

John the Baptist's Revival Sermon

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 3. I'm going to conclude our Songs for a Savior series this morning. Luke chapter 3, beginning in verse 1.

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

And he went into the region all around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it was 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, every mountain and hill made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level places, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

[1 : 32] Verse 7, And he said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath that is to come?

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

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.

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

Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? He said to them, Collect no more than you are authorized to do. Soldiers also asked, And what shall we do?

[2 : 44] And he said, Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages. And the people were in expectation.

And all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ. John answered them all and said, 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. His winnowing fork is in his hand. To clear his threshing floor, to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. May God bless the hearing and the preaching of his word. Besides shirts, one of my favorite Christmas gifts each year that I inevitably receive are books.

Several years ago, I received the book, *Hunting Eichmann*, about the search for the Nazi leader, Adolf Eichmann, at the end of World War II. As I read the first few pages, I was quickly captivated by the introduction.

[4 : 09] A good introduction is vital to a book. It gives a foretaste of what's to come and an appetite for what is going to happen. And the introduction of *Hunting Eichmann* did all that and more.

It gave a brief glimpse into his capture in Argentina, into the plan and seizure of the man who had seized countless Jews and led all the administration to get them to the gas chambers where they died.

It was literally gripping. My heart began beating faster and faster, reading the introduction. So too, the songs and introductions to Jesus Christ that we have read and talked about the past few weeks

have given us a foretaste of what's to come.

They've created an appetite for this Savior, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah. Each of the songs have whispered unspeakable truth to us.

Mary prayed how the hungry will be filled with good things. Zechariah prophesied how the light would find those stuck in darkness. The angels sung of peace on earth and goodwill toward those with whom God is pleased.

[5 : 25] Simeon confessed that he'll bring salvation to all people. Each of these songs wonderfully anticipate the world-altering salvation-bringing coming of Christ.

But there's one more introduction to Christ in the Gospel of Luke. It's this one. Whereas all the other introductions, all the other appearances of the angels in these songs have been private, this introduction is public.

All the people in the wilderness are invited to come out to see what God is doing. But it doesn't occur as we might think.

I mean, how would you, if you were given the privilege, seek to prepare people to hear the message of Jesus Christ? Surely you'd take a front page in the DPA or buy a billboard or take it to the streets. But Luke takes pains in this first two verses to tell us that this introduction begins outside of town, in the wilderness. I won't repeat all the names, but he lists all these names of powerful people.

[6 : 36] And then he says, John went out in the wilderness. John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. So it takes place in a place that we would never think the introduction to Jesus Christ would take place.

But perhaps most surprising of all, this introduction is not all joy. John doesn't prepare the way for Jesus with celebration only, but with warning.

Not jubilation merely, but with sobriety. He calls a people to repent. Even though we live 2,000 years after the ministry of Christ, though we know the full story, God has a message for us.

God has a thing we need to hear this morning. Jesus did not come to give us warm and fuzzies at Christmas, but to call us to live a new, completely different life. He did not come so that we would mind our P's and Q's, but to set us free.

God has providentially brought us to this text. Buddy was actually supposed to preach today, and he got pneumonia. And so God led me to this text, this morning, this message on this first day of the year.

[7 : 52] The main point where we're going is the coming of Christ urges us to embrace true religion, which alone pleases God. The coming of Christ urges us to embrace true religion, which alone pleases God.

True religion, that might not be a word you like to think about when you think about Christianity, but true religion is just your life of repentance and faith towards God. There's a lot of dead religion out there is what John's going to tell us.

The religion of those who follow Christ must be filled with repentance and faith and life. So in a word, well, I've already told you the word, but three points.

The first one is the invitation of true religion. The invitation of true religion. This account of John's preaching in the wilderness is included in all four Gospels.

So it's very important. The Old Testament concludes with Zechariah, I mean Malachi's prophecy that there would be, one would come and prepare the way.

[8 : 53] Isaiah 40 includes things like that. And so he's telling us this is the forerunner. This is the preparation man for Jesus Christ. And so verse three, John, he was in the wilderness.

