office as high priest to amass great wealth and influence and power.

And this was then the godless political and corrupt spiritual setting that Luke tells us some good news.

[15 : 08] He says, The Word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. So, here is this kind of litany, kind of list of the political and religious leaders of the day, all implying, pointing us to the corruption of the day and the unspirituality and immorality of the day.

And it's in the midst of that, in that day, that the Word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, while he was in the wilderness. Now, you know, the most consistent feature about human history is that it is predictably consistent.

That is, history repeats itself over and over again. And my point is this, our times are not unlike those of John's day.

Political godlessness, spiritual, religious corruption. And so, their need, then, is the same as our need today.

Our need is the same. We need, just like they did in their day, that we need the Word of God to come. And so, we need men like John to preach it and to preach it faithfully and to preach it fearlessly.

[16:41] And that leads, then, to a second thing to consider by kind of way of introduction. Not only does what, what does Luke tell us about the historical setting, but what does Luke tell us about John?

We know him as John the Baptist. What does he tell us about it? Well, Luke actually tells us a great deal about John. Some important things about John. Some of the other Gospel writers also give us bits and pieces of information about John.

John the Baptist. We have already learned, by the way, in chapter 1 about John's unique birth. John's birth was miraculous. Chapter 1 tells us that John's birth was pre-announced by the archangel Gabriel.

Chapter 1 tells us that John was born to aged parents who were way past the child-bearing and child-rearing age, but added to that, he was born to a sterile woman.

A barren woman. So, his unique birth. Chapter 1 also tells us about his unique person. John was unique among men.

[17:50] In chapter 1, we learn that John was a Nazirite. We won't go into all about the Nazirite vow, but we understand this, that evidence by verse 15 of chapter 1 where the Bible says, for he shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.

It's not just a statement about him being a teetotaler. It was that he was to be a Nazirite. This was a part of the vow. And so, the Bible tells us something quite unique. John was a Nazirite from birth. Not only that, but something else quite unique. John was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb. Now, that's quite unique. We understand this about this unique person, John the Baptist. And added to that, verse 15 in chapter 1 tells us that John was great, great in the sight of the Lord. That's quite a statement from the Lord. In fact, it was Jesus who said of John a little bit later in Luke's Gospel, in Luke chapter 7 and verse 28, He said, For I say to you, among those born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.

He was a great man. John lived in the wilderness. In fact, it tells us that in chapter 1, that as soon as he left home, he moved out and lived in the wilderness.

[19:10] And it was there that God found him and God called him to the ministry. And John ate the diet of the wilderness people. So don't get the idea that he was some crazy, mad kind of person eating locusts, eating bugs.

That was the diet of those who lived in that region of the world. He ate locusts and wild honey. This is part of his unique person. And he dressed not as some weirdo.

He dressed in the traditional clothing of the Old Testament prophets. The Bible says he wore camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist.

That was the garb of a prophet. And indeed, John was a prophet. The last of the Old Testament prophets. In fact, John served as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament prophets. He was the bridge between the two. And so we have learned something about his unique birth, his unique person, but also his unique ministry.

[20:12] Luke tells us about his unique ministry. And we can read about that starting in chapter 1 and verse 14. You can read that on your own sometime. But it's the concluding statement that I want us to see here and consider.

It's the key phrase in this entire description of what kind of ministry he would perform. And here's how it goes. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

That was his ministry. His unique ministry. Not just to prepare people to accept and receive Him, but to actually prepare the people for the actual coming of the Messiah.

The one they had been looking for and waiting for. The one that had been prophesied in the Old Testament. And John was not only an Old Testament prophet that bridged the Old Testament to the New Testament, but his role was to prepare the people for the actual, physical coming of the Christ, the Messiah.

That was his ministry. To prepare the people for the Lord. Now, here's where we get to our text. Here's where, having understood this about the setting and understood this about John, here's where we zero in on what this passage is telling us.

[21 : 30] How did John make ready the people prepared for the Lord's coming? That was his ministry.

That was his purpose for coming. And that's why God called him, sent him, gave him a message to preach. He was to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. How did he do that?

