

Without Repentance There Is No Salvation

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[0:00] In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea and Errod being tetrac of Galilee and his brother Philip tetrac of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis and Licinius tetrac of Abilene.

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight. And that rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ. Please be seated. We're in the second Sunday of Advent.

[1:46] Before we know it, Christmas will be upon us. But in this time of waiting and longing and hopeful expectations, we look to Christ.

We hope and trust in him. And we are reminded of his great mercy in coming. And we're reminded that he will come again.

All of those things should be uplifting to our hearts in this time. And our text this morning in Luke 3 reminds me of one of the major themes of it.

Actually, this week and next week will be the theme of repentance. And that reminds me of the 15th century when an Augustinian monk was struggling with his words and these things and the teaching of the church and the Bible.

And he wrote what we now know as the 95 Thesis, Martin Luther. And he nailed it, allegedly, to the wall of the Wittenberg Church.

[2:58] We don't know if he actually did that or not. But I like to believe that he did. Well, this is how he begins. These are the first. I'm going to read to you the first three Thesis of these 95 Thesis.

2. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, Repent, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, repentance. 3. Repentance cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.

Thesis 3. Yet it does mean solely inner repentance. Such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward modification of the flesh.

This is a great sort of summary of what repentance is and how repentance happens. But for our purposes this morning, I want us to dwell especially in the first one.

[4:16] Our whole life as believers in Jesus Christ, as Christians, should be marked by confession and repentance. Constantly buying down to the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ over our lives.

This should be our whole life. And Luke begins his third chapter of his gospel, sort of starting off again, it seems like.

Because Luke chapter 1 and chapter 2 talked a little bit about the announcement of the births. Of the two main characters, at least in the beginning of his gospel.

The announcement of the birth of Jesus and the announcement of his cousin, John the Baptist. And now, this special boy that was filled by the Holy Spirit right from the womb, that is John the Baptist, is now entering into his ministry.

And Luke tells us about John's public career. And he places him, as he tells us about it, he places him in a socio-political climate in which he's doing his ministry.

[5:34] And then he also gives us, in the latter part of these verses, verse 4 to 6, the salvation history.

How John and how his ministry is integral in God's plan of saving history to Israel and to the world at large. But first, let's look at the socio-political climate in which John's ministry is.

It says, in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberias. Right? Look at all the peoples that are listed here in these first verses. And the places that are listed.

It serves two purposes. While we know Tiberias, Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, one of the Tetracks, his brother, Philip, Lysanias, a third Tetrack, and then the priesthood in the temple. These are the authorities in the world that John lives in. And in the world that Jesus is about to begin his ministry. These are the people in power. And he gives us the region where they serve.

[6:40] It serves two purposes. It tells us that what Luke is telling us now. Luke is an historian. Right? And he's a faithful historian. He's telling us that these accounts that I'm telling you here are historical accounts.

Verifiable. Right? Can be verified. Right? If I were to be writing a book about the American Revolution and I start talking about, you know, Abraham Lincoln and the American Revolution. Everyone will already know this guy doesn't know what he's talking about. Right? And that's me writing, you know, 200 plus years after the fact. But imagine I was there and I was a legend that I was there.

I'm writing to people who were there. Right? They will laugh me out of the room. Right? Luke is doing something here that if he was making these stories up, if he were making it up, it would have been verifiable, falsified.

That, man, this guy doesn't know what he's talking about. He names people and he names places to verify the veracity of what he says. But it's not just to do that.

[7:50] It's not the only point for which he gives us this Marcus. This also paints a picture of the climate in which John is ministering.

These men that he names are known for, they're not known for being, you know, godly, righteous, paragon of virtue, leaders.

Right? These are evil leaders. These were wicked men. Tiberius Caesar succeeded Caesar Augustus as the emperor of Rome.

And, you know, he was, well, maybe we can say he started off fairly well. But he finished his reign under a cloud of suspicion, paranoia, and was killing people left and right.

What do we know about Herod? Tetrarch of Galilee. Herod Antipas. His father was Herod the Great. Wicked man. Right? He was the one who looked for Jesus.

[8:57] He couldn't find Jesus. And killed a whole town of infant children. Right? Herod is not far. The tree didn't, what's the proverbial first?

The apple didn't fall far from the tree regarding Herod. He was the one, as we will later see next week, that actually arrested John the Baptist.

Because John the Baptist told him, this is the righteous way to go. Boldly proclaim God's law and God's ways and God's statutes. And he didn't want to hear it.

Right? Philip of Tetrarch of, and Herod was especially the one in charge of the area where John is ministering. Right?

He's in charge of Galilee and Judea. That was his, so Herod the Great was the father. And he was in charge of this area. After Herod the Great died, his kingdom or his provinces were divided into four.

[9:58] Given to each one of his sons. So Herod was in charge of the region of Galilee and Judea. His brother Philip was Tetrarch of the region of Eteria and Trachonitis.

Further north of the Jordan River, north of Galilee. And Licinius, Tetrarch of Abilene. We don't know much about him. But we also know that not only were these leaders, secular leaders, men that were opposed, cross purposes, at cross purposes with the work and plan of God.

We also know that even the religious leaders that were named, Hannes and Caiaphas, were people who were at cross purposes. And it's important to name these people, even in the beginning of John's ministry and Jesus' ministry.

Because they were, a lot of them, right? Pontius Pilate, we forgot about Pontius Pilate. Who was well known to us as the one who tried Jesus and falsely condemned our Lord. Right? Pontius Pilate was also known historically as a corrupt leader. Another summary execution of prisoners without proper trial.

[11:11] Well, Jesus was an example of that, right? And this is, these are the men. These are the secular leaders in the time of John's ministry.

Then the religious leaders, Hannes and Caiaphas. Hannes was the priest. And Caiaphas was, historically, Caiaphas was one of his sons.

So, the priest, Hannes, the reason why, there's only one high priest in the temple. But in this period of time, Hannes was a political, he was really the power base, right?

Caiaphas and four of his other sons and his son-in-law were listed in historical records as high priests succeeding Hannes. But you can imagine that Hannes, being the father in the background, was the power base.

This is why Luke, and everyone would have understood that. So, when Luke says the high priesthood, singular, but referring to Hannes and Caiaphas, is denoting, Anna is the power base, Caiaphas is the one, you know, is the particular puppet in charge under the power of Hannes.

[12:22] But these are the rulers. This is the corrupt nature. This is the atmosphere in which John comes into his ministry. And who is this John the Baptist?

What is Luke describing? He says to us, in the end of verse 2, The word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

The word of God came to John. The word of the Lord coming to John. This phrase, this very phrase, is a marker. That the person being spoken of is a true prophet of God.

In the Old Testament, this is the same, it's kind of like a formulaic phrase to describe the prophet of God. Right? The word of the Lord came to Jonah. Right? And we're studying Jonah now in our Wednesday night Bible study.

And that's the beginning of the book of Jonah. The word of the Lord came to Jonah. And then God tells him what to do. Right? The word of the Lord came to Isaiah. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. These are formulaic phrases to tell us about the nature and the ministry of the person we talk about.

[13:33] John the Baptist here is in line with the Old Testament prophets. In fact, as Jesus himself will proclaim, he is the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

Remember what Jesus says in Luke 7, 20 or Matthew 11, 11. He says, I tell you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than him.

This is who John is. He's the prophet of God. He is ushering in, preparing the way, ushering in the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

But he is the last prophet. And he is the voice crying in the wilderness. What is he crying?

What is his proclamation? It is a proclamation of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is in keeping with God's already proclamation about this man and his ministry.

[14:42] Remember in Luke 1, this is what angel Gabriel says about this John and his ministry. When he tells the news to his father Zechariah.

He will turn, referring to John, he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah.

To turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous. To make ready for the Lord a prepared people.

This is what John's ministry ought to be. Zechariah himself after he came, you know, finally came to, he came to agree to the plan.

Says this about his son. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the most high God. For you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways. This is what John's ministry is about.

[15:44] He is going before the Lord to prepare the Lord's ways. So, John is portrayed here by Luke intentionally as a prophet that is concerned with the renewal and transformation of the people of Israel.

We can even say social renewal and transformation. This proves, apart from the names and the places that proves the veracity of Luke's account, it also proves, in a lot of ways, the fact that John is part of ushering in God's salvation to Israel and to us.

How do we know that? Because he comes proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John's ministry and his baptism is intimately tied up with repentance and must give rise to behaviors that demonstrate repentance.

We're only covering the first six verses here. And next Sunday, Bishop Dobbs will be telling us more about the nature of this repentance, what it means and what it entails.

But look here, that repentance, the baptism is not the repentance, right? The baptism is tied into what is already acknowledgement as the people come.

[17:14] It's a sign of the fact that the people are acknowledging that we are sinners, right? John's baptism was a repentance baptism. His proclamation, the two cannot be separated.

The fact that he proclaims the repentance of sins and people are coming to be baptized as that repentance. Those who undergo John's baptism are confessing, essentially, that they are sinners in need of a cleansing.

That's a really radical thing for a Jewish person to undergo, to undergo the water of baptism. Because they're saying, they're acknowledging that their heritage, the fact that they're children of Abraham, that they're Israelites, that does not absorb them of the guilt, their guilt before God. And that's John's, that has been, that is John's proclamation. You are sinners before a righteous God. Turn away from your sin. Repent and turn to God.

[18:24] And that's what repentance is, isn't it? Repentance is a turning away. Repentance is a 180 degree turn. So, let's say you're going towards Binghamton, and you go off on Route 81, and you start going north on 81.

And you're driving, and you're going north on 81. And you recognize, this is the wrong way. Now, you can recognize that's the wrong way. But you haven't repented yet until you turn around, and you start to go the right way.

That's, that's a great, that's, the word itself actually means that, turning around and going the right way. And this is what Paul is, John is calling them to do.

And, and it's, it's a call to recognize that even though you're Israelites, children of Abraham, you are going the wrong way. You're going away from your Lord.

And they're going to confess their guilt, and then undergo the repentance baptism. And this is different. This is different. John's baptism is different from the baptism that we have, Christ's baptism.

[19:39] Remember what John himself says about, about, about Jesus and his ministry. We read it in, in our Old Testament reading in Malachi this morning.

Malachi 3, verse 2. But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will be able to stand when he appears? Who is the he there?

It's our Lord, Jesus Christ. For he will be like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's bleach. He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver.

He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. And they will present offense to the Lord in righteousness. But who can endure the day of his coming?

This person who's coming, we need to prepare ourselves and our hearts and our minds and our ways for his appearance.

[20:43] Because he is the Lord himself, the righteous judge. This is, and Jesus' baptism is a baptism that is, that it's not just a, when we come to Christ, we're not, we are acknowledging that we're sinners.

We're acknowledging that we are, we need God, we need all of those things. But we are going down into the waters of judgment with Christ.

The beauty of the Christian baptism is that as we go down in the waters of judgment, we are following our Lord himself. Because what he did not say in the waters of judgment, we are also being raised up in resurrection life with him.

This is the significance of, and the distinction between Jesus' baptism and John's baptism. Jesus' baptism is a signif, signifies that Christ himself has atoned for that guilt and that sin.

And that as we are baptized into him, we are baptized not only as people that are acknowledging that we're sinners and repentant, but we're also acknowledging that we've been forgiven and we've been made new.

[21:57] Right? So that's, I just want us to notice a distinction there, because even later on in the New Testament, you will see that people who have been baptized under John's baptism, like for

example in Acts and in Ephesians, they started following Jesus, they started following Christ, and then the apostles, for example, Paul met some people who have been baptized under John's baptism.

And he tells them, you actually need to be baptized, again, because the baptism is quite different. There are two distinct baptism, right? But let's go back to John.

John's message is a message of repentance, and it's a turning away. Secondly, John's emphasis on the repentance is that people will understand that their status quo, that they are in need of someone to save them.

His message is a prophetic plea. A prophetic plea for people to turn their backs from the world and turn to God.

Because the God who is judged is coming. That is his cry. And furthermore, John's message and proclamation is to tell the people that there is the forgiveness of sins that can be had from this God who is coming.