He went out throughout the region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now scriptures, other scriptures tell us that John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

Not exactly a guy you'd bring home to the parents at Christmas. But he's proclaiming a message, he's proclaiming a baptism of forgiveness of sins.

Now that doesn't mean he's the first Baptist. Just, that's why we call him John the Baptist because he proclaimed a baptism. He's telling us that at the heart of the coming of Christ is a call to repent and be baptized.

Not because baptism saves you, but because the promise of this good news does. So like many of the prophets before him, he says repent. Repent.

[10:00] He sounds like Jeremiah and Isaiah and all these prophets calling the people to repent. And Luke continues and tells us why. Look at verse 4. He says, the voice of one, quoting Isaiah 40, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight.

Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill be made low. The crooked shall become straight, the rough places shall become level. All will see the salvation of God.

It's a reference to Isaiah 40, a text written to people in exile to say God's not done. His salvation's gonna come and find you there. But why does Luke tie that to John here?

Because in preparing the way of the Lord, John is declaring the emptiness of religion. The emptiness of religion. The original leaders lived in a world that we would have a hard time understanding.

A world consumed with the fear of God. Go buy New York Times tomorrow, I doubt you'll see anything about the fear of God. But that culture was consumed with it.

[11:13] No one thought, God is my homeboy. They were consumed with an awareness of the great distance between them and God. Because it was a world consumed with awareness of that great distance.

It was a world permeated with the guilt of sin. Not merely the awareness that we have sinned, that people have sinned, but the awareness that we have a guilt problem.

So much of their daily life was dictated and driven by this guilt, defined by what they have to do to deal with guilt, to deal with sin, all the blood and sacrifices, ceremonies and cleansing.

And so the valleys and the mountains and the crooked roads and rough places are pictures of the separation between God and man. Isaiah tells them this.

And he's preaching to the choir. They know this already. There's a great separation between God and men. No matter how many sacrifices you offer, they offer, you cannot erase this separation.

[12:17] You may sing, ain't no mountain high enough to your baby, but you can't sing it to the Lord. Because there's lots of mountains.

He is holy. His eyes are too pure to look on evil. In sin did your mother conceive you. The valleys, mountains, crooked roads, and rough places are pictures of the separation between God and man and of the emptiness of religion to bridge it.

John says, therefore, the only way to prepare for God is repentance. The only way to prepare for God is to look for him to do what only he can do.

Notice these pictures in Isaiah 40 are announcing a day in which God will bridge the humanly impossible gap in miraculous ways. God's calling them to repent in order to find forgiveness in the mighty one who's coming to say, he says, prepare the way as a theme to say what's about to happen is going to be more glorious than the exodus, more glorious than cutting through the Red Sea or crossing the Jordan, more glorious than all those things.

Prepare the way for God and what's impossible will be made possible with him. You know, valleys aren't filled, mountains don't move around and fall down, crooked places don't suddenly become straight, rough places do not become level but the salvation of God will make it so.

[13:51] He will bridge the humanly possible gap to bring a miraculous salvation. As a boy, I remember my dad singing these songs in Handel's Messiah.

Isaiah 40, it's a wonderful song called Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye. Now, you probably never listen to Handel's Messiah and it's not exactly something I turn on when I'm cruising in the car but you should.

It's amazing. And these, this aria, if we want to be specific for our music people, is incredible.

On the one hand, it's very demanding for a tenor. My dad was a tenor. He is a tenor. Very demanding for all the breath control it takes for these runs. Just filled with these runs of, I don't know, twenty notes in a row.

But what's amazing about these runs that demand so much breath control is the runs keep going up and down and up and down to underline the great distance God is bridging in his salvation.

[14:55] Mountains are coming down. Valleys are raising up. All creation is making a way for the Lord to come in a way far beyond what we could imagine.

So, turn on the Messiah this afternoon. John's saying the humanly impossible salvation of God is coming. The only thing you have to do to receive this salvation is repent.

But even more wonderfully true, the only thing you can do to receive this salvation is to repent. as Luther famously said, the only thing you're allowed to bring to your salvation is your sin.

On the one hand, John is proclaiming the emptiness of religion. He's also proclaiming the invitation of true religion. This invitation is whispered throughout the Old Testament.

I want to show you one other text in Isaiah. Isaiah 57. I was reading that a couple weeks ago. It blew my brain. And it shall be said, build up, build up, prepare the way.

[16:06] Says that same thing from Isaiah 40. Remove every obstruction from my people's way. Listen to what immediately follows that. For thus says the Lord who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

I dwell in a high and holy place. And also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly, to revive the heart of the contrite.

Prepare the way. I'm coming for a people that have nothing to offer but their contrition. Sounds very similar to Jesus in Luke 5.

He said, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The old preacher Thomas Watson helps us understand the unspeakable gravity of the invitation to repent and his wonderful book *The Doctrine of Repentance*.

You could listen to the Messiah as you read that book. He says, repentance is pure gospel grace. The covenant of works admitted no repentance.

[17:23] That's what the people knew. They were in a dark world under the shadow of the fall. There it says, sin and die. Everyone who sins, Ezekiel tells us, shall die.

Repentance came in by the gospel. Christ has purchased in his blood that repenting sinners shall be saved. So John's preaching begins with a powerful invitation.

The question for us though is, is your religion a religion of repentance? John Newton famously said at the end of life, my mind is nearly gone.

But two things I know, I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior. Friend, what does Christ mean to you? two things I know may I make one request of you in 2024?

Three! We'll get there later. That you be honest about your relationship with God. One request, be honest about your relationship with God.

[18:38] I feel there's a very real temptation growing up in the church, being raised in the church, to begin repeating the things we hear in church without really believing them. There's nothing commendable in that.

We take the Lord's Supper without really thinking about the examination. We hear sermons calling sinners to repent without giving much thought to it. We do the things of Christianity without really considering what we believe about Christianity.

Christianity. I believe one reason we do so is because we're afraid to be honest. Oh man, I pray. There's never a church where you have to be afraid to be honest.

The things of Christianity can actually become the camouflage that we hide behind instead of considering the question, what does Christ really mean?

If someone were to overhear your prayers from last week, would they say Christ is a great Savior?

[19:42] Would they say Christ is a great Savior? Would they hear of how you've been shown immense grace saving you of your many sins and continue to be patient with your many frailties and failures?

If the only thing you can do is repent, receive freely, the tone and theme, the main content of our prayers should be endless amazement.

So what does Christ mean? Could there be a more important question to consider at the outset of 2023? Point two, the promise of true religion. The promise of true religion.

John continues his message. This is where he gets a bit of a bad rap. It's not hard to see why a red-faced preacher yelling about snakes. In actuality, John is, and what we're going to see in a moment, he's exposing their trust in religion.

Look at verse 7, he says, you brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? He's saying, you're acting like snakes crawling away from a brush fire.

[21:05] Who told you about the fire? Now, this is, who told you to come out and be cleansed? Now, this is kind of crazy. John calls them to come out, a baptism of repentance and then he rebukes them for coming.

Which one is it, man? Isn't that what you wanted? He says, who warned you to flee the wrath to come?

He's not asking for information. He's not saying, who told you? How'd that word get out? John's trying to discern if they're really sincere. Are you coming out because everyone else is? Are you a snake slithering away from the fire because you saw other snakes sliver away? Are you just coming to check the box? Are you just coming because it's Sunday? Are you coming to truly repent and be baptized? John is asking, is your religion real? Ultimately, they still trust their religion.

[22 : 12] They come out to hear John. They desire the baptism. They came to repent of their sins. But John says, bear fruits in keeping with your repentance. You'll see a little bit more of what that means in a moment. Then he continues and adds, this is just wild.

Look in verse 8. He says, 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 sons for Abraham. John knows that this religious crowd, if he begins talking about whether they're truly religious, they're truly, they would just say, we've been a part of God's people.

The Jewish religion was a family. Religion is based on being a part of a specific family, a family with whom God had guided for thousands of years. And so when John questions their faith, he knows they'll say, do you not know whose family I'm in?

You don't know who my mama is or my dad is. Do you not know that my father is Abraham? And John said, it doesn't matter. Abraham's your father.

God's in the business of raising stones into life. John's unveiling the empty promises of religion. Now it's stark, but it's important.

