

# True Repentance

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Date: 21 January 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] Church will be officially starting a week of corporate consecration.! And so I'm trusting the Lord to use this morning's message to prepare our hearts to consecrate ourselves before Him for His purposes for us individually and also as a church in 2018.

! In a four-part sermon series on the Christian life, the first one was on true religion. The second one last week was on true forgiveness.

And now this third sermon is on true repentance. Please follow along as I read Luke chapter 3, beginning in verse 1, ending at verse 14.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iteria and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene.

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

[ 1 : 34 ] And he went into all the region around the 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 paths straight. Every valley shall be filled. And every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight. And the rough places shall become level ways. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

He said, therefore, to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come.

Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

[ 2 : 57 ] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not be a good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

And the crowds asked him, What then shall we do? And he answered them, Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none.

And whoever has food is to do likewise. 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 you are authorized to do. Soldiers also asked him, And we, what shall we do?

And he said to them, Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation. And be content with your wages.

[ 4 : 01 ] Let's pray together. Father, we thank you this morning for your word. Your word that you have breathed out.

Your word that you have preserved over the ages. And we pause in this moment, Lord, because we need your help to grant us illumination, to grant us understanding of your word.

And in addition to understanding, grant us hearts to be able to obey your word. Father, we trust that in your providence, you will use this message this morning to prepare our hearts, to set our faces, to consecrate ourselves before you this week.

Lord, help us to truly seek you. Would you keep us from ritual and rote? And God, would you meet us in fresh ways during the course of this week?

And we ask that you'd use this message as a foundation to do that. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 5 : 22 ] One of the powerful abilities of the human mind is the ability to process thoughts based on words that we hear. Sometimes even a single word.

For example, what comes to your mind when you hear the word danger? Perhaps for some of us, we immediately think of electricity, an exposed line, or maybe some flammable liquid that could explode if it came near fire.

Or perhaps you thought about a construction site where people have to wear hard hats or some other kind of a situation that would require protection of some kind.

What comes to mind when you hear the word crime? Some people thought Nassau. Maybe you thought about a crime scene with the famous yellow tape around it, marking it off.

Maybe you recalled images of seeing people taken to court in handcuffs. Maybe your mind reflected on crime that was committed against you or someone close to you.

[ 6 : 55 ] What comes to your mind when you hear the word repent? I won't seek to speculate what came to your mind, but I would hazard to guess that few of us, if any of us, thought about ourselves.

And here I'm speaking primarily to believers, those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ, those who know that their sins have been forgiven, they've been reconciled to God.

For most of us, when we hear the word repent, we generally do not think about ourselves. We tend to think about unbelievers.

We tend to think about those who have yet to come to Christ. And we think repent is a word that they need to hear. We think repentance is relevant to them.

But as far as we're concerned, well, we repented when we came to Christ however long ago it was. And we don't see repentance as being relevant for us simply because we did that some time ago.

[ 8 : 13 ] But repentance is not just an experience that we have at the beginning of the Christian life. The witness of Scripture is that repentance is to mark the entirety of the Christian life.

all of the Christian life is to be marked by repentance. That's the truth of God's word.

The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, understood this. And in the very first of his 95 theses, when he nailed them to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, he wrote, when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, repent, he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance. It's the first statement that Luther penned as he was troubled by what was going on in the church in his day. It was those words that started that process of theses that resulted in the Protestant Reformation.

And so Luther understood what Scripture teaches that the entire life of believers should be a life of repentance.

[ 9 : 37 ] and the reason for this is that sin is a reality for us. Sin is a reality for us today. Sin will be a reality for us every single day until the day we die.

We will face sin and therefore we are called as those who follow Christ to a life of ongoing repentance.

repentance. In the New Testament our first encounter with the words repent and repentance is when we find them coming from the lips of John the Baptist.

We find this recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospels. We encounter these words for the first time in the New Testament as they came from the lips of John the Baptist.

And in our remaining time this morning I want us to consider what John said about repentance using the account that is found in the Gospel of Luke.

[ 10 : 50 ] Luke. When we consider what John says what Luke recorded in Luke chapter 3 concerning John and his preaching ministry what we see is that John was concerned for true repentance.

