

TEXT: Luke 3:1-22

TITLE: Preparation for the Revelation of Jesus

THEME: Since the coming of the Lord Jesus has revealed to us the fullness of the Gospel, we can serve the Lord faithfully and point all men to Him.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever seen a morning star? Do you know what it is? It is a name for the planet Venus when it appears in the east before sunrise. When we look at it in the dark, it is so tiny and bright, but as bright as it is, it is not enough to give light and heat for the day. And it slowly disappears as the sun rises in the morning.

In the Gospels, we also see a morning star which shines brightly in the dark night, but he faded away as soon as he accomplished his job. And the star was John the Baptist (施洗约翰). Our text in front of us today tells us that John was sent ahead of the Lord in order to prepare a highway for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. John was not the central character of the Gospel, but he was only the preparer! His task was to prepare the way so that all the people would be ready to receive the Gospel! And his whole ministry served to point God's people to the Greater One who was coming, who would come to bring glad tidings to the world!

This morning, we are going to consider the passage in three sections:

1. **The Call of the Gospel (vv.1-14)**
2. **The Cause of the Gospel (vv.15-20)**
3. **The Confirmation of the Gospel (vv.21-22)**

I. **The Call of the Gospel (vv.1-14)**

Consider the context:

In the first few verses, Luke tells us that all of this happened during the dark period of time when the glorious days of David and Solomon had long passed, the Jews at this time were a desolate (凄凉的) people. Not only because they were under the rule of the wicked Tiberius Caesar, but more importantly, the Lord had not spoken to Israel for over 400 years since the prophet Malachi! The people of God had been long anticipating to hear God's word again. The Jews wanted and needed redemption (救赎), they were anticipating the coming of the Messiah (弥赛亚), the One who was prophesied in the entire Old Testament, who would come and deliver them!

a. **John the Baptist as the voice of the Gospel**

In the midst of uncertainties, we see that the Lord was ever faithful to His people, it is because God spoke to Israel again after 400 years! This time, His word came to John the Baptist in the wilderness, and he began preaching the baptism of repentance (悔改). But Luke noticed something significant in the ministry and appearance of John the Baptist, which was that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-5! A prophecy prophesied more than 800 years ago! This is significant! It is because Isaiah spoke of the promise of a preparer who would come to clear the highway for His people before the Messiah! And here, Luke was telling us that John was the fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-5! It was not because of John in appearance looked like the one whom Isaiah was talking about, but it was because of what he was doing! John was preaching and calling people to repent! Luke is telling us that John was the divine fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah! John was the voice who was calling in the wilderness of whom Isaiah spoke! In other words, John was the one filling up the valley, bringing low the mountains, making straight the crooked places and also smoothing out the rough ways! John was the one through whom God was calling His people to be prepared for the arrival of the Messiah, so that *"all flesh shall see the salvation of God!"* What an encouragement to the people of God when they saw the appearance of John, it is because God finally broke the silence after 400 years, and not only that, the prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled! Why is it so significant? It is because when the guy preparing the way is here, it means that the long-anticipated Christ was coming very soon!

b. **The Gospel's call to repentance**

But the question is: how did John prepare the way of the Lord? How did he fulfill the prophecy? Well, Luke tells us that John was fulfilling the prophecy through **the preaching of the baptism of repentance! In other words, the way of preparing for the full revelation of the Gospel was by calling man to repent!** And what exactly did John say to the people of God? **John was proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, the wrath of God was near and the nation of Israel would not escape the wrath of God!** Can you sense the urgency in John's preaching? He was telling people to repent

before it would be too late! This preaching was a stumbling block (绊脚石) to the Jews. It is because for a long period of time, the Jews thought that they would not be punished because they were the biological children of Abraham. God would not punish them on account of the covenant (约) promises He made with their father Abraham! But John was telling them that having blood relations with Abraham would not save them! God could cut them off completely and raise for Himself a new people! In order to illustrate this, John used the analogy of an axe being already laid to the root of the tree! **Telling and warning the wicked and those who refused to repent that the judgement would be more severe and terrible than before!** On top of that, John was also telling them to be baptized, which was completely contrary to all the traditions of the Jews! It is because baptism was a rite (仪式) performed by the Gentiles (外邦人) when they converted to Judaism! So, for John to tell them that their biological lineage (血统) would not save them, to repent, and also to get baptized was absolute insanity (疯狂) to the Jews!

However, we see that the crowd was moved by John's preaching! They probably noticed that John's teaching was different from the scribes (文士) and the Pharisees, and that they had not heard anything like this for a long time! Notice how the crowd responded, they said, "**what must we do?**" They did not turn away, and even the soldiers and the tax collectors also came to John and asked how they should act! **And John told them that the only way to be saved was to be baptized!** He was telling them to be baptized because the water represents the washing away of sins! But baptism was just a rite, representing **repentance, and repentance is always accompanied by a new life. It means that you have to start living differently! Why? It is because repentance was not only a change of the mind, but it was the change of the heart! Repentance means that you recognize that you are in great debt and you need God's forgiving grace! You see, this is the preparation for the Gospel, that the people's hearts must be changed, that they must abandon their wicked ways in order to be saved by the Greater One to come!** And this is the way of the Gospel! It requires repentance, without which no one could escape God's wrath!