What was his approach? Not just his chosen approach, but the approach God gave him to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. How did he do it? Well, John 3, verses 1 through 20 that I read just a moment ago answered that question.

But let's make the question more personal. Here's where the text comes in to our day and applies to us today.

Let's make it personal. Let's make the question that I just asked apply to us today. And here's how we apply it with the question.

[22 : 36] What is the required preparation for the coming of the Lord into your life? That's a big question.

Let me ask it again. What is the required preparation for the coming of the Lord into your life? The answer is repentance.

That's the answer. Repentance. It's a big subject. Huge subject. Very serious subject. Repentance. There's a story about a professional painter who was a little unscrupulous.

In fact, what he would do when he would get a job to paint a house, he would kind of cut corners by adding water to his paint. Make that paint go a little further. He would collect the full price for the job and then he would make some profit on really using half the paint.

And one day he finished painting a house with his watered down paint and it began to rain. I mean heavy. And to his horror, he watched as the paint began to run down off of the house he had just painted.

[23 : 52] And then there was a clap of thunder and there was a voice from heaven that said, Repaint and thin not. Now I tell that story as kind of a comic relief because we're about to get into some pretty hard-hitting truth in God's Word.

And quite likely many of us are going to learn something about repentance that we did not know before because we've been misinformed.

Because many preachers today are not preaching true repentance. And we learn what true repentance is from the ministry of John the Baptist.

And it's pretty strong. That's our subject. Repentance. The preaching of it. The picture of it that we learn from this text.

And the proof of it. The proof of it. The preaching of it. The picture of it. The proof of it. And all of that we learn from John the Baptist.

[25 : 10] All of that we learn right here in these 20 verses. Let's begin with the preaching of true repentance.

And I emphasize true repentance. There is false repentance and there is true repentance. What is the preaching as we learn from this text the preaching of true repentance?

Well verse 2 tells us that the Word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. It came to John. That's how it's worded in my translation.

And the preposition to came to John is the Greek preposition epi. Epi which really basically means upon.

And that's an important distinction though our translation many of our English translations don't bring this out. Because it doesn't sound right doesn't really fit with good English. the Word of God came upon John.

[26 : 12] That's literally the meaning here. Came upon him. I like G. Campbell Morgan's explanation. He said the Word of the Lord came upon him. Pressed down upon him from above.

G. Campbell Morgan said here is the qualification for preaching. The message of God comes upon a man. Comes upon him. Presses down upon him.

Listen how we need more men like John today. Where the Word of God has come has pressed down upon them. I tell you today there are many pastors many of God's preachers who need to repent of weak preaching.

Who are preaching sermonettes that really at best create Christianettes. You know what I mean. If they create anything at all. So verse three tells us that John came preaching.

And the word preaching is also a very significant word. It is the Greek word *keruso*. It's the ancient word that speaks of the herald.

[27 : 20] The one who is sent out by the king to proclaim the message of the king to every part of his kingdom. And he goes out as the *keruso*, the herald, to speak the message of the king.

And it carries with it all the authority and power and significance of the king himself. This is what John was. He was a herald. And he came as a herald.

He came preaching. And what did he preach? He was preaching a baptism of repentance. That's what the Bible says here. A baptism of repentance for the remission or forgiveness of sins.

Now let's understand something about this word baptism. This is not Christian baptism. Don't get this confused. It's not people aren't coming, getting saved, and being baptized in the scriptural way because baptism hadn't been invented yet.

Christian baptism. Christian baptism did not exist until after the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Christian baptism pictures. So this is not Christian baptism.

[28 : 25] This is something else. What is it? Well, this baptism was a symbolic washing after the confession of sin.

After the acknowledgement of sin. And Matthew 3, 6, a parallel passage, I think, gives us the indication of that. Matthew records, and they were being baptized by John in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

Alright, so this baptism, not Christian baptism, this baptism was an open acknowledgement of their sin. That's what this was. It was an admission of sin, an admission of guilt, guiltiness before God.

It was a confession, an open confession of sin. It was repentance. And the baptism, the actual physical baptism, was symbolic of that act of acknowledging their sin.