John was not concerned about merely drawing a crowd. John was not merely concerned with having a lot of adherence but when we listen to the message of John John was concerned that those who came to his baptism those who gathered at the Jordan River that they would experience true repentance.

And John's concern for his hearers then is the same concern that God has for us now those of us who are gathered in this place.

And here's the point of the preaching of John the Baptist. True repentance is evidenced by a truly changed life. True repentance is evidenced by a truly changed life.

In other words when a person repents that person's life truly changes. It's not enough to pray a prayer. It's not enough to say some words.

[ 12 : 16 ] It's not enough to repeat after someone. Repentance is more than mere words. True repentance will always be evidenced by a truly changed life.

And right at the outside I say to all of us this morning it is a contradiction to say I have repented and my life has not changed.

my life has not been transformed. So let us consider this morning what the Lord would say to us about true repentance from this passage.

And I've organized my thoughts under three points and they are number one the work of true repentance. Number two the need for true repentance.

And number three the fruit of true repentance. So first the work of true repentance. Luke introduces the ministry of John the Baptist in verses one and two.

[13:22] And he does so by giving us the political and religious setting at the time. As a historian Luke is concerned to show that John the Baptist was not some made-up story.

John the Baptist was not some fictitious once-upon-a-time character. Luke is concerned to show that John the Baptist was a real historical figure.

And what he does is he gives us the time and the setting that John the Baptist came on the scene. He tells us who the Roman emperor was. He tells us who his officials were in the region where John would be commencing his ministry.

He tells us who was serving as high priest at the time. This joint priesthood between Annas and Caiaphas.

But as a theologian, remember, and we saw this as we were in the Christmas series in the early sections of Luke, that Luke was both a theologian and a historian.

[14:38] So as a theologian, Luke is, he's concerned to show us that these political leaders and these religious leaders helped to paint the picture of the darkness of the time in which John began his ministry.

These political leaders were wicked, ruthless men. Annas and Caiaphas, the men who comprised the high priesthood at that time, they were backslidden, corrupt religious leaders.

And when we consider that setting, especially when we consider Annas and Caiaphas, the contrast is easy to miss, but there is a contrast here because here you have these two men who represent God.

They are the official representatives of God to the people. They're the high priests and all the religious system was under them and they were in control over it.

And yet, when God desires to now speak, there's been at this point a 400-year silence since the last time God addressed the nation of Israel was in the book of Malachi and we're told that there's about 400 years in between and he now comes to this prophet.

[16:07] Remember John the Baptist, we saw earlier in chapter 1 of Luke that John is a prophet, raised by God to prepare the way for the Messiah.

But when God desires to speak, he doesn't go to the temple, he goes to the wilderness, he goes to this prophet in the backsides of the wilderness in Judea and he calls John the Baptist.

And John the Baptist begins to proclaim a message. Look at verse 3. It says, And he, meaning John, ran into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Now we know from Matthew's account that the exact words that John proclaimed were, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And in particular, what John was doing was John was calling people to be baptized to publicly show that they had repented.

Now when we look at these words that are recorded for us, in verse 3 it says, he ran into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

[17:32] Now exactly what was this baptism that John was proclaiming? John was not saying, if you get baptized, your baptism will do the work of repentance in you and your sins will be forgiven.

He wasn't saying that at all. That's not what John was saying. John knew that forgiveness of sins could only come through Jesus Christ. And he points that out later on in verse 16.

We have not read that, but he talks about one who is coming after him. And he says, I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And here John is referring to salvation. salvation. The one coming after John is Jesus.

And he is the one who brings salvation. He is the one who is the source of the forgiveness of sins. John knew that. But John's baptism was a unique baptism.

[ 18 : 36 ] John's baptism was not the baptism that they continued with in the New Testament. Though people who received John's baptism, if they came to Christ, they still had to be baptized in accordance with the commands of Christ.

John's baptism was not a baptism that was to be continued. It was a unique baptism in that unique moment in time in salvation history for those individuals who were the ones to hear this message, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And you probably remember this in Acts chapter 19 when the apostle Paul met some men from Ephesus, some disciples from Ephesus, and they talked about baptism.

