

Repent As Good News?

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Amen. Jeff, I'm glad Christmas is not canceled. You have to admit, though, sometimes the Christmas season can make me a little bit of a curmudgeon.

There's a song that I particularly find a little draining. It's on my Amy Grant Christmas album from 1987 or something. Many of those of you who were born then, so you haven't been subjected to this.

One of the songs she sings is, It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year. And I know it's supposed to be an uplifting song, make you happy as you're going to the mall shopping or doing whatever. And I know there's a message of real joy at Christmas that these songs are supposed to be helping us take hold of. But, gosh, sometimes it's just so saccharine and so glitzy and so light and tinsel. And it seems to lack substance. It feels like it promotes Christmas as the hallmark countdown to Christmas holiday season.

[1 : 14] If you're not familiar with that, don't go there. No, even there, like, there's hopefulness there. Like, life can't turn out well. But, you can't find love in your life. But, the reality is that Christmas is, it just makes, leaves me feeling, having a hollow feeling.

Is this really what Christmas is about? Is there anything more than this? This leads us to our passage this morning.

We're continuing in our series on John the Baptist. And it's going to be a good day to talk about John the Baptist because we're going to have a lot of baptisms in a few minutes. And so, we're going to look at him.

And if you were here last week, we talked a little bit about John the Baptist, the person, and the context of his ministry. That he was uniquely the last of the Old Testament prophets come to bridge into the New Testament by proclaiming that all the hopes and fears of the Old Testament people, God.

As they look forward to what God would do. As they were longing and crying out for God to fulfill the promises of salvation and of restoration and of establishment of his kingdom.

[2 : 26] John has come and said, I'm the last of the Old Testament prophets because what's going to come after me will be the fulfillment of all those things. So, we looked at the context of who John the Baptist was last week.

And then this week, we're going to talk a little bit about the context of his message. We're going to look at Luke chapter 3. If you want to turn there, it's page 858 in your pew Bible.

Luke chapter 3. We're going to be reading verses 1 through 18. What we will see is that at the very core of John's message is this. Get ready.

The Lord is coming. This is a message that is both a warning and a message of hope. And that's what we're going to see as we read this book together.

So, Luke chapter 3, verses 1 through 18. Let's read that together. 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 Turia 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.

[3 : 52] 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 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 waves, 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. 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. And the crowds asked him, What then shall we do?

[5 : 10] 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. The soldiers also asked him, And 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. As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, 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 with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hands, clear his brushing floor, and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. So with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people. Let's pray together. Lord, we come before you this morning, yearning that the message of Christmas would have greater significance to us, because of your word.

[6 : 47] Lord, I pray this morning as we look into this passage, Lord, that you would speak to us. Lord, that you would prepare our hearts to receive the message that you have for us this morning.

God, I pray that I might speak your words faithfully, and that your Holy Spirit would apply your word to our minds and to our hearts this morning. Lord, help us this morning to hear your word, and to listen to you, and to recite you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Get ready.

The Lord is coming. It's interesting when you look at verse 18, how Luke kind of wraps up this section. He says that the Lord was preaching, or John the Baptist was preaching good news, but did it strike you as a message of good news as you listen?

When you look particularly at verses 7 through 14, does this sound like good news to you? John's message has a warning in it.

[8 : 06] That we all need to hear this warning. And at its core, the message is this. You are not okay with God. And He is coming to settle accounts with you.

Do you notice the images that he used? He talked about a wrath that is to come. He talked about an axe being laid at the root of a tree.

A tree that would be evaluated for its fruit, and if found lacking, if found unworthy, it would be chopped down.

John begins his message of good news by saying, there is a problem here. You are not okay with God, and He is coming. And He is coming to judge.

Now, judgment is not something we particularly like in our culture today. It's not something that we... And part of it, there's a proper recognition that when we as human beings take on the role of ultimate judge in the world, we fail.

[9 : 12] Because we are finite people, and we are weak, and we don't know all that we ought to. And yet, it has made us squeamish about the idea that there could be any judgment at all.

But instead, what we see in the Bible is that judgment is actually inherent in the overall message of the Bible, and is key to the good news that it proclaims.

Let me explain that briefly. First of all, we see John has taken up this role as the last Old Testament prophet. And as you may have this impression in your mind, oh, the Old Testament prophets, they were the ones who always preached judgment, who always talked about how everyone was doing everything wrong, and how God was going to come and bring destruction.

But interestingly, if you look at the New Testament, if you read Jesus' words carefully and with your eyes open, you will see that John is in a part of a tradition that does stretch back through the Old Testament, but stretches ahead into the very words and teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the

Apostle Paul, the Bible speaks from beginning to end that judgment is coming. But it not only says that, but it says that this judgment is good. I'll explain that to you because you may be surprised when I say that. Judgment is good because it means that people will not be loved. [10:43] Judgment is good because it means that wrongdoing will not be overlooked. We all have deep in us a sense of right and wrong, a sense of justice.

We may argue until we, as long as the day is, about what is wrong and what is right, but we all know that there is a right and wrong. And we all long for evil to stop. We all long for wrongdoers to face consequences, to be punished, or to be redeemed, but not for it to be simply overlooked. And the message of judgment in the scriptures is an important one for us to recognize. That it is not just there consistently and conspicuously, but it is actually a good message for us. And so John comes and he says, there is a judgment coming. And here's the thing, if we're an oppressed people, if we are on the receiving end of wrongdoing or evil in the world, we long for that, don't we?

[12:00] We long for King Richard to return from his travels to England and cast out that nasty Prince John.

All of this is through Disney. This is not history. This is all through Disney. Because that King Richard will come back and he will cast out Prince John who's been taxing people to death and putting people in prison and oppressing the good citizens of England. When we're on that end of evil, we long for this judgment to come. But John also sees that there are some who need to recognize that you're actually on the other side. You are the one who when God comes, he will find you wanting. He will find you to be one who is perpetrating evil in the world. He will find you whose heart is not right before God and before your fellow human beings.

This is what we see. Look with me again in the scriptures. This is what we see in verse 8 particularly. John says, bear fruit of repentance.

[13:19] That is, look to your life to see what kind of things it bears. And then he goes on and this seems to be the very heart of his warning. And interestingly, when you look at the parallel passage in Matthew, Matthew identifies that he's particularly saying these things to the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

But it seems that here, Luke chooses not to do that because it's a broader thing that he's warning them of. Jews in the first century might have felt very entitled.

I am a physical descendant of Abraham. I am a citizen of the nation of Israel. I am a regular partaker in the worship in the temple and the offering of sacrifices as I ought to.

Therefore, I must be okay with God. And religious identity. Know that you cannot be good with God simply through those things.

Those formal, external things are never enough. Your heritage as a churchgoer, your self-identity as a good person who does good things to others, these are not sufficient.

[14:39] John says, you need a life that's transformed. He even looks at, when he talks to those in verses 10 through 14, he has a whole list of people.

He has a crowd and he has tax collectors who were hated collaborators of the Roman oppressors and he has soldiers who were the means by which this oppression has been laid out.

And they come to him and they say, what do we have to do? And he says, you have to change the way you live. You have to change how you wield your power, whether it be your material belongings, your position in government, or the raw physical power of a soldier.

You may no longer use these things to oppress, but you must use them righteously and to serve others. And the warning is that being religious does not save us.

Being good does not save us. We need something else. We need a change of heart and we need a change of character. Friends, this is bad news for us potentially as well.

[16:06] You may be sitting here this morning because going to church is something you've grown up with. It's the right thing to do. As one of the great 70s theologians, Keith Green, that was a joke.

If you don't know him, he's a popular singer. But going to church doesn't make you Christian any more than going to McDonald's makes you a hamburger. attendance does not produce what church is meant to produce.

Simply being here, simply doing those, going through the motions is not enough for us. And even our good enough, whether we're not, maybe we're not churchgoers, but we're here this morning because our friend is being baptized.

baptized, even your good enough by whatever standard you have is not going to be enough. John the Baptist says what you need is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

That's what it says in verse 3. That was the core of his message. A baptism is a picture of cleansing. You need to be cleansed of something that right now you are dirty with.

[17 : 30] And that dirt is sin. And that sin is all the ways in which we fail to honor and glorify God. Tyler, thank you for your prayer this morning.

That was a beautiful expression of our understanding of sin and how our selfishness and our rejection of God and our desire to glorify ourselves and the ways that in so many petty ways we hurt others and exalt ourselves.

all the various ways in which we deny God in our lives and put ourselves at the center. All of these are expressions of sin.

For the religious people it was putting their religious performance and identity before God in the middle of their lives. And John says you must turn from these things.

The warning comes with an exhortation to repent. And repentance means to change your mind. It means to change your mind about something. What I used to think was most important.

[18 : 37] What I used to think was most central. What I used to think would make me okay with God and has failed. What I used to think would give me a good life but will put me at odds with God.

I have to turn from those things. I need to abandon the belief that those things are right and good and what God wants for me and I must turn to something else.

This is what biblical repentance is. It is seeing things the way God sees it and seeing what is wrong and what is evil and what is sinful and agreeing that those things are not good and turning from them to something else.

And that something else is not simply a right understanding of God intellectually. Not simply an uptick in our morality for this week or this month but it's the forgiveness of our sins.

Friends, this is the good news that John wants to bring. Though there is a great warning and though the king is going to come and there will be a reckoning but there is a place to turn not only turn from but there is a place to turn to and when we turn to him there is hope for us.

[20 : 09] Because many people flocked from Jerusalem. They were leaving behind the temple.

They were leaving behind the city where God was meant to dwell with his people. They knew that it was empty and they were looking for something more.

And they wondered, John, are you the one? Are you the one who's going to bring the fulfillment of all the promises? John says, no, it's not me. There's one coming after me.

One who is so much greater than I that I am even unworthy to untie his sandals. And remember, untying his sandals is not an act of honor or a display of great respect.

It was a work of a servant. It was a dirty work. It was taking off the shoes after you've lived, after you've walked around the dusty, dirty, and I mean stinky dirty, streets of Palestine.

It was not an honor to untie their shoes. It was drudge work. And John says, I'm not even worthy to do that because of the greatness of the one who comes after me.

[21 : 28] He is coming. He is going to be the one that when you see him you will see the salvation of God mentioned in verse 6. He is going to be the one who's going to come and bring a greater baptism than I do because the baptism that I do is water and it's going to clean your skin but the baptism that he's going to bring is going to be done with the Holy Spirit and it's going to clean your soul and it's going to be able to change your heart and it's going to be able to transform your life.

A turning to this one who comes after me will be turning to what you've really always longed for.

And in fact it's not just you turning to him but it's him coming for you.

Did you see it in verses 16 and 17 which John is talking about this one who's coming after him.

Verse 17 is such a powerful verse.

His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn but the chaff he will burn with the unquenchable fire. This is a picture from if you've never seen a threshing floor it's basically this platform that the harvested grain would be poured out upon and the grain had an inner meat of it that was good and an outer husk that was hard and dry and inedible and in order to separate them out the threshers would take a shovel and throw it up in the air and

the wind would blow the hard chaff that was inedible away and the good grain would fall back to the floor and then it would be gathered up and it was how grain was harvested and gathered and part of what John is saying is that when Jesus comes he will gather his own there is wheat and he will gather it there is also chaff there are those who are going through the motions there are those who are trusting in themselves there are those who are doing all these things and they will be blown away and they will find themselves on the wrong side of judgment how does

Jesus do this how do we know what Jesus is going to do what is it what is John saying well he doesn't say here but Luke knows Luke wrote the gospel to say read the rest of the story read all the way through chapter 24 for that matter read the whole other book book of Acts and I'm going to write about how this will change the world and change your life but Luke as he lays out this he says this Jesus that John is proclaiming he will come and live the perfect life that we ought to but can't he will offer himself in our place taking upon himself the wrath of God against our sin he will be cut off the axe will be laid to his root he will be cut off from God the father so that we won't be cut off from God he will take the judgment upon himself as he dies on the cross on Good

[25 : 06] Friday but he will rise again as well he will rise victorious over sin and death and the grave and he is able then to be a savior who offers to all who believe and trust in him not in their religious actions not in their goodness but who trust in him alone he comes to them as their savior and he offers them a new life and that new life is characterized by repentance and turning from sin and taking hold of this new life that God has given us it transforms our hearts and enables us to be those who love and serve others the way God has called us to so Jesus comes Jesus comes as a savior and as a judge and the question that John the Baptist put to his hearers is the question that I want to leave you with today are you ready are you ready for

Christmas are you ready for this Jesus to come he will come and to all who turn to him in repentance and faith who know the depth of their sin he will welcome but to those of us who want to stand obstinately outside who want to trust in ourselves and make our own way and be our own God he will come as a judge do you hear the warning and do you hear the hope this is what Christmas is about let's pray together Jesus we love you and we thank you for this season where we remember the incredible gift of your incarnation that you came to be our savior by identifying with us and dying for us

Lord I pray this morning that as we walk through this season that you will help us Lord that you will help us to consider the significance and the depth of what we celebrate when we celebrate Christmas and Lord I pray for many this morning I pray that the joy of the hope of salvation in Christ would fill our hearts that we would turn from the empty things of this world from the empty religiosity and the empty works that we would turn to him and find hope we pray these things in Jesus name amen