[23 : 24] For people who grew up in the church and are raised in the church and begin repeating the things they hear at church without really believing them, Christianity is reduced to little more than religion, than a list of do's and don'ts.

It's reduced to boxes to check, sinners prayer, baptism, church attendance, confirmation, whatever tradition you're in, Bible reading. It's not that those things are bad, but it's just not that we can't, it's just that we can't rest in them.

That's what John is saying. Don't let those things become a list that you use to hold up, to measure yourself as one who is in the family of God.

Our sinners prayer and baptism, church attendance and family background and traditions do not make us Christian. They're utterly worthless if not joined by something else.

How do you know? So often you talk to people, how do you know that you're a Christian? Well, I was baptized. It's not entirely wrong to say that. But it's completely insufficient.

[24 : 40] Right here is the wonder of the gospel, actually. Jesus calls you to repent and turn from your sin. But he also calls you to repent and turn from trusting and anything else.

On the one hand, he says, I don't care who your family is. I don't care when you are baptized. I don't care any of those things.

I only care if you're really alive. He's also unveiling the promise of true religion. The promise of true religion is new life. This is a most wonderful picture of new life.

He says, God makes sons and daughters of Abraham from stones. How can we not read that and think of Ezekiel 36? God makes unfeeling, unresponsive, dead people alive by grace and adopts them as sons and daughters.

That's the salvation God came to bring. He did not come to bring a salvation where you clean yourselves up and then you slide in the back door. No, he came to find those on the highways and byways that went completely lost and to make them new again.

[25 : 52] It's amazing. God raises up sons of Abraham from stones. I'm sure you remember the story of Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a man, a Jewish man comes to Jesus by night.

Tell me about the kingdom of God. Jesus says, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. If we were to ask that question today, are you born again?

We'd say, oh yeah! And yet, claiming to be born again makes a little difference. Consider the statistics.

Of those claiming to be born again, 33% are pro-choice. 46% attend churches weekly. 46% tithe. About 2% of their income.

Divorce rate, it's a little different. 37% say pornography is a constant struggle. 53% say they've visited porn sites a few times in the last year. Is that what it means to be born again?

[26 : 55] Is that what Jesus came to bring? Jesus continues and clarifies, it's a little bit of water.

Truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. The wind blows where it wills. You hear it sound, but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes.

So is everyone born of the Spirit. Very important. What Jesus is saying is being born again is not something you can manufacture. born again is not something you can do.

That's what Jesus is teaching Nicodemus. That's what John is telling us. He's declaring the emptiness of the promises of religion so that they would see their utter desperation on God to do what only God can do, do you see?

So he's laying this out. He said Christianity is not a formula of words to recite. Not about making a decision or reciting a prayer or asking Jesus into your heart. Christianity is all miracle or it's nothing.

[28 : 02] Christianity is power from God coming into you and producing a visibly obvious new life. The problem with America is not that born again people are stumbling.

The problem with America is that the vast number of people who said a prayer were never born again. Obviously born again people have stumbled. So have you been born again?

Are you a son of Abraham? Kind of like an acid test. Is it there?

Is new life present in your life? John says show me your fruit. They'll know my disciples by their fruit.

One of the most neglected teachings I would argue in the south is Jesus' emphasis on fruit. Of course you can't produce it.

[29 : 02] But the new life he gives always produces it. Where is your fruit? Every tree healthy tree bears good fruit but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit nor a diseased tree bear good fruit.

So what's the fruit? fruit? Well you know he follows the Lord he's just not practicing I mean he's a true believer. I don't think so.

Jesus demands fruit not because we're accepted because of it but because new life always produces it. what does Christ really mean to you? How does it show up?

Does it show up? In your finances and your decisions your weekend conditions I mean you're here on January 1st so it's showing up in your life. But it's still a question to search us.

I love the picture immediately after that. He says bear fruits and the crowd say what do we do? We want to do it. Well be generous.

[30 : 17] Tax collectors what do we do? Now if you know anything about tax collectors the most hated people in well besides Samaritans in New Testament. Don't collect any more than you're authorized.

Soldiers say what should we do? Perhaps soldiers that kind of roamed through these wilderness towns and took whatever they wanted. Don't extort money from anybody.

Be content with your wages as following Christ always produces a life of fruit. Point three the power of true religion.

the power of true religion. John reaches the climax I think in some ways at the end of his end of our text as he exalts in the superiority of Christ.

The one who will remove all the obstacles that all flesh shall see the salvation of God. He begins underlining how great Christ is. Look in verse 15 as people were in expectation all questioning in their hearts is this one the Christ?

[31 : 39] Remember I told you the Messiah was coming and they were looking for the Messiah. Is this one him? Is this one the Christ the Messiah? John answered him 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 the one who is coming is Christ. John says I am not worthy to untie his sandal I am not worthy to perform the most humble task for this one.

Interestingly in those days teachers would have often had students that followed him a rabbi would have had students that follow him like interns or something like that. They would show their devotion by doing different things for the teacher they would fetch him water or food or help him but this unstrapping of the teacher's sandal was not allowed.

Not by these servants because they were too worthy to do it. The unstrapping of a sandal was too demeaning for them to do and yet what these students are too worthy to do John says he's unworthy to do.

Do you see that's what's going on what these students said they're too worthy to do they're too worthy to dirty their fingers with a strap of his family John says I'm too unworthy to come near this one to unstrap his sandal because he's great and mighty John says in John 3 I must increase or you must increase and I must decrease I love it John gets it he's not the center of what God is doing several months ago Queen Elizabeth died and I enjoyed the festivities a little bit hearing about her life one interview I heard was one of her main bodyguards but people that were with her everywhere he was telling they asked for some humorous stories you can probably look this one up and find it easily one of the reporters asked what's she like and tell us a little bit of the story he said oh I got lots of stories thousands of them but I'll tell you this one he said we were we were out she has a castle in Balmoral or she had one in Scotland a summer house and so she was up at her summer house and they were on a picnic walking around and and and someone walks up and and and asks the queen they did they just two

[34 : 15] Americans actually two Americans walk up and ask the queen where do you live she said well I have a house in London but you know I have a weekend cabin up here well then they said well how often do you come up here it's beautiful up here how often do you come up here well actually I've been coming here my whole life 80 years old I've been coming here my whole life she said well if you've been coming up here for 80 years you must have met the queen she said I haven't met him well a friend of your ass pointing the servant I said well what's the queen like this is where he's totally great he said well she's she's wonderful but she can be very cantankerous and then he starts telling a few more stories well they said well can we get a picture with you so they they get around the servants one arm around him on the one arm one on one side one on the other and they said hey miss queen will you take this picture for us apparently she said well or the servants said why don't you get with her and

I'll take a picture with her too and she laughed saying I wonder what they think when they show people the pictures and realize that I am the queen in some ways it's a picture of John he's realized all this isn't about him it's Christianity 101 it's all about Jesus he must increase and I must decrease John continues and tells about the greater baptism he will perform look at verse 16b I'll baptize you with the water he who is mighty will baptize you he who is mighty is coming he will baptize you with the holy spirit and fire now some ask is this referring to Pentecost when the spirit comes down and fire goes on people's heads I don't think it's merely referring to Pentecost or something like that it's referring to the baptism of the spirit that is for all believers that's the way it's reverted in some place in the New

Testament but it's also referred to it's the work of spirit birth it's the work of regeneration it's the work that God promised to bring that only the spirit can perform one commentator said John could put repentant people in water but only one who is God could put the Holy Spirit in people that's what that's what it's saying he's going to baptize you in the Holy Spirit I'm going to baptize you in water water doesn't do anything but if you'll be baptized in the spirit you'll be made new you'll be cleansed forever he's unveiling the power of true religion the power of true religion is wonderfully not a list of do's and don'ts that we carry around through life the power of true religion is true life being born of the spirit walking in step with the spirit all the references to the spirit remember those all throughout Luke 1 and 2 those 8 or 9 references to the spirit crystallize here because this is the one who in the last days is going to bring the spirit on all flesh men and women all people will be born again by the spirit the new birth will come to all

