

Everyone Will Be Baptized (Luke 3:15-20)

1. The Context of Repentance (v.1-2)

- Luke, as a historian, lists seven rulers and leaders covering the political, governmental, and religious oversight of the Roman occupation of Israel (v.1-2).
- Luke's audience in the mid-first century would have been familiar with these names and had intimate knowledge of their policies.
- It was an exceedingly dark time of corruption, violence, and self-indulgence. Despite the privation and exploitation of the populace from those in authority, God brings salvation by raising leaders, like John the Baptist, to call the people to repentance.

2. The Call of Repentance (v.2-6)

- After four hundred years of silence since Malachi, the "word of God" (v.2) came to John in the wilderness.
- He proclaimed a "baptism of repentance."
- Baptism of Repentance (v.3)
 - While Jews washed themselves of their ceremonial uncleanness and proselytes (Gentiles) washed and were circumcised, this was a new baptism.
 - John's baptism in the Jordan river was temporary and preparatory to the pouring out of the New Covenant at Pentecost (Acts 2; 19:1-5).
 - There is no grace or salvific power in the water baptism, either from John, Jesus, or any other disciple through water baptism.
- John's ministry, as a herald, inaugurated Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 40:3-5) by announcing the coming of the Lord in all His splendor. He describes mountains as being leveled and valleys being raised as a metaphor:
 - Splendor and majesty: make as much room as possible for the coming Lord.
 - Salvation: the prideful (mountains) and the low (brokenhearted) will be placed on level ground.
- John's message to the people's curiosity is simple: repent and be baptized.

3. The Clarity of Repentance (v.7-14)

- Through John's preaching (v.3), people came out to be baptized by him (v.7). Three groups met him near the river Jordan: the crowd, tax collectors, and soldiers.
- John, in loving urgency:
 - A. rebuked them for their hypocrisy (v.7-8): as deceitful "vipers," all the crowds wanted to do was escape judgment. They rely on their nationality and pedigree as sons of Abraham. They have attended this baptism as another "check" on their list of religious acts.
 - B. warned them of the coming judgment in their hypocrisy (v.9): if they continue to display no fruit of genuine faith, they will be cut down and "tossed into the fire."

When the people ask, "what shall we do?" (v.10), John gives practical and ethical directions to the:

- A. Crowds (v.11): share your food and personal belongings with those in need.
- B. Tax collectors (v.12-13): tax what you need to survive and no more.
- C. Soldiers (v.14): stop using your authority to threaten and extort people.

John did not call them to quit their occupation but instead summoned them to have a God-centered ethic in refusing to extort their fellow man. This fulfillment of the Mosaic Law (Matt. 22:36-40) is the "fruit of repentance." He commands them to live out their repentance where God has placed them.

4. The Contemplation and Condition of Repentance (v.15-17)

- John uses the metaphor of baptism to contrast external baptism and internal baptism.
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is akin to regeneration.
- As the crowds inquire whether John is the Christ (Messiah), he says "no." He replies, "I am not worthy to untie His sandal."
 - It was customary for a rabbi to have students (disciples) who followed him everywhere. Disciples demonstrated their commitment to their rabbi by performing even the most menial task. A rabbi's disciples did everything for him, and his disciples' service assessed the rabbi's competency.
 - One act of service that Jews did not carry out: unloose the thongs on his sandals. This was the role of a servant, typically a Gentile.
- Loosening the Messiah's sandal was above John! He was unworthy of even that.
- Jesus' baptism is superior to his, for Jesus will baptize with the "Holy Spirit and fire." What is the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire? Historically, three options:
 - A. This is one event that occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and ushered in the gifting of apostles and disciples of the New Testament church.
 - B. Baptism of the Holy Spirit (regeneration/positional sanctification) and fire (progressive sanctification and cleansing of sin) describe the positional and practical life of the one who repents.
 - C. Since John had with him a mixed company (v.7), the Holy Spirit will regenerate some (baptism) while fire (judgment) will fall on the others who do not "bear fruit with repentance" (v.8-9; 17).
- John is addressing the mixed company (c): those who will demonstrate the fruit of repentance (v.8), birthed by the work of the Holy Spirit, to those who will remain "vipers" (v.7) that are deceived in their spiritual status and standing.
- When wheat is harvested, the animals would tread on it, crushing the head of the grain. The grain is separated from the outer shell (chaff) when the kernel is crushed.
- The farmer would then take his winnowing fork (wooden trident) and toss the crushed grain. The wheat fell to the ground while the chaff was collected (typically in a barn).
- The grain shell (chaff) was used for fuel to be burned.
- Those who repent (v.3), live a God-ward ethic (v.10-14), and who display the fruits of repentance (v.9) are the wheat (v.17), while the unrepentant deceived (v.7) are unfruitful (v.9) and reckoned as chaff (v.17). They will be "cut down" (v.9).
- John's message is clear: everyone will be baptized. It will be either by the Holy Spirit or fire: regeneration or damnation.

5. The Consequence of Repentance (v.18-20)

- What is the consequence of this "baptism of the Holy Spirit"?
 - Repentance and a Godward ethic (v.3, 9-14).
- As John went into the Jordan wilderness, he also rebuked Herod (v.3; 18) for his marriage and incest drama (Lev 18:16;20:21).
- When sin is confronted, sinners either turn from their wickedness or silence the voice.
- Herod arrested John because John publicly rebuked him for his sin (v.20).
- John is no different from Moses and Pharaoh, Elijah and Ahab/Jezebel, Nathan and David, and Ezekiel with the kings of Babylon.
- Godly men and women are the consciences of their sphere of influence, who will either accuse or excuse the conduct.
- While the church is not the state, it is to be conscience of the state by urging a Godward ethic birthed from faith in Jesus Christ. This is good news (v.18).
- When done faithfully, there will always be two groups: those who repent and turn from their sins (v.10-14) and those who want to silence the voice (v.20).