

1. God's Work and Word are Historical, not Metaphors, Myths, or Fables
 - a. Luke roots John's ministry in the historical political and spiritual context
 - i. Seven rulers listed in priority
 1. common way of dating in ancient times
 2. Also fits John in as a prophet, where prophets were also dated according to the rulers who reigned at their time (Isa 1, Jer 1, Amos 1, etc.)
 - ii. 15th year of Tiberius' reign = 27-28AD
 1. Tiberius ruled from a distance, being a scholar who studied at Rhodes when his stepfather, Caesar Augustus, apparently was grooming his grandson to take his place
 2. Tiberius was an effective military general, too
 3. The typical Augustinian way of ruling was to place regional rulers over conquered peoples (prefects) and military rulers (legates)
 - a. Legates were typically more important and more powerful than prefects
 - b. Pontius Pilate was a prefect (administrative ruler)
 - iii. Tetrach = regional ruler put in place and supported by Rome, yet not Roman
 1. Anitpater, Herod's grandfather, received the authority to rule Judea (Idumea) from Augustus from helping to quell an uprising in Syria
 - a. under his son, Herod the Great, Judea enjoyed great economic growth and he oversaw the reconstruction of the Temple and the expansion of Jerusalem
 - i. This would have given Herod the Great much praise among the Jews
 - b. when Herod the Great died in 4BC, his kingdom was split among his three sons
 - i. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee/Perea as a tetrarch to 39AD
 - ii. Archelaus received Judea and Samaria until he was banished in 6AD (he died in 18AD)
 1. When he was banished, his region came under a varied succession of Roman prefects (Pilate was a prefect)
 - iii. Philip ruled the northern Transjordan area
 2. This is the complex political situation in which John ministered.
 - iv. He also mentions two spiritual leaders, the high priests Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas
 1. Interesting, Luke uses a singular "high priest" when referring to two people
 - a. Josephus mentions a "college" of high priests, indicating that one may have held the title for life, much like the President of the US
 - b. More likely, however, is that while Annas officially held the office from 6-15AD and Caiaphas soon after up to 36AD, Annas held great power "behind the scenes" even while his son-in-law was the official high priest.
 - c. We see this evidenced in John 18:13-27
 2. Luke is revealing how the priesthood actually functioned during this time
 - a. We must remember that simply because the priesthood was inaugurated by God as the forerunner to the Great High Priest, Jesus, it does not necessarily follow that the high priests were righteous or pure in their leadership
 - b. What we see is a political and spiritual leadership that is in a state of tension over power and control of the future of the spiritual and political state of the Jewish people
 - v. Luke mentions all of this because Theophilus was a Roman official, thus he would be accustomed to the rulers and their positions, placing this story in its time and context
 - b. God works in actual history, with actual historical people in historical places to accomplish His redemptive plan in reality
 - c. The Word of God Came to John
 - i. John's authority and his message came not from himself, but from God
 - ii. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, now we see the Holy Spirit bringing His Word to bear in John's ministry
 - d. This also puts him squarely in the context of the prophets, similar with the OT proclaimers
 - i. Jer 1:2; Isa 38:4; Eze 1:3; Zech 1:1

2. The Gospel Begins With a Message of Repentance

- a. 1:16-17 explains what this message of repentance entailed
 - i. "repentance" (*metanoia*) is the translation of the Aramaic word, "*shuv*", which means "to turn"
 1. Even now, upon hearing the word "to turn" think behaviorally
 2. But, repentance, while definitely including behavior transformation, goes much deeper to "the root of the tree", the heart
 - ii. Repentance is the turning of the heart
 1. "turn many of the children of Israel to the LORD..."
 2. "turn the *hearts* of fathers to children..."
 3. "turn the *hearts* of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just..."
- b. Repentance is the "turning of the *heart*" from "disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous"
 - i. This was the preaching of John: turn your hearts to the LORD, set your affections upon Him so that you love the things He loves, thus walking in the way that is consistent with His holy character and Word
 - ii. "Forgiveness of sins" is what is promises to those who entrust themselves to the LORD in this way
- c. What Repentance *is*:
 - i. Seeing clearly and honestly
 1. Sees how deep our sin really goes
 - a. Not merely faux pas, slips, but rebellion and an inner desire to be God (mutiny)
 - b. Seeing sin as rooted deep within me as a master who enslaves me, a natural bent of my soul
 2. "Brood of Vipers"
 - a. This is not a modern evangelistic technique
 - b. John uses the term "brood", which indicates parentage
 - i. What he is saying is that those who come out to see him and hear him in the wilderness are children of a single father
 - ii. But it's not Abraham, as they would have assumed, thus they are not to claim their heritage as Abraham's descendents
 - c. He calls them "sons of the serpent"
 - i. Like their father, the serpent
 - ii. This would have been a punch in the face type of accusation to the Jewish people: sons of the Serpent, sons of the Devil?!
 1. But we are sons of Abraham
 2. Jesus makes the same accusation against those who would not humble themselves, too, in John 8:42-47
 - d. Thus, John tells the truth that there are only two families (1 John 3:7-10): the children of Satan and the children of God, and the nature of each is revealed by their fruit
 - i. Children of Satan: Pride which works deeds of unrighteousness (inconsistent with the character of God) and self-determined sin
 - ii. Children of God: Humble which produces fruit of righteousness (consistent with character of God) and God-ward obedient works
 - ii. Recognizing God as the Sovereign Giver of All Grace
 1. "Who told you...?"
 - a. John strongly implies here that one does not draw himself toward salvation, but rather is drawn by another
 - b. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching that it is the Father who draws all who come to Him for salvation (John 6:44)
 - c. John is placing the impetus for our repentance, the fleeing from God's wrath, and the humble dependence upon God for our salvation squarely in the realm of God's sovereign and irresistible grace