Mark Dever helpfully says that scripture is clear in teaching that we're not all ultimately journeying journeying toward God some having found him and others still seeking instead scripture presents us as needing to have our hearts replaced our minds transformed our spirits given life we can do none of this for ourselves the change each human needs regardless of how we may outwardly appear is so radical so near its roots that only God can bring it about we need God to convert us we need God to put the spirit in us that's what Jesus is saying you gotta be born again and the spirit is sovereign to bring to life anyone he chooses a couple years ago the kids and I finished reading the voyage of the dawn treader a book in the series the chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis one of the most incredible scenes in the book is when Eustace is transformed now from the beginning of the book

Eustace is a total twerp he complains and grumbles he doesn't work hard you know not the guy you want to hang out with kind of a half full type of guy during the adventure the gang arrives on an unknown island and Eustace wanders off by the trail I mean Eustace is one of those kids he's a

sitting duck if he wanders off the trail with no sat phone you know he's in trouble he's overtaken by a dragon and turns into one his wrist begins to hurt and he longs for a leaf and Aslan the lion who is the Christ figure in the book shows up takes him up on a mountain they look down this garden he's longing for a leaf he's longing for water they look down this beautiful garden filled with fruit and all these things and a wonderful river running through it just what he needs for a leaf but Aslan says you gotta undress to get into this water he said dragons don't have skin what are you talking about and this is a little intense that's not what Aslan says he says you must remove your skin you must take it off

[40 : 04] Eustace does he begins scratching away the layers of skin on his body until he's completely peeled it's a gripping scene he's just pulling it away and then he begins to get closer to the pool to get into the water but Aslan says wait I must take off more skin I must take off more skin Aslan take more of his skin off unpeeling like an onion and throws him in the well wonderfully that's what it means to be born again you're not born again because you peeled off your skin you're not born again because you walked down an aisle you wrote a date in your bible you're not born again because of those things you're born again because

God produced new life and you wonderfully the new life that he produces is a new life where you're clothed in him you know in the garden they went and they killed the animals so that they could have clothing again the new life that Christ is coming to bring is to clothe you with none other than himself to put you down in the water you might be clothed in Christ forever and ever and be made completely new and that work he must do if anyone is in Christ he's a new creation the old is gone the new has come and so John is trying to clear away anything that would stand in the way for you coming to God to repent of your sin all you have to do the only thing you can do is to come and bow your knee if you'll be honest about where you are in relation to Jesus Christ and what he means to you then I offer you the word of salvation come he's gonna come and rip it all away because he wants to make you new all the way down he doesn't want to change a few things you do on the weekend he wants to change you from the bottom up and put eternity into your heart you trust him anyone believes in

Christ believes that God raised him from the dead you'll be saved this day and made new baptized in the spirit that's the hope of true religion it's not in all these things it's a baptism of the spirit but it's also a baptism of fire John ends in a very sobering way his winning fork verse 17 is in his hand in the hand of the

Christ he did not come to judge the world but in order the world might be saved he's coming again to judge it the winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor because everything on the earth is his gather the wheat into his barn but the chaff he will burn in the unquenchable fire the winnowing fork is what he used to throw up grain in the air so that the real grain is separated from the chaff which falls to the ground and that chaff is swept away and put in a little fire on the side John says that's what the final judgment is going to be he's going to throw the grain up in the air toss the church around a bit he's going to condemn the hell those who do not turn and follow Jesus Christ and the unquenchable fire we're not guaranteed tomorrow not guaranteed the rest of the day for all who believe in the gospel we're guaranteed eternal life with Jesus Christ the coming of Christ urges us to embrace true religion which alone pleases God I think there's two things this text will do to us if we let it one is rebuke us sweep away dependence on anything else but Christ push us to think what is Christ what do I really think about Christ what do my parents think what do I really think invite us the one hand rebuke the other hand the most precious invitation imaginable come that you can have life because Jesus comes to the wilderness it comes to all those who are far off they might be born again let us pray father in heaven thank you for a few minutes to sit under your word the outset of 2023 we offer ourselves to you completely and sincerely we confess our trust in the work of

[46 : 17] Jesus Christ alone we pray that this will be the most fruitful year in our lives for your glory for your purposes come by your spirit do not leave us unchanged we pray in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com B