

1. People wonder if John is the "Messiah" (Christ)
 - a. Expectation
 - i. They were hoping that the Deliverer had arrived
 - ii. There was such a longing for a Champion
 - b. deliberating in their hearts
 - i. debating, reasoning, contemplating
 - ii. in the core of their being, they wondered if this was the One

2. John delineates between himself and the Christ
 - a. John labels Jesus "the Stronger One than me"
 - i. This relationship between strength and redemption is a common OT idea
 - ii. "Your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" – Isa 49:26; 60:16
 - iii. "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save" (Zeph 3:17)
 - b. Jesus is mightier in three primary ways:
 - i. Mightier One brings a mightier baptism than John
 1. Holy Spirit and fire
 - a. This relationship between the Spirit and fire is only coupled once in the OT promises, and it is in Isaiah, the 5th gospel of which Luke is obviously relying heavily upon
 - b. Isa 4:4 – spirit of fire and a spirit of burning in cleansing and in judgment
 2. The coming of the Holy Spirit is the coming of the judgment of God
 - a. Those of repentant faith in the Strong One – cleansing fire
 - b. Those who refuse to come undone to the Strong One – judgment of fire
 - c. One Spirit – One Fire – Two Outcomes
 3. This corresponds well to the "winnowing fork" analogy that John draws upon next – judgment to salvation and judgment to destruction based upon the nature of that which is tossed by the "winnowing fork", i.e. Jesus
 - a. Wheat – gathered into the barn
 - b. Chaff – burned up with fire
 4. Luke is focusing again on the presence, power, and pouring out of the Holy Spirit as the sign of the coming of God's promised Kingdom
 - a. Jesus, as the baptizer in the Spirit, is the coming King
 - b. As the King comes, so the Kingdom comes, and this is evidenced by the pouring out, or baptism of, the Spirit of God
 - i. Ezek 36:22-36; 39:29
 - ii. Isa 32:14-17; 44:1-6
 - iii. Joel 2:28-32
 - c. This is why I believe the Kingdom of God arrived when the King arrived, and the "beginning", as Peter put it, was when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost (Acts 11:15) as the continuation of Jesus' baptism of the Spirit ministry
 5. The Strong One's baptism of the Spirit and fire is one of division
 - a. "winnowing fork"
 - i. Type of pitchfork which one would use to throw the threshed grain up into the air so that the wind would blow away the lighter chaff
 - ii. The heavier grains would fall to the ground

- b. The idea is that the Christ would immerse the people in the Spirit and in fire which both cleanses and condemns
 - i. Cleanses the grain
 - ii. Burns up, or consumes, the chaff
 - c. The differentiation between the two types is repentant hearts, trust in the Strong One, as evidenced by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit's cleansing work, i.e. obedience and fruit in keeping with repentance
 - ii. Mightier One is more worthy than John
 - 1. Not even worthy to untie His sandals
 - a. The untying of sandals was the job of the slaves
 - 2. It was an extremely humiliating task
 - a. So humiliating, that Jews wouldn't let a Hebrew servant do it at all because it was too humiliation for a brother
 - b. John says that he isn't even worth comparing to as a foreign slave to a Hebrew Master
 - 3. This is an exclamation of the Christ's authority over him, honor that is far beyond him, and the worship that is due the Christ (hence, the "lower than the feet" idea)
 - iii. Mightier One is the Judge of all the earth
 - 1. Luke uses this "mightier" analogy in the judgment against the spiritual forces of darkness (Luke 11:21ff) – the Strong Man binds up and throws down the enemy
 - 2. In fact, other than describing the strength of a famine, this is the only other Lucan usage of the term
 - 3. This shows the superior right, power, and authority of Jesus over all things: whether physical (he healed), spiritual (he cast out demons), or religious (he is lord of the Sabbath)
 - c. John prepared for Jesus' ministry, and did not parallel it
 - i. As such, his exhortations of the gospel must have included these comparative terms
 - ii. "He who is coming is Stronger than me"
3. The Message of the King Who Divides is Good News
 - a. many exhortations
 - i. "parakaleo" –to urge action
 - 1. To urge or beg
 - a. (Matt 8:5) – the Centurion "cried out" to Jesus to heal his servant
 - b. (Mark 1:40) – the leper begged Jesus to heal him, "if you are willing"
 - c. (Luke 8:31) – the demons He dispossessed beg Him not to send them to the abyss
 - 2. To comfort or encourage
 - a. (Luke 16:25) – Lazarus is "comforted" in Abraham's bosom
 - b. (Acts 20:12) – Eutycus, upon being revived through Paul, his family were greatly comforted
 - 3. The basic idea is to bring news and an invitation to action (in that order)
 - ii. John's ministry was one of a loud crying out for transformation because of the coming of the Kingdom of God
 - 1. This is love!!
 - 2. It is loving to warn people of real and imminent danger: the alcoholic to turn from his drink, the child to flee from the waterfall, the blind man to move away from the ledge, etc.