And he asked them, what baptism were you baptized with? And they said, the baptism of John. And they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. So this baptism of John was a unique baptism. It was not, it was a baptism of repentance unto salvation.

[ 20 : 02 ] But the baptism did not bring about repentance. The baptism came after people had repented. We were able to see that these people came to be baptized.

But John was saying to them, you have to repent before you be baptized. Look at verse 4 of chapter 3.

Here Luke helps us to see that this baptism of John was a fulfillment of a prophecy spoken by the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier.

It says, 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 the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Luke is helping us to see that John was the fulfillment of this prophecy. John was this voice in the wilderness. And what Isaiah does is Isaiah draws upon an ancient practice of when there was a dignitary who was visiting a city, typically what would happen is you would prepare for that dignitary.

[ 21 : 31 ] They would make sure that the road that the dignitary was going to come on had been prepared and make sure there were no potholes in the road, no boulders in the road, that the road was straight, that the road was smooth.

And what would also happen was the dignitary would have someone to go before him, a forerunner to go before him to make sure that everything was in place, that everything was in order, that his visit would be without hitches.

I think some of us are old enough to remember when Queen Elizabeth visited, I couldn't find the exact year, but it was back in the 80s when Elizabeth Estates was opened.

How many remember when Elizabeth Estates was opened? Some of you remember that. Do you know, remember they paved the road from the airport straight down to Elizabeth Estates, the entire road that Elizabeth was going to ride on, they paved the whole road.

That's what they do. And that's what they did back then. They made sure that there was going to be a smooth journey for this emissary. And so what Isaiah does is Isaiah draws upon this practice and he is saying that Messiah is coming and there's going to be one who's going to go before Messiah and things are to be prepared for him.

[ 22 : 52 ] All the mountains are to be dealt with, the valleys are to be dealt with, and the crooked places and the rough places, they're all to be dealt with. So John was saying to the people, get ready, the king is coming.

Get ready, the Messiah is coming. You need to be ready for this Messiah. He's coming with salvation. He's coming with the forgiveness of sins. You need to repent. I find this prophecy of Isaiah very interesting.

It's in two parts. Look at it again. The first part of it we find in verse 4. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.

That was the first part of this prophecy, these words that John the Baptist was to proclaim. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.

This is a command. John was saying to the people, the king is coming, you need to prepare the way for the Lord, you need to make his path straight.

[ 24 : 07 ] In one word, John was saying, repent. That's what he was saying to them. He's not inviting them to repent, he's not suggesting that they should repent, he is commanding them to repent.

But what I find interesting about this command that John makes of these people is, the witness of scripture teaches us that none of us left to ourselves can repent and therefore will repent.

The witness of scripture is that it is a human impossibility for a fallen person, and we're all fallen people left to themselves to fulfill this command that John makes of them.

That you need to repent because the king is coming. Because left to ourselves we are unable and therefore we are unwilling to repent.

Listen to what Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 2 starting in verse 23. He says to Timothy, have nothing to do with foolish ignorant controversies.

[ 25 : 32 ] You know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone able to teach patiently enjoying evil correcting his opponents with gentleness.

And then he says this, God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. And they may escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will. Listen, if God does not grant repentance, no one is able to repent. Repentance is a gift from God. And yet John says to these people, you need to repent.

You need to prepare for the king who is coming. But notice the second part of John's prophecy fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy about him.

He says in verses 5 and 6, John says this is going to happen.

[ 26 : 50 ] So notice that John has moved now from what we call an imperative, giving a command, and he's now declaring something. He's saying this is going to happen.

saying this is going to happen. And he's saying And he's saying this is going to happen. And he's saying Every valley is going to be filled. Every mountain is going to be pulled down. Every crooked place is going to be made straight, and all the rough places are going to become level ground, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Now what is clear is that in this prophecy, Isaiah is not talking about the landscape of Judea. He is not talking about the geography, the physical geography of Judea.

What Isaiah is prophesying about, Isaiah is prophesying about the hearts of men and women and boys and girls, because that's the road that this king is going to travel on.

This king is coming to the hearts of men, women, boys and girls, and their hearts need to be prepared. The mountains of their hearts need to be pulled down.

[ 28 : 02 ] The valleys need to be raised up. The crooked paths need to become straight. The rough places need to become level ways.

This is a work of repentance. And so here what we have is we have John saying to people, you need to do this. You need to prepare for the king who is coming.

But the witness of scripture says we can't. The witness of scripture says left to ourselves is none of us. We can't repent. As a matter of fact, the witness of scripture says none of us wants to repent. That's how deeply we have been affected by sin and the fall. Scripture says none of us seeks after God. Anytime you see a person inquiring about God, seeking after God, you can rest assured God has acted.

God has enabled that person to even have any desire for him. Left to ourselves, we love darkness. We naturally gravitate to the darkness, not to the light.

[ 29 : 13 ] And so what Isaiah is addressing here, what John is addressing, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, he is addressing the hearts of men.

But see, this king is different from the other kings. The other kings of that day, they would simply send the forerunner before them.

And the people of the city, they were responsible for making the way clear and smooth and making sure that all the preparations worthy of this king were done.

This king is different. This king makes the preparation himself that needs to be done on the road of the hearts of those to whom he will come.

Because if he doesn't, it will not be done. And this is why John is able to say, every valley will be filled. Every mountain will be pulled down.

[ 30 : 22 ] Every crooked path will be made straight. Every rough place will be made a level ground. Because God himself will do it. And therefore, he's able to speak in these definitive terms to people who left to themselves could never do this.

But he declares it's going to be done. Because this king will do it himself. So the work of repentance is heart work.

The work of repentance is done by God himself. Notice in verse 6 it says, And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

This too is a declaration. All flesh shall see the salvation of God. That's what the coming king is going to do.

He is going to ensure that all flesh will see the salvation of God. Now it's important to notice what it is not saying. What verse 6 it is not saying.

[ 31 : 31 ] Verse 6 is not a promise that all flesh without exception will see the salvation of God, including those who reject him. It's not saying that.

It's not saying all flesh without exception. It is saying all flesh without distinction. That it does not matter who they are, whether they are Jew or Gentile, whether they are rich or poor, whether they are educated or uneducated, male or female, young or old, it doesn't matter.

All flesh, all flesh without distinction, will see his salvation. In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Michael Wilcock explains that very succinctly, very clearly.

And here's what he says concerning verse 6. He says, It means that there is no kind of person the Gospel cannot reach.

No boundary it cannot cross. Luke is saying, not that everyone will be saved, but that anyone can be saved.

[ 32 : 47 ] All flesh. And that is the witness of Scripture. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. And it matters not who they are.

It matters not where they are from. It matters not what they have done. Whosoever will call on the name of the Lord. God will be saved. That's the work of repentance.

It's heart work. And we need the King himself to prepare our hearts. It is an impossible task to think that even as we seek to consecrate ourselves this week, that there is work that we can do in our hearts to cause us to be acceptable before the Lord for the King to come to us.

The big part of John's baptism was not that people were going to be forgiven of their sins. John knew that the forgiveness would only come through Jesus Christ. But it was a recognition on the part of people that they needed the forgiveness of sins.

They needed God. They had to recognize their own sinful condition. But they could not help themselves.

[ 34 : 12 ] This hard work is not just for salvation, but it is for the entirety of the Christian life.

We need to have the King to come to us to do a work in our hearts, dealing with our valleys of self-pity, dealing with our mountains of pride, dealing with the crooked places of deception and dishonesty, dealing with the rough places of un-Christlikeness.

Only He can do that. And see, let's be honest with ourselves this morning. I think we all know if we could change ourselves, we would change ourselves. The song we sang this morning, We Are Not What We Should Be, how many times we recognize that?

How many times we recognize that we sin again and again, and not different sins, the same sins, sins that beset us. We can't change ourselves.

The King has to come to us. The King has to do that work in us. And see, a lot of times, when we don't recognize that, we continue to toil and labor and we work our fingers to the bone trying to do what only the King can do.

[ 35 : 36 ] So why do we need to repent? John gives us the answer in verse 7, which brings me to my second point, the need for true repentance.

In verse 7, Luke tells us that crowds of people came out to be baptized. Matthew's gospel tells us that even Pharisees and Sadducees came to John's baptism.