Application:

1. Brothers and sisters, **only God's Word teaches that there is nothing you can do to earn your salvation, and that the way of salvation is by repentance.** This is the uniqueness (独特性) of the Gospel, other religions tell you what you can do to earn god's favor, or how you can pay some money to buy happiness. Only the Gospel would tell you that there is nothing you may do, but to humble yourself, repent of your sins, and cling to Christ in order to be saved.
2. Why is this call of the Gospel so important? It is because baptism alone does not save us, the way of the Gospel is a call to repentance. **A true repentance is a transformation of the heart, and it must be evidenced by the way we live our lives!** Why? These good works prove that we have been justified (被称为义) in Christ alone through faith alone, demonstrating that we are citizens of heaven. Lord's Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism (海德堡教理问答) says, "because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image, so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits, so that he may be praised through us, so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ." You see, true repentance leads us to live a Godly life, out of faith and out of gratitude! And these good works serve as a means of Evangelism (传教) .

II. The Cause of the Gospel (vv.15-20)

In the next few verses, we see that the people began to question John if he was the Christ. It was probably because the teachings of John were uncommon to what they usually heard, and his words cut straight to the hearts! But we see that John immediately pointed them to Christ! He quickly corrected them that there would be a Greater, a Mightier One coming after Him! The Greater One would not only baptize with water as John did, but He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire! What does that mean?

a. The Christ who would baptize with the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel

First of all, you know, in the old days, students did not pay their teachers. But they showed them respect and gratitude by a way of service! They would often take the shoes off for them or to wash their feet. But John was telling the Jews that the One coming would be so excellent that even John would not be worthy to untie the strap of his sandals! You see, John was aware that he was just a messenger of God, his baptism was simply preparatory (预备) for who was to come! The most John could do was to baptize people with water, but he had no access to change the hearts of men. He could only

exhort people to repent, and assure them of the forgiveness of their sins. **But the Greater One coming would have the access to the Holy Spirit and has the ability to access the hearts of man! He would have the power to purify and to sanctify (使...成圣) them through the Spirit. He would cleanse the inner most part of a man. In other words, He would soften the hearts of man as he wished, and grant them mercy as He willed.** And this tells us that He might be able to do so because the Holy Spirit was His Spirit.

b. The Christ who would baptize with fire

Then John also said that the Greater One coming would come to baptize with fire! What does that mean? First, fire has the meaning of refining and sanctifying. It means that Christ would come to sanctify those who would repent of their sins! But it also has another meaning, which is that Christ would come with judgement. And it is explained by John's illustration in verse 17. He said that Christ would hold a winnowing fan (簸箕) in His hand and thoroughly cleanse the threshing floor (打谷场). But what does the analogy mean? Well, in the old days, workers would use the fork to throw harvested grain into the wind, letting the grains fall directly to the ground while the chaff (糠皮) blew away. And when the harvest was finished and the grain were all gathered, the workers would burn the threshing floor with all the chaffs in it, because they were no use to them. In other words, John was speaking of judgement! The day would come when the wheat would all be gathered, the chaffs which were left in the threshing floor would be burned, and not just with fire, but with unquenchable (不可熄灭的) fire, which signified the burning wrath of God! That is why the Jews needed their hearts to be renewed and that is why they needed the forgiveness of sins! Not because they needed extra grace, but because they needed the forgiveness of their sins! **So what John was telling the crowd was that the Christ would come with the double-edge sword (双刃剑) : a sword of sanctifying grace on one end, and judgement on the other! Those who put their faith in Him would receive grace, but those who reject Him would be severely judged.**

Application:

1. **Knowing the severity of God's wrath should motivate us to preach the Gospel!** Brothers and sisters, if God's wrath is burning hot, judgement will also be severe! This should give us an urgency to preach! How can others know about their dangerous position if we don't go and tell? God has called us to be instruments to speak his Word! We are His ambassadors (使者)! So, let us be preach with all boldness, so that many more may hear and rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!
2. **Be ready to be mocked and be ready to take the cost!** Later on in the text, we see that Luke concludes by telling us that John was imprisoned by Herod because he reprovved him for taking his brother's wife and for the evil things he did. But this also tells us there is a cost for faithful preaching of the Gospel...which is that we may be mocked and be persecuted...But we must remember that we are called to be faithful children of Christ, maybe speaking the truth (of course we must speak with all wisdom and grace) in our workplace and in our families would cost us our jobs or our relationships, but when we faithfully speak the truth, Christ is honored and glorified.