Repenting of sin. And by the way, that's what repentance is before it is anything else. It is an acknowledgement of sin.

[29 : 33] The word repentance comes from a compound word, *metanoia*, *meta* meaning after, and *nous*, or excuse me, *naus*, meaning mind, after mind.

And its basic meaning is a change of mind. It's a change of outlook on things. And the word carries this force. It describes, defines for us a radical reorientation of the mind and consequently of the life.

That's a good way to define it. Let me repeat that. This word *metanoia*, repentance, denotes a radical reorientation of the mind and consequently, ultimately, of the life.

So from thinking to living or acting. To put it another way, it is the turning from a life oriented towards self to a life, a new way of life oriented toward God.

That is repentance. And repentance, according to this scripture, this passage here, repentance is required for the forgiveness of sins. That's what the text says. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[30 : 59] Now how are we to understand that? Well, we need to take care in how we understand that. Repentance, dear people, now listen very carefully.

Repentance does not bring about forgiveness. forgiveness. You say, are you sure about that? Yes, I am absolutely sure.

Forgiveness does not cause, excuse me, repentance does not cause forgiveness to take place. Now follow me here, it's very important.

Turning away, turning away, turning away, repenting from sin does not secure for you God's forgiveness.

That's simply moralism. That's all that is. That reduces repentance to a form of meritorious work.

[32 : 05] or how we need to learn this about repentance. Repentance, that kind of repentance, if repentance causes forgiveness, if repentance is what brings about forgiveness, then repentance is just an attempt to add something to grace.

forgiveness. And Paul has already told us, has told us that if it's not all grace, it's not grace at all. So that's not what this is.

See, listen, forgiveness is secured by the saving work of Christ. Forgiveness is then applied to the life only by the sovereign grace of God.

Don't ever forget that. And yet, repentance is vital for salvation. You say, how could that be? How can it be both of those things?

It's vital for salvation because repentance is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. How does that work? Well, here's how. Listen very carefully. You cannot have God's forgiveness so long as you do not believe that you are a sinner and that you need His forgiveness.

[33:27] And that describes countless millions of people today. Maybe some right here in this room. You cannot have God's forgiveness as long as you do not fully believe that you are a sinner and that you need His forgiveness.

And repentance is, first and foremost, before it is anything else, it is the full acknowledgement of your sin and your need for God's forgiveness.

Now, folks, listen, John is going to tell us, John the Baptist is going to tell us a little bit later in John 1:29, he's going to say that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and that means that Jesus will, in John's day, and for us has, shed His blood to provide the only way for the forgiveness of sin.

And Jesus has then secured the only, absolute only, just and righteous basis upon which God can forgive us. It's all what Jesus has done.

This is what John's going to tell us and what we should know today. And I tell you that countless millions have rejected that and are still rejecting today that glorious gospel, that good news because they do not believe that they need a Savior because they do not believe they are sinners.

[34:57] You say, now, pastor, listen, everybody knows they have sinned. No, they don't. No, they don't believe that. Now, maybe if they're thinking honest people, they may admit that they've committed some sins, but that's not the same thing as acknowledging that you are a sinner and that you have sinned against a holy God, the judge of all mankind.

That's not the same as saying that you have sinned and that you have eternally offended God and that you're in big trouble with God. That's not the same.

Just to say that you have sinned and maybe you've done some wrong things is not the same as acknowledging that what you are is a condemned sinner and that you've sinned against God and you are in big trouble with him.

That's not the same. Repentance is acknowledging your sinfulness and recognizing your need for God's forgiveness. It's a reorientation of the mind from self to God.

From self evaluation to God's evaluation is a complete reorientation a complete way of thinking where you acknowledge openly the very depth of your sinfulness before God.

[36:22] That's what repentance is. And that must happen before you will be in any position to receive God's forgiveness and to trust the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation.

I tell you you just don't hear this today. In most of the preaching that is taking place in America and in our world today.