[23:30] Right? It's not just condemning them. It's to tell them, this God, this Lord who has appeared, will cleanse you from your sin. He is coming, actually, to do the work of cleansing you from your sin.

To redeem you. To do that which you cannot do, and you've not been able to do. To restore you. To restore you. To restore you. To restore you.

As a community of God's people. To restore you to himself. I think of Paul's, the passage that Luke actually refers to here in Isaiah.

In describing John the Baptist. He is the voice crying in the wilderness. But what is his message? What is his message? Luke is quoting Luke 40.

Luke, I'm sorry. Luke is quoting Isaiah chapter 40. And Isaiah chapter 40 is, starting in verse 3, is the quote we have here. But even the first two verses, it's part of the proclamation.

[24:35] I imagine that this is a paraphrase of John's whole proclamation. Isaiah 40, if you go read Isaiah 40, it's actually a good depiction of what John's message would have been to Israel.

It is a message of a coming Lord who is like a refiner's fire, who will judge. It is a message of a moment of crisis that the people have to make a decision.

But it's also good news that he's offering to these people. It's good news that God himself is coming to redeem you and to save you. It's a message of comfort, as Isaiah says it, even in the beginning of Isaiah 40.

Comfort, comfort my people, says our God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and announce to her that her time of our service is over. Her iniquity has been pardoned.

And she is received from the Lord's hand, double for all her sins. It is a voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord.

[25:40] Make its path straight. Every valley shall be filled. Every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked will become straight. The rough ways will be smoothened out.

And everyone will see the salvation of the Lord. Well, this person that's coming is the Lord himself. So we need to prepare for him. It's not unlike when a great, you know, important person comes to a place.

It's really saying, John is saying, roll out the red carpet. Because he's coming. Now, it's not, it's a red carpet of your heart. Prepare yourself. Prepare your heart.

Prepare your mind. Prepare your world for his coming. When, if, if the, well, next, next Sunday, the bishop will be here.

We will proverbially roll out, not an actual red carpet, but we will proverbially roll out a red carpet.

Right? We, we, we welcome him. We'll have, we'll have things after church to welcome him because he's an important person.

[26:49] Imagine if the, you know, Queen of England were going somewhere. You know, and the road is, is, is messy. Or, or, or patch. They patch the road.

They fix the road. They make it smooth. So that, so that he can, and this is, this is a reality for the people that Luke is writing to. Right? They would have known.

Right? If the, if any of these other people that he referred to, Tiberius Caesar, Herod, were going anywhere. Pontius Pilate. This will be what would happen. Right?

Someone would have gone ahead to prepare the way for their, for their, for their travel. Well, here is someone greater than all of these men. Here is someone who is the Lord himself.

And John is proclaiming to us, to Israel, prepare the way for the Lord. Notice that in the Isaiah passage, this person who is coming is God himself.

[27 : 52] Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness. Make a straight way for our God in the desert. That's what Isaiah says. Right? Luke, quoting that, says, prepare the way for the Lord.

Make his path straight. He just is, he, he, he's talking about Jesus Christ. He sees it there. Make a straight way for our God in the desert.

And he, he knows that that God is Jesus Christ himself. He's the Lord. Make his path straight. Every valley will be filled.

Every mountain and hill will be made low. The crooked will become straight. The rocks way smooth. And when this is done, in preparation for his coming, everyone will see the salvation of God.

John's proclamation, I want to reiterate to us, is the proclamation for the necessity of repentance in order to, in order to have forgiveness of sins.

[28 : 51] Repentance does not atone, as we know, for sin. Repentance is just an acknowledgement that we are sinners in need of a savior, a mediator.

Jesus Christ, his blood alone does that. It atones for our sins. Repentance does not justify us before God.

Only Jesus Christ does that. But without turning to him. But without turning to him. Without making the path straight.

Preparing for him. Without looking to him for deliverance. In repentance, there is no salvation.

The call for us then, the charge to us then is, do you repent of your sins? Are you sorrowful and committed to turn it from them?

[29 : 51] Or are you preoccupied with societal sins and injustices? You know, in our world, we don't use the word sin anymore. We have so many different words.

Rather than say sin. Say something is a sin. Even in the church, I think. We oftentimes, we suffer. Mistake. Transgression. Well, transgression means sins.

But we would rather use all those other words than rather say sin. When sin is an affront against God. Sin separates us from a holy God. Sin separates us from the source of life and goodness.

And we ought to acknowledge that we are all, without Christ, separated from God. But are we preoccupied, even as the people of God?

Remember what we read in the beginning. What Martin Luther says about what it means to be a Christian. When our Lord and Master says, repent.

[30 : 51] He willed that the entire life of believers. Jesus, people who believed in Jesus Christ. Our entire life will be one of repentance.

Are we people who are continually sorrowful over our sins. Coming to God in confession. And turning away from those sins. And turning to Christ.

It's not just to turn away from the sin, is it? It's to turn to the one who can absolve you. Who can forgive you. Who can deliver you from that sin.

Jesus Christ himself. And it's also for us as the people of God. Not to be preoccupied with society. Our world is preoccupied with society of sins. And injustices. Right? There is clamor for justice.

Social justice.

[31 : 47] There's clamor for environmental justice. There's clamor for all of these things. Now, as people of God, we don't want to minimize those things. We want to be people who proclaim and live out and propagate the biblical justice of God.

Even in those of you. We want to live out faithfully as God's people. Imitating God our Father. But, I think that oftentimes as the church, we are preoccupied with advocating and searching and seeking societal justice.

Environmental justice. National justice. Whatever else you want to call it. We're concerned about litigating the sins of the world.

Of the culture out there. Rather than... And we're concerned about litigating who is sinning against one another in the world around us. Rather than recognizing that we live and we stand before a holy and righteous God.

Who condemns sin. And that we, ourselves, are sinners in need of saving. And that the world itself needs that same saving and salvation.

[33 : 08] Is that proclamation that of John the Baptist? Are we calling people to repent? And if we are, what are we calling them to repent from? Not only are we ourselves repenting and turning to

Christ.

But are we calling the world around us, as the people of God, to repent? Are we telling them to repent from the same thing the world is calling everyone to repent from?

Are we calling them to repent from their sin and turn to the one alone who can save them? Are we telling them there is a judge? We will judge. And we're telling them that that same judge we will judge has come to offer a lifeline.

By giving himself as an atoning sacrifice. That all will turn to him and lay hold and cling to him. We'll be saved.

We'll go through the waters of judgment. And we'll come up in the new life that he gives us. Is that our proclamation, people of God?

[34:15] We must know our sins. We must mourn over our sins as the people of God. Our whole life should be marked by that cycle of knowing, mourning, forsaking and hating our sins.

That's repentance. We're not only to just confess the sins. We are to repent of them. This is why confession is of no benefit without repentance.

It is not a merit-based thing. Our Roman Catholic friends think that confession is a sacrament by which when you do the confession, you're being absolved.

But confession is an inner repentance. It requires a heart motive and change. It's not just the very act of confessing, which is necessary.

John says we should confess our sins to one another. But it's the turning away from it. It is then relying on the Holy Spirit to empower us to do the work of turning away.

[35:19] Because we're knowing in ourselves, we're unable. And we have an inability to turn away by nature. We need God to help us. As we proclaim this, we ought to know that this should mark.

This is what J.C. Ryle says about repentance. Saved souls are always penitent souls. It means that if you're believing in Jesus Christ, you've been saved, you're saved soul, then the mark of that salvation is the fact that you are always penitent before a holy God.

But recognizing your need for God's mercy and grace to cover you. Knowing that you do not stand on your own righteousness.

You stand at the mercy and grace of God. We must never forget this. Saving faith in Christ and true repentance towards God can never be separated.

Let us be a people of repentance, brothers and sisters. Let us walk in it. Let us turn to Christ. Even in this season of Advent, as we look and long for the coming of our Lord.

[36:37] Remember, we stand now looking and longing for a second coming. But are we preparing ourselves? Are we hearing the message of John the Baptist?

Preparing our hearts and minds for the Lord. Turning to him. And are we pronouncing and proclaiming that same message to the world around us? May God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit empower us to do that.