III. The Confirmation of the Gospel (vv.21-22)

In the last two verses, Luke shifts the focus from John to Jesus! And Luke gives us an account of the baptism of Jesus. This is a rapid shift, but Luke cannot wait any more and he tells us something remarkably important, that Jesus was also being baptized, and after Jesus was baptized, the heaven opened up! And the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove in a bodily form! But what does that mean? Well, in the OT Scripture, a dove symbolized purity, innocence and loveliness. So, in this case, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the shape of a dove, this not only symbolized the loveliness, the holiness and the innocence of the Lord Jesus, but that Jesus was the chosen instrument of God who would accomplish the work redemption! This echoed Isaiah 42:1, "*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.*" So, you see, the descension of the Spirit of God not only described that Jesus was indeed the Messiah Servant about whom Isaiah spoke, but was also an indication that the Messiah-Servant is here. He has arrived to do the will of the Father!

More than that, Luke also tells us that after the descending of the Holy Spirit, a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." This is significant! This is **a public declaration of the identity of Jesus, as the Son of God!** It also echoed what the psalmist said in Psalm 2:7 when he sang of the Messianic Figure, he said, "*I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'*" **What the psalmist was saying is that the Messiah would not only be David's Son, but also the very Son of God!** So, you see, this verse is telling us that Jesus was

indeed the One of whom the psalmist spoke! And not only the Son of God, but the Only Beloved Son of God! It is because **He obediently accepted to accomplish the work of redemption which the Father had called Him to do, which was to suffer on behalf of His people to die on the Cross.** You see, that is why He was called God's Beloved Son, because He perfectly obeyed the will of the Father!

Brothers and sisters, this is the confirmation of the Gospel! Luke is **telling us that Jesus is the One** toward whom the whole ministry of John was pointing! You see, John's words were just empty words without the fulfillment of it! And Jesus was the fulfillment of his words, who would come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and Fire! Not only that, Luke was also telling us that Jesus was the One who was being spoken of in the entire Old Testament! He was the long-anticipated Messiah! Jesus was the One promised to forever sit on the throne of David, and the Servant of whom Isaiah spoke who would be pierced for their transgressions and would be crushed for their iniquities!

Application:

1. **The opening of heaven signified the mediation (中保) work of Jesus Christ!** This is significant! It is because this tells us that He who parted the water to lead His people out of the land of Egypt in order to make a way for the people of God into Canaan, was now parting the heavens in order to open the door to the heavenly Canaan! This means that we can be assured that every obstacle that might hinder our return to God have been removed by the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ Jesus, the heaven has been opened to us! Jesus is the way for us to go to the Father's eternal home!
2. **Here in the baptism of Jesus, we can see here the full, clear, and sensible demonstration of the Trinity (三位一体)!** It demonstrated to us that the work of redemption involved the work of all Three Persons of the Trinity! We see that in the work of creation, and now we see this once again at Christ's baptism! How glorious!
3. **We need to remember our baptism. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, Jesus was baptized in order to identify with us!** You see, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, but Jesus was not a sinner! He did not have to be baptized! But He did so in order to identify Himself with us! He who had no sin was baptized in order to identify with us, a bunch of filthy rags. He did so in order to save us, so that when we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are joint in union with Him in His death and resurrection!

CONCLUSION

In conclusion to our sermon, we see here that the Lord sent John the Baptist ahead of Him to prepare for the Gospel, through urging to repent along with a water baptism, which ultimately signified the greater baptism in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we also see that John pointed the people of God to the promise of the Greater One who would come with a greater baptism associated with the Holy Spirit and fire. And we also see that just as the morning star disappears as the sun rises up from the East, we also see that John the Baptist gave way to the Lord Jesus, who manifested to us the full revelation of the Gospel through His Baptism and the divine declaration as the Beloved Son of God! And finally, this was the mark of the beginning of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus, who would later resist the temptation of the Devil, who would open the eyes of the blind and cause the lame to rise, and ultimately, He was the One who voluntarily became the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world!

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, are you rejoicing in the Gospel because the fullness of God's redemption has been revealed through the Son of God? While the Saints of the Old Covenant rejoiced in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus by faith through the means of the foreshadows (预表) and types, we as saints of the New Covenant can now look back at the whole of Redemptive History and rejoice because Jesus has come and revealed to us the fullness of the Gospel. Jesus is indeed confirmation of the Old Testament, He is indeed the Seed of Abraham, the True Israel, and the Pascal Lamb who took away all our sins! And this is the Gospel that the Lord has called us to preach to all the nations, the Gospel concerning the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. You are called to be an ambassador for Christ, you are the instrument by which the Lord calls the lost to faith. And when we have to speak God's Word, our words are powerful only because the Spirit of God is working through us. May we put our full confidence in the Gospel and begin to live a life of reflection of our confidence in Christ, pointing our unbelieving friends and families to Christ. Amen.

Let us pray.