Now to reinforce the significance of this we need to go a little further in the text and see not only the preaching of true repentance this is what John preached but see a picture of it a picture of true repentance this will reinforce for us our understanding of this of the concept of repentance what it really is what it really consists of the picture of repentance it's very interesting Luke's inclusion of Isaiah's prophecy there in chapter 4 this is a prophecy from Isaiah Isaiah 40 as a matter of fact and Luke's inclusion of this prophecy at this point accomplishes two things for us first of all it identifies John as the forerunner of Christ it validates it legitimizes the claim that John is indeed the one who has come in the spirit of

Elijah to prepare the way prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah John is the fulfillment of this prophecy that's why Luke included that here his readers would have understood well first John preaching the people who heard him preach would have understood the connection between these two things he's coming has come in the spirit of Elijah he is the fulfillment of that prophecy so that's the first thing first reason why Luke includes that there's a second reason the second thing this accomplishes for us is this it provides for us a very vivid image of what true repentance consists of we get that from this prophecy it is a very vivid I would even say a an outlandish picture and I'll explain here in a minute of what true repentance consists look at verse four let's just walk through this this prophecy taken again from

Isaiah chapter 40 verses 3 through 5 and here is the prophecy the voice of one crying in the wilderness that's John John the Baptist he's the fulfillment of that and what is he crying that's what we have next prepare the way of the Lord make his paths straight do you see that this is prophecy here is where we begin to understand the kind of the substance of John's preaching prepare the way of the Lord make his paths straight but the image here is really quite amazing very vivid when

you read this you are to imagine in your minds a powerful the powerful king of the land coming to your city that's what your picture king and all of his regal majesty the supreme sovereign monarch of your land is coming and indeed he was in

[40 : 10] John's day and it was Jesus coming but this is what we're to picture just just just get the picture in your mind here the king is coming and you are to prepare to make ready for his arrival and you would if you knew he was coming you would you would want to make ready for his coming and just to make sure that you would be prepared the king sends out his royal messenger his herald he sends him out well in advance of his arrival to make sure that the way is open for him can you kind of picture this and the king will suffer no obstacle in his way his path must be smooth and it must be straight the king is coming make his path straight that that's the idea here but then as you read further you notice the descriptions in this prophecy of what is required to prepare the way for the king the descriptions are a bit outlandish did you catch that when

I read it a moment ago did you entertain that thought well this is extreme even into the realm of absurdity did you catch that every valley look at it every valley shall be filled can you imagine that and what about this one every mountain and hill brought low leveled the crooked places shall be made straight imagine what the citizens of no water would do with highway 60 all the crooked places made straight no turns no curves in any road and the rough ways smooth that's an incredible description can you imagine doing that doing all of that in preparation for visiting monarch!

I mean filling in all the valleys leveling off all the mountains and hills straight out all of the curves in the roads smoothing out all of the potholes and bumps and such in the road the surface of the roads so forth can you imagine doing that now this is absurd language and it's meant to be it's what's called hyperbole it it's an exaggeration and for what purpose to highlight the infinite greatness of the king that's what it's meant to do we get all hung up on the literalness of doing all these things and we fail to realize the whole point is to highlight the greatness of the king who's coming and further than that it is to intended to highlight the seriousness with which we should desire him and prepare for him this is a picture of repentance what it consists!

true repentance remember this is a description of the substance of John's preaching John's the fulfillment and so therefore everything that's said here in the prophecy gives us a clue into his goal and desire in preaching the desired outcome and it's repentance we already know that about John's preaching consisted of repentance and so this is a word picture this prophecy is a word picture of what repentance consists of what it really is and so according to the picture what is it you and I are to acknowledge in our repentance well three things first true repentance acknowledges the depth of your sinfulness it acknowledges the depth the very depth of your sinfulness the prophecy takes us first takes us to the depths the valleys every valley shall be filled it is to acknowledge the deep utter sinfulness of our hearts in repentance we're not just simply sorry for some of the things we've done not just simply a feeling of guilt kind of guiltiness for doing some bad things and wrong things that we're sorry for repentance is to acknowledge the utter depth of our sinfulness a depth that we don't even really know totally