John was a fascinating figure, no doubt a wonder to behold. He was dressed strange, he ate strange, and he was plain speaking. And so people came to see him, including the Pharisees.

And you can imagine the jealousy of the Pharisees, how they were literally drawn to John's baptism because everybody was going to John's baptism. But John had discernment that not every single person had come to his baptism desirous of repenting.

He had discernment that some of them wanted to be baptized for an outward show, but they had no interest in truly changing and truly repenting.

[ 36 : 47 ] And John calls those persons a brood of vipers or snakes. He's accusing them of being slick and crafty, pretending to repent when in fact they had not repented.

And then he further says to them, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? And in that question, John points to the reality of the need for true repentance, and it is the day of the coming wrath of God.

John says, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? In other words, there's a wrath coming. And the way we prepare for that wrath is by true repentance and through the salvation that the king brings.

And that is what his salvation saves us from. See, when you think about it, we often think about being saved. Well, what are we being saved from? We're being saved from the wrath of God. And here again, we see the mercy of this king.

That though his wrath is coming, he saves us from his own wrath. He sent his own son to save us from his own wrath.

[ 38 : 17 ] Here's how the apostle Paul describes that day of wrath that will be where God's wrath will be poured out on the wicked. He says it this way in Romans 2, 5, but because of your hard and impenitent hearts, you are storing up wrath for yourselves on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

That day of wrath is the day of God's righteous judgment being revealed. In other words, if God were to do otherwise, if God were not to pour his wrath, he would be unrighteous.

If God were to overlook sin and rebellion, he would be unrighteous. It is a holy wrath that would be poured out on that day.

And the way we escape that is we flee to the only one who can save us from it, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

John says, he's coming after me, but the path to that one who was coming after John was through repentance. And here was a certain thing that if you rejected the baptism of John, you were going to reject the salvation that the Messiah was bringing.

[ 39 : 37 ] Notice in verse 8 that John told the people who did not want to truly repent, he says, you know what? You need to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. You need to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

In other words, he's saying, I'm not satisfied with you just being baptized. I'm not here counting the number of people who get baptized. He says, you need to repent.

And again, he has discernment because he's saying, don't say to yourself, don't say to yourself, we have Abraham as our father. Abraham is our father. We're connected to Abraham. He says, there's nothing special about that.

He says, God can make these stones in the children of Abraham. Don't rely on that. Physical relationship to Abraham was not enough.

You need to repent and you need to show the fruit that's consistent with repentance. Here's one way we can think of what John was saying. John is saying, it makes no sense to say you're an apple tree.

[ 40 : 46 ] And you're bearing something other than apples. You're not bearing apples. You can say you're an apple tree all you want.

If you're not bearing apples, and I'm not saying first day, you know, you bear apples. No, it takes some time to bear, but over time, if a tree is supposed to be an apple tree, over time, that's supposed to bear apples.

Or mangoes. And essentially, if we have repented, then we too are to bear the fruit of repentance.

Notice what he says in verse nine. He says, even now, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Clearly, John is speaking figuratively. He's referring to men, women, boys, and girls as trees. He says, we're trees. He says, and you need to bear the fruit of repentance.

[ 41 : 56 ] You need to give evidence that you have truly repented. And here's the important point that we should see. I think for most of us, there are some who probably are not able to point to the very moment that they came to Christ.

It was just a process, and they really couldn't point to the moment. But I think for many of us, we can probably point to some moment in our lives where we came to a place of conviction and understanding of our need for salvation, and we prayed a prayer, confessing our sins to God and declaring the Lordship of Jesus over our lives.

But in the largest scheme of things, what is more important than that is what our life says. It is the fruit that we bear.

And John is saying, he says, you know, the axe is laid to all the trees right now. It is laid to the root of the trees. And every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Brothers and sisters, a verbal profession of faith in Christ is not enough over time. If you come to Christ this morning, you make a verbal profession of faith, we rejoice in that.

[ 43 : 35 ] We're not going to belittle that. But over time, there must be fruit to demonstrate that we have turned from sin and we have truly turned to Christ.

