

Luke 3:1-18



Theme Sentence

John prepares for Jesus by preaching that judgment is coming ... so repent!

Context

The OT ends with the promise that God will send 'Elijah the prophet' before the day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5-6). Luke begins his gospel by telling us that 450 years of waiting is over, because John the Baptist is that 'prophet ... (to) go before the Lord to prepare his ways' (1:76) 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' (1:17). In 3:4-6, Luke is explicit that John's ministry prepares the way in fulfilment of the OT (ie Isaiah 40:3-4). If this is so, then the Jesus who 'is mightier than I' (3:16) is to be understood as fulfilling Isaiah 40:9-11 'Behold your God!'.

Luke 16:16 (and cf Matt 11:11-14) gives further insight into where John fits onto the Bible's timetable. Theologically, his ministry marks the end of the OT era, and with Jesus a new time begins (cf 'Today ...' in 4:21).

Verse-by-verse

- 1 See **Saviour, Judge and King** p18-20 (*More about ... Luke the historian*).
- 2 The story picks up from 1:80 where we last saw John 'in the wilderness'.
- 3 Being baptised by John was all about repenting of sin (cf 7-14 for examples of what that repentance looks like), looking forward to the coming of God's salvation (when sin will be forgiven). His washing baptism is a picture of the yet-to-come true baptism that Jesus will bring (15-17).
- 6 This quotation is largely from Isaiah 40:3-5, except for the last phrase (from Isaiah 52:10) ... the 'glory of the Lord' is the 'salvation of God': the world sees how glorious God is when he saves (cf Exod 7:5; 14:1-15:18).
- 7-14 (cf 1:17, 76-77) God's wrath is coming; his axe will cut down all who are unfruitful and being descended from Abraham will not save you. What should we do? Repent (an inner attitude?) - and the 'fruit' of that will show in practical ways. Respond to God by treating others unselfishly.
- 16 Baptism with the Holy Spirit is what Jesus does for every Christian at their conversion (cf 1 Cor 12:13); the 'fire' is defined in 17 in terms of the judgement he will bring. In other words, Jesus will do what no man (not even John) can do: impart genuine spiritual life to the believing /repentant, and execute the wrath of God on the unbelieving/unrepentant.

Application

- The first of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses says that *the whole life of believers should be repentance*. Repentance is not a one-time act, but continues on and defines the life of the believer (cf Revelation 2:4-5; 3:19-20) ... for the Christian life is not a process of becoming stronger and needing Christ less; it is becoming weaker and needing Christ more. This is logic behind John's preparation for Jesus: he prepares us for Jesus by showing us how much we need Jesus (because of the wrath to come).

Group Study Outline

Luke 3:1-18

Theme Sentence

John prepares for Jesus by preaching that judgment is coming ... so repent!

Launching Question

What is repentance? is it something we do once (when we become Christians), or again and again (- in which case how can it be a complete 'about turn')?

READ Luke 3:1-18

Questions

How does John prepare the way for the Lord (and the salvation he will bring)? Why is a call to repent a good preparation for Jesus?

What are the most important points John is making in 3:7-14?

What danger is John warning the Jews about in 3:7-14?

What reasons does John give in 3:8- 9 as to why these people need to be warned (despite the fact that they are Jews and so, historically, God's people)?

What does repentance look like? what are the common features in 10-14? Is 'repentance' different from 'fruits in keeping with repentance' (8)?

What is John's view of Jesus?

How exactly is he 'mightier' than John?

What will Jesus do (that John is saying no man, not even he, can do)?

What is baptism with the Holy Spirit (from this context)?

Thinking it through

What is your reaction to the pictures of judgement in this passage (9, 17)?

Is judgement something typical or rare in the preaching of 'good news' (18)?

Should it be rare or typical, do you think? why?

What is repentance (cf the phrase 'bear fruits in keeping with repentance' 8)?

Explain how repentance is an essential way of first coming to Jesus.

So, is repentance something that Christians subsequently grow out of?

What might be contemporary answers to the question 'what shall we do?' (10, 12, 14)? what will repentance look like today?

Application

How should the fact that God's judgement is coming affect our life?

How is repentance a part of your normal Christian life?

Why does so much of our acknowledgement of sin of sin stop at 'confession' and give a lower profile to 'repentance'? (if you agree that it does!)

How will repenting more help me to value Jesus more?

How can repentance be something that we healthily encourage in one another?