Jeremiah reminds us the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can understand it second thing the height of our pridefulness this prophecy takes us to the heights and every mountain and hill shall be brought low that is made level and so the idea is to acknowledge the pride of our minds and our hearts that keep us enthroned rather than God is to acknowledge that it is a pride by the way that really lays the foundation for every other kind of sin as Paul admonishes us in 2nd Corinthians 10 and verse 5 casting down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God above the knowledge of God pride so the depths of our sinfulness that's what true repentance acknowledges and the height of our pride fullness and self centeredness that's what true repentance acknowledges and third true repentance acknowledges the breadth of our perverseness we're perverted you say that's not a very nice thing to say we are though we're perverted the prophecy takes us to kind of takes us to the very landscape of our sinful natures the breadth of its perverseness its perverted and crooked ways that's what we're to acknowledge the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth it is dear people to acknowledge that we are deceitful by nature corrupt by nature it is to acknowledge that compared to

[47 : 48] God and his perfection we have lying tongues and covetous hands and crooked ways and perverted desires and that we have deceitful minds and on and on we could go that there is no good thing in us there is nothing holy in us psalm 42 and verse 2 it's quoted in Romans 3 see the

Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men as he looks down upon us to see if there are any who understand who seek God and this is what he found they have all turned aside they have together become corrupt there is none who does good no not one see here's the point you cannot be forgiven of sin if you do not believe that you are a sinner in desperate need of

God's forgiveness that is repentance repentance acknowledges that repentance acknowledges the depth the height the breadth of our sinfulness and when we do then and only then are we in a position to receive God's forgiveness and to trust in the one who accomplished all that forgiveness made that forgiveness possible the Lord Jesus Christ as the prophecy concludes and all flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord the preaching of true repentance the picture of true repentance and one more the proof the proof of true true repentance look quickly at verse seven then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him brood of vipers and by the way if you want to be a popular preacher that's not the best approach a little bit later they're going to say he's going to say you thought you're

Abraham's children but you're really not you're children of the devil actually you brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the wrath to come I don't have time to just really dig into this but here's the point primarily that John is making he's saying that your mere verbal confession of sin you've come out here and you've confessed your sin your mere confession of sin and this outward ritual of baptism it's meaningless to God absolutely meaningless if that's all there is to your repentance that's all there is to it ironic by the way that most of the Jews who were baptized that day by John or in that period of time that most of them who were baptized with his baptism of repentance they were the same ones who rejected and crucified the Lord Jesus Christ their repentance was false as is the case with many today a false repentance what is the proof of true repentance well that's what we learn from the next several verses look at verse 8 now there were in the same excuse me that's chapter therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance what does that mean there must be some fruit of repentance if it's true the proof of repentance true repentance is good work bear fruits worthy of repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves we have

Abraham as our father that is we're secure because we're members of the church he'd already called them children of vipers he said for I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these very stones and even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees judgment is even now on its way therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire!

that is those who are living under a false assurance of their salvation based upon some act of sorrow over sin in the past are going to be cut down because there was no true repentance and so they asked a question they said what shall we do then what's the proof of repentance and then John gives it to them he who has two tunics let him give to him who has none he who has food let him do likewise tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him teacher what shall we do we've come to acknowledge our sin we repent what's the proof of it what shall we do as a result of it and he says to the tax collectors gives them instructions on how they should live collect no more than what is appointed for you 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 what's the point of this that true repentance is not simply some spiritual moralistic act done sometime in the past to clear our conscience and make us feel better about things and with the thinking that somehow now we have bought our way to salvation you can be sorry for your sin and repent only in that sense over and over again but until there is fruit of repentance there is no true repentance and this is ongoing the reformation began when

[55 : 07] Martin Luther nailed his 95 thesis to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg you might be familiar with that you may not know all 95 of the theses but here is the first one and really this first one set in motion the 16th century reformation Luther said our Lord and Master Jesus Christ when he said repent willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance the whole life have you truly repented as I have had the opportunity to minister in Ukraine I learned something from the Ukrainians that very instructive for us they didn't call

Christians believers or even use the term Christian they used the word repentance those who truly repented of sin and whose lives gave evidence of true repentance is that you