That is what John is saying. And John was expressing an urgency. And recognize this this morning. The coming of Jesus Christ represents the coming both of salvation and damnation.

Jesus has appeared, as Scripture says, at the end of the age. Jesus has come to show that life as we know it is coming to a close.

It is in its final chapter and the Savior has come, the judge has also come. And he says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees.

In other words, what he's saying is judgment is at hand. Judgment is eminent. I can't help but underscore how he says in verse 9, every tree, every tree, without exception.

[ 44 : 53 ] It matters not. Every tree, every tree is required to bear good fruit. And so I want to ask us this morning, are you aware of your need for repentance?

And here again, let's not hear that as, oh, he's talking to unbelievers, no, I'm talking to us in an ongoing way to be repenting.

Are we aware that no past experience, no past connection is sufficient for us to rely on as the Pharisees were doing and the Sadducees were doing saying, we're of Abraham, we're set.

are we aware that the work of true repentance takes place in our hearts and it is a gift from God.

It is a gift from God. And so we need to cry out to him asking that he would grant us repentance and we know exactly where in particular we need to repent.

[ 46 : 18 ] Third and finally, John helps us to see the fruit of true repentance. The fruit of true repentance is a changed life. Again, we deceive ourselves when we say we have repented and there is no change in how we live.

Notice the question that the crowds ask, a natural question in verse 10 in response to John saying, you have to produce fruit. They ask the question, what should we do?

What should we do? And John gives two examples of how repentance should change us from selfishness and stinginess to selflessness and generosity.

He answers them in verse 11. He says, whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has one and whoever has food is to do likewise.

Even tax collectors came to John's baptism and tax collectors were considered to be among the lowest in society. They were considered to be the outcasts.

[ 47 : 28 ] Nobody wanted to relate to them because they worked for the Romans. But even tax collectors, and here we see this fulfillment, God's salvation will appear out of all flesh.

All flesh. Even the rejected, dejected tax collectors, they were drawn to John's baptism.

And John says to them, he says, fruit of repentance for you should look like this. Don't collect more taxes than you are authorized to do.

Because that's what they did. Remember the story of Zacchaeus? He became a very rich man. He had to give the Romans their taxes. And so obviously he had to take extra taxes to be a rich man.

And so John, knowing how tax collectors operated in that day, he's saying, if you are going to be a tax collector who has repented, you cannot continue like others who have not repented.

[ 48 : 31 ] You must only collect what you're authorized to collect. Even soldiers came, hardened soldiers. These would have probably been Roman soldiers. They came to John's baptism and they said, what should we do?

And again, John, knowing how they operated, said to them, don't extort more money from anyone. Don't extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusations. And you should be content with your wages.

John had these two specific groups of people to come to him inquiring what they should do.

It's not an exhaustive list. But how he answers them should enable all of us to think about ourselves. Think about how we should be asked that question, what should I do?

Think of ourselves and the roles that we play and the responsibilities that we have as husbands and wives and children, as employees and business owners and as students and as citizens in this country, as neighbors.

[ 49 : 44 ] And we need to be thinking about repentance in those particular ways. We need to be thinking, what does repentance look like for me on the job in the morning? What does repentance look like for me when I go home today?

What does repentance look like for me when I deal with my neighbor who is selfish, who is inconsiderate?

What does repentance look like for me as a student? The two groups who came to John had John to counsel them.

We don't have John to counsel us. We have one who was greater than John to counsel us. The Holy Spirit himself will speak to us uniquely and particularly concerning our circumstances as we come before him, as we ask the question, what should I do?

What should repentance look like in my life? God will be faithful to answer us as we bring those questions before him.

[ 51 : 00 ] Brothers and sisters, true repentance is heart work. And true repentance requires the king himself who is coming to our hearts to prepare our hearts, dealing with the valleys, dealing with the mountains, dealing with the crooked places, dealing with the rough places.

I believe this morning we can start at least by being honest before the Lord and say, God, in my heart are mountains, in my heart are valleys, in my heart are crooked places, in my heart are rough places.

Would you meet me during this week and make it all level, make it all smooth, that you may come to me. I believe if we do that, God will meet us.

And so let us do that this morning as we close. Let's pray.