3. The calling out, exhorting, to repentance is the ministry of love
- iii. To exhort people away from that which will destroy them is the highest of preaching calls, and nothing destroys the soul like sin!!
 1. We cannot be afraid that an exhortation to flee the coming wrath of God, to flee from sin which seeks to master my beloved, will somehow upset people
 2. If we care, we ought to warn them
 - a. This does not mean to belittle them or to scare them needlessly, but we may want to consider scaring them needfully with the truth that sin destroys them and give them hope that though God is opposed to the proud, He gives grace to the humble
 - b. This also does not mean that every person is a John, a preacher in the wilderness, but we all do play some part in the revelation of the Kingdom of God and the truth of His mercy to those who will humbly receive Him on His terms
- b. He preached gospel to the people
 - i. It is "good news" because God is merciful and gracious to the humble
 1. John is not merely revealing sin, but showing the way out through the mercy of God
 2. It is good news when somebody wakes you up from a deep sleep and says to you, "Quick! The hotel is on fire, but there is still time to get out. I'll show you the way!"
 - ii. It is "good news" because God is merciful to the humble from all nations
 1. It is good news for the outcast, the fringe, the weak nations
 2. How would it be good news if God were only merciful to the Jews, or rich people, or white folk, or Beaver fans?!
 3. The way is open to all for salvation because no human distinction is a precondition for God's mercy: His mercy is based upon His sovereign grace and He gives it freely to all who come to him in repentant faith
 - iii. It is "good news" because John's exhortations give assurance that we belong to God
 1. The fruit that the Holy Spirit bears up in keeping with repentance give us some evidence that our hearts are being changed
 2. Thus, when we see fruit, we can know that we truly *know* Him (1 John 2:3)
 - iv. The good news includes that great joy in the Lord's rescue of us
 1. There is no joy like the joy of a released prisoner, or one who felt the imminence of doom and was plucked from the fire
 2. Thus, John gives us the path to the greatest joy in the salvation of the Lord, in this life and the next

4. The Unrepentant Respond to the Gospel of Rescue with Anger

- a. Herod locked him up in prison
 - i. word used by Paul to describe his pre-Christian work
- b. Why?
 - i. John called out Herod for marrying his brother's wife
 1. Matt 14
 - ii. He "exposed" it as evil, showed its sinfulness
 1. Eph 5:11; 1 Tim 5:20; 1 Cor 14:24
 2. Remember, that John's ministry was one of "urging or begging" according to the gospel of God's merciful rescue
 3. So, we see here that John's exposure of Herod's sin was not merely to humiliate him before the people, but rather was an urging of a friend to see

God rightly, to be saved from God's wrath, to truly live a life of joy, according to gospel

- iii. Thus, this exposure of Herod's sin was a deep act of love for Herod
- c. Sometimes the response to loving exhortation is hatred, self-defense, and acts of violence in word or deed
 - i. The darkness hates the light and the light exposes the evil deeds of darkness
 - ii. When you love somebody enough to warn them of imminent danger, sometimes they will love their dangerous deeds more than they will love the light of life
 - iii. Sin is a powerful deceiver and takes a powerful work of God to open blinded eyes
- d. Our love for the Lord does not mean that we change hearts, and our faithfulness to Him and our honor of Him does not mean that we must open eyes or move people to humility
 - i. Our honor of the Lord is to reveal Him rightly, to proclaim His good news in Christ
 - ii. We are not responsible for people's reactions or people's decisions, nor should we bear the responsibility for these
 - iii. The Spirit of Jesus Christ is the only one who can open blinded eyes, make the lame to walk rightly, set the prisoners free, and draw the people to the glory of God (
- e. The end of John's ministry of preparing the way for the LORD gives an indication of where the Christ will end up, too.
 - i. They imprisoned John, they will imprison Jesus
 - ii. They killed John, they will kill Jesus
 - iii. They hated and killed the prophets, so with John and even more so with the Son (Luke 20:9-18)
 - iv. Jesus holds this solidarity with John precious, and when John is killed by Herod, Jesus withdraws by Himself to a desolate place

Little did John know that the Mighty One would save His people, cleanse His people by His blood. This mighty judge of all the earth would submit Himself to the violence of the unrepentant so that His Father might pour out His holy wrath upon His shoulders instead of ours! John, though full of the Holy Spirit, and humbled by the majesty of Jesus, did not even comprehend how great His love and His majesty went. The Mighty One humbled Himself for us! This holy, sovereign God always in the right, submitted to our wrath and ugliness. In true gospel irony, it is God's grace in the crucifixion of His Son in my place that truly moves me to repentance. His kindness moving with swift violence in my heart to slay my self-trust. It was His love that killed my stubbornness and His mighty power poured out in the Holy Spirit raised this dead man to life. This is my King. How can I not be humbled by such mighty acts of grace?! As I see more and more the greatness, majesty, and holiness of God against the backdrop of my own sinful heart and my deservedness of the Hellfire reserved for chaff does the gospel of the crucified Messiah in my place become the sweet song of my grateful heart. Thus, I will endeavor every day to see His holiness, perfection, unattainable grandeur, the severity and depth of my sin with open eyes, and the glories and excellencies of the cross of Christ and His resurrected life for the promises of the Holy Spirit to cleanse and transform me so that my God will be praised from these unworthy lips. Milton Vincent says it best:

“Preaching the gospel to myself each day mounts a powerful assault against my pride and serves to establish humility in its place. Nothing suffocates my pride more than daily reminders regarding the glory of my God, the gravity of my sins, and the crucifixion of God's own Son in my place. Also, the gracious love of God, lavished on me because of Christ's death, is always humbling to remember, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the Hell I deserve.”

-Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer*