

Mighty God

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[0 : 0 0] to our Bible reading now. This is the second reading. We began this evening with Isaiah 9, verse 6. I'm going to read a few verses from Luke's gospel, chapter 3, verses 10 through to 18.

So this is the gospel according to Luke, beginning in chapter 3, and moving through to the end of verse 18, 10 to 18, 10 to 17, sorry.

I'll just set the scene. John the Baptist is out. He's preparing the way. He's preaching, and he's baptizing. And verse 10, the crowds come up to him and ask him, what then shall we do?

And he answered them, whoever has two tunics is to share with him one 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? And he said to them, collect no more than you're authorized to do. Soldiers also asked him, and we, what shall we do? And he said to them, do not exhort money from anyone by the threats or by false accusations, and be content with your wages. As the people were in 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 fire. 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 unquenchable fire. Well, may God add his blessing to his word this evening.

Well, this evening's message, if you have your Bibles, we're going to stay within Luke, and it really is a follow-on from this morning's message from Isaiah 9 verses 6 and 7.

[2 : 3 1] The part that I'm concerned about this evening, I want us all to be concerned about, is that the wonderful counselor in Isaiah is also the mighty God. Now, John the Baptist recognizes this by saying that the one who's coming is mightier than I. The one who is coming is mightier than I.

So, John has this understanding that Jesus Christ is not like him, and he is not like the people around him, but he is altogether quite different. And so, the way John gets to point out that Jesus is different is by contrasting Jesus to himself. John's saying, I can do these things. He then says, Jesus will do this. But what he's effectively saying is that the one who is coming, Jesus who is coming, like Isaiah said, is beyond the natural. That Jesus is, in fact, quantitatively different.

He's not different. He's not different in the sense that we are different from each other. Some of us are male. Some of us are female. Some of us are tall. Some of us are short.

Some of us are old. Some of us are young. They're differences, but that's not the kind of thing that John even wants you to be thinking about. He's saying, no, Jesus is altogether beyond the natural.

That he is quantitatively different. He is, like Isaiah was saying this morning, that he's wonderful. In other words, he is beyond your comprehension. And in fact, I think that if you could imagine what God is like and get God right completely, then he wouldn't be God, right? There has to be an element to the fact that God has to be beyond our comprehension in order for him to be God in the first place.

[4 : 44] Well, this is exactly what John is picturing Jesus as, that he is totally beyond the natural. And the way that he does this is by comparing Jesus, the one who's coming, to himself. Now, John is a prophet, and even though he is a prophet, he is nothing in comparison to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says that he is mightier, he is more powerful, and I am not worthy even to untie his sandals. And so this only raises one question for John. It raises perhaps more questions for his listeners, but it only raises a question for us, and that is, what is the one with all this power going to do with all this power? This one who is mightier than anybody else, who is beyond the natural, what is he going to do with that strength? What is he going to do with that mightiness, the mighty God? What does he do with his mightiness? And that's a question that I think we need to consider. Now, in order to get us to understand this, the thing that we have to do is to understand what John is able to do, and then understand what John says that Jesus is able to do. And only there do you actually get to see the extreme difference, that John is saying, I can do these things, but Jesus, well, he's altogether different.

He's going to do something far more than I can do. And the only way you're going to get to see it is by John comparing himself with Jesus. And then you'll understand why John calls Jesus the mightier one, that he is mightier than I. So here's John's ministry. John is out in the middle of the wilderness almost, not quite. He's preaching, and he's baptizing people. And it says in Luke 3, verse 7, that many people came out to him. The crowds came out to be baptized by John. But then he says this, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Which is a very interesting statement to make, because they obviously understand what the baptism is signifying.

They obviously understand John's ministry. They obviously understand that if I go out and get baptized, I am making sure that I'm going to avoid the wrath of God to come. See, John understands that.

And they, by going out, understand that that's what they're doing. Now, John's ministry precedes Jesus' ministry, obviously. He tells people that they ought to repent, that they ought to be baptized. And of course, baptism is not the confession of sin.

[7 : 48] Repentance, again, is not the confession of sin. What John says, both in the other Gospels and in this one, is that they ought to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Repentance is not about the confession of sin either, funnily enough. Repentance is solely about changing your mind.

And so when people come out to John and say, right, I'm going to get baptized. In other words, he's saying, why have you had the change of mind?

Or I know why you've had the change of mind, because you want to avoid the wrath that is coming. They understand, right? So suddenly you're faced with having to face the wrath of God, verse 7.

And you flee from the wrath of God, this is what John is saying, by coming to John the Baptist and be baptized. Well, how does baptism cause a person to flee from the wrath of God? How does baptism unto repentance cause a person to flee from the wrath of God? And more importantly, who is the wrath of God to flee from?

One wonders. So the crowds then say, hearing what John has to say, what shall we do? What shall we do? So he says to them, he gives them works of justice. Go ahead and do good things.

[9 : 17] Verse 10, he says to them, whoever of you has two tunics, whoever of you has two shirts, two tops, go and give one away. Go and share it with him who has none. Go and do a work of justice.

Whoever of you has more food than he needs, then give it to someone who doesn't have enough food. Go and share that food. Then the tax collectors, well, they want to be baptized. Why? Because, again, they're wanting to flee from the wrath of God, just like everybody else. And so he says to them, look, okay, come and be baptized, but I want you to go away and don't take any more money than you should. In other words, be just. The soldiers again come to him, and he has to say to the soldiers in the same way, right? Go away and be good. Don't take, don't exhort money, don't use your soldier status and abuse it by sort of, you know, having some kind of protection racket going off down in the streets. In other words, he's telling all these people, look, all of these things are wrong, wrong, and you need to do them right. That's repentance. Repentance is not the confession of sin.

Repentance is understanding what is true and changing your mind to that truth. Metanoia means repentance, to change your mind. And so the way he gets these people ready to meet the Lord Jesus Christ, is by getting them to see works of justice from God's point of view. That this is how God has ordered society to be, and you're not living like that. So when these people say, what shall we do?

It's no wonder John gives them a whole list of things to do. But then he says this. He says, I'll baptize you with water, but the one who is coming, the one who is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

And he basically says to the people before Jesus arrives that they are to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. So what does that mean? Because it's really quite important for understanding why Jesus comes when he does. Well, let me put it this way. It is possible to say sorry, and at the same time, still be unrepentant.

[11 : 58] I'm going to say it again, just in case it's washed over you. It is possible to say sorry, but at the same time, be unrepentant. When you say sorry, you could be admitting that what you've done is wrong.

But if you don't truly believe that it's wrong, you're just saying sorry to appease the situation, to please the person, and you're not really committed to the fact that it's wrong, you haven't changed your mind that it's wrong, then you are unrepentant.

Because repentance is all about changing your mind from what is false to what is true. And that's really crucial for when Jesus comes along.

It's really crucial for John here with the people. Many people can say sorry, perhaps even in the church. I'm sorry for the way things turned out. I'm sorry this situation happened.

I'm sorry it had to come to that. I'm sorry, right? But the sorry falls flat if it's based on a foundation of unrepentance. In other words, I haven't actually changed my view.

[13 : 08] So, I know a couple of people that decided to go to a same-sex mirage. Some of them calls them marriages.

They're not marriages, they're mirages. And the whole idea was, I'm sorry that I went because it turned out to be actually a bad witness.

Okay, but are you repentant? In other words, do you believe that that thing is right or wrong? And that's what John's getting at.

As I said this morning, it's impossible to confess your sins until it's pointed out to you that you have a sin. And the only way to point out to someone that they are sinful is to bring the truth into their life.

You change your mind. That's repentance. And so it's possible to be sorry for the way things have turned out. It's even possible to say sorry. But you can say sorry and still remain unrepentant.

[14 : 13] Because you've never truly changed your mind. You've never truly committed yourself to the truth. And that's the issue that John's got with these people. He's baptizing them unto repentance.

He's baptizing them saying, get yourself in line for the king is coming. Start changing your mind about everything that you're doing. Because the king is coming.

And he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Then, then you'll be able to confess those sins. Then you'll truly be able to come to God and confess those sins.

So John is saying, look, I will baptize you with water. That's what I'll do. But the one who is coming is mightier than I. The straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

And he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. In fact, what John is actually saying is, look, I'll baptize you with water. But anybody could do that.

[15 : 19] Okay, anybody could do that. We're going to have a baptism next Sunday evening. I'm going to show you just how easy it is to do what John the Baptist did. There's nothing special there in the sense that the way it happens.

So John is saying, look, I can baptize you with water. It's no big deal. Anybody can do that. But then he says this, the one who's coming, the one who's coming is going to do something that nobody else can do.

The one who's coming is going to be able to do something that I can't do. And the one who's coming is going to do it to you himself. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and with fire.

So what does this mean? Well, you'll notice that John begins by saying what he wants all the people to do. Do this, do that.

Soldiers, don't take any more than you should. Tax collectors, you as well, don't take any more than you should. Though you, if you have two loaves of bread, give one away. If you have a couple of jackets, make sure you give one away.

[16 : 25] These are all good works. But the moment he gets to Jesus, what does he do? He doesn't say, this is what you need to do. He says, no. The one who's beyond the natural.

The one who is quantitatively different. He's going to do something to you. He's going to come and do it for you. He's going to come and baptize you in the Holy Spirit.

He's going to come and use his winnowing fork, his winnowing fan on you. In other words, he is going to come and affect the change in your life that you cannot do yourself.

The one who's coming is quantitatively different. He is beyond the natural. He will do it for you. In other words, John knows that Jesus, that only Jesus, the mightier one, is the only one who can do anything to cause lasting change in a person's life.

You see, put it this way. If I have a fair bit of money, then I could, I guess, if I turned over a magazine and saw a picture of a crying, hungry child.

[17 : 35] Out of guilt, I might just give 20 pounds. But then as I turn the next page and I see a fancy sports car, then any guilt that I might have felt towards a child is then overtaken by perhaps a desire to have a nice fancy sports car.

In other words, that's not the kind of change that needs to happen because you'll forever be if and am in between works of goodness and works of desire. Now, what he's saying is when Jesus comes, everything's going to be burnt down to the very bottom.

Jesus is going to deal with it at the very core. He's going to affect a lasting change to do for people what they cannot do for themselves. And John's saying, look, don't look to me.

I can't do this. Because the one who's coming is going to do it for you. He's way mightier than I. They actually think that John is the Christ.

He has to point out to him that he's not the Christ. The Christ is coming. And he is the mighty God. He is the one that Isaiah speaks about. The mighty God who is the wonderful counselor.

[18 : 46] The one who is beyond the natural. He's not human in the sense that we're human. It's true that he will have flesh and blood and bones and feelings and get tired.

He's human in that sense, fully human. But he is also fully divine. He is God himself. So we're not dealing with another prophet. We're not dealing with another John.

We're not dealing with another Isaiah. We're not dealing with another Jeremiah. We're dealing with someone who is beyond all of them. But the way that he is beyond all of them is that he's not of this world.

But he is sent from God who is God himself. In other words, John is saying, look, there's come a time where God is no longer going to deal with his people through prophets and priests. That time has ended.

God used to deal with his people through intermediaries. Now he has come to deal with you himself. That's what John is saying. You're going to be dealt with God himself.

[19 : 52] So how does God deal with us? Well, both Isaiah and John understand that sin is a big problem. But it's not a problem too big for God.

Right? Sin is a massive problem. But it's not a problem that's too big for God. And so God, only God, has to come and address the problem of sin within the lives of his people.

Now here's the thing. The word sin is, forget the long word, but it's a theological word. It's sort of a Bible word. And the word sin, the concept of sin, the idea of sin can only be understood when you have a perfect God.

You remove a perfect God and sin loses all its meaning. And so if you want to truly understand how awful sin is, you have to understand in comparison to how great God is.

So John understands that the mightier one who's coming is come to deal with sin. Is come to deal with that part of people's lives that is just awful.

[21 : 02] Now here's the surprising truth. That a person who confesses their sin has already been redeemed from that sin.

A person who confesses their sin to God, as I said this morning, have already been a recipient of the divine mercy and grace to confess that sin. The Bible puts it this way, that a person, before they are saved, are dead in sin and trespasses.

Dead people are conscious of nothing. They're not conscious of the world and they're not conscious of their sin. They're conscious of nothing.

And it is by God, Son, Christ, coming into this world, working in the lives of men and women, boys and girls, that does that spark go off.

And so the confession of sin is simultaneous with the act of redemption itself. That's truly marvelous. I mean, if you could only spend an evening thinking about that.

[22 : 08] That the reason why you can confess your sins is because you have already been delivered from them. We tend to think, no, no, the confession of sin comes first and then I get free from them.

Dead people can't walk out of prison. Dead people cannot undo the chains that bind them. Dead people cannot undo the chains that bind them.

It is concerning. All right. It helps us to make sure that our lives are separated from the lives of unbelievers. But more importantly, that sin is separated from us. So here's some final thoughts. Here's as we conclude.

We ask the question, what is Jesus going to do with all that strength? That what is the mightier one going to do with all that strength that he has? John's saying, look, I can baptize you with water, but anyone can do that.

but the one who is coming is not only going to baptize you with the holy spirit in fire verse 17 his winnowing fork is in hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather the weed into his barn but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire here's here's the thing that john has here's the thing how john pitches the mightier one a threshing fan or a threshing fork does the same thing but a threshing fan is a bit like a shell shaped we uh woven basket and you throw the wheat up and as the wind blows it blows the chaff when you're left with the wheat now it's it's sort of not necessarily a comfortable process but that's the type of thing that goes on here's the interesting thing though you can't get change immediately you have to have this constant sifting over and over and over again until at some point is all the chaff removed and so what john is saying is that this mightier one who will do it for you is going to take your life into his winnowing fan and you're going to experience perhaps a little discomfort but through that discomfort is your life going to be set free from the things that corrupted all that chaff is going to be taken away as christ has you in his winnowing fan that as he baptizes you in the holy spirit that as he purifies you with a fire that comes with that that as he throws you up and down in this winnowing fan that all sorts of sin and corruption and everything that stains your life will be removed in other words john is saying look this is what he'll do for you he will do it all he will affect the change in your life that you cannot affect by yourselves but john's ministry is simply to say get in line this is the cue to getting right with god this is why he baptizes all these people who are not saved you ever wondered how strange that is there's not a single one of them are saved but he's baptizing them why because the baptism is unto repentance it's about changing your mind and getting in line with god but you can't you can't make yourself right it takes christ to come it takes christ to dip you into himself to purify you with fire and to put you through his winnowing fork and fan it takes christ to do that for you and at the end of that are you his purified and glorified forever so remember what john's saying as we finish anyone can do what i do anyone can do what i do but the one who's coming he's going to do it all for you he's going to take your life into his hands and do it all for you and here's the blessing that even this very night you're still in that winnowing fan you're still sealed with the spirit until the day of redemption and you're still going to be purified with fire that's where you are if you ever wondered where you are with christ that's where you are you're with the mightier one the wonderful counselor who is also the mighty god amen you