2. Repentance recognizes nothing within myself, even the wisdom of my choice, as finding its source within me, but from outside of me rooted in the sovereign wisdom, grace, and love of God
- iii. Turning away from His wrath
 1. To turn towards God in faith (reliance/dependence), you must turn away from trusting in other things (idols)
 2. Not *perfection*, again, but rather a consistent turning away from that which cannot deliver and dishonors the God who gives grace, to the LORD in powerlessness
 3. “to flee from the coming wrath?”
 - a. Again, John makes it clear, speaking to Jews, that their Jewishness has not led them to escape the coming wrath of God
 - i. We can apply this to all men, who trust in their position or their performance, apart from the total grace and mercy of God, that these things do not give us escape from the coming wrath of God
 - b. It is also important to note that John doesn’t steer clear of this truth, but boldly proclaims that God has wrath, it is coming, and it can be escaped from
- iv. Running from sin by the Holy Spirit
 1. Trusting in Christ as the King with all wisdom, knowledge, power to rule you the way you are made to be
 2. Running from sin as an enemy which desires to master you, rule you to death
 3. We do not embrace sin, make excuses for sin, belittle the significance of sin, for we are children of holiness, children of God
 - a. You cannot have peace with God and make peace with His enemy (sin)
 - b. Children of God have war with sin (Rom 8:3-4; Gal 5) because the Holy Spirit of God is in them doing battle against it
- v. Coming undone – humble giving up of self-power
 1. Repentance is brokenness of our own strength, a *complete distrust* of our own ability, wisdom, righteousness coming under the righteous authority and mercy of God in the *completely sufficient* person and work of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin and as a King to whom we submit
 - a. Isa 6 – “I am undone” “ruined” “torn apart”
 - b. Rom 7 – distrust of my own heart, in which sin still dwells to deceive me, thus I must submit my own heart’s understanding to the Word
 - c. Luke 18:10-14 – “be merciful to me, *the sinner!*” – went away justified
 - d. 1 John 3:18-20 – love in word, deed, and truth and even when our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts
 2. Think of it this way: Faith is “putting all of our weight upon Christ”. If faith is putting all of our weight upon Jesus, then repentance is the buckling of our knees. Everything is placed upon Christ. Thus, repentance is not a “thing” or a “doing” but rather an “undoing” or a coming undone. One wouldn’t consider the buckling of our knees to be a work, but rather a ceasing from work in order to fully rely upon the work of the Other, Jesus.

3. Repentance Bears Fruit

- a. John then calls those who repent to demonstrate this changing of affections, of worship, by being baptized in the Jordan
 - i. This was an offensive statement to the Jewish people
 1. The only baptism that the Jews would have been familiar with was proselyte baptism, which is for Gentiles to come into the covenant community
 2. So, for John to call Jews to be baptized is to say to them that their Jewishness is not adequate for their inclusion in the covenant, but only repentance suffices
 3. In a sense, he said that they’re not really Jews unless their hearts were changed, no matter their outward works or their bloodline
 - ii. This baptism was open for *all peoples, not only Jews*

1. This is evidenced by the fact that Luke quotes Isaiah 40:3, but even more particularly he includes the quote from vv4-5 (which Matthew and Mark do not)
2. Why these included verses?
 - a. "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
 - b. Luke is emphasizing that just as one's Jewishness does not make one acceptable to God, neither does one's Gentileness keep one from God
 - c. All who repent and bear fruit with that repentance are children of God, no matter one's race or former religious community
3. This is also consistent with the word that Luke includes here, "salvation"
 - a. This word is only used three times by Luke (and once by Paul in Eph 6)
 - b. All three times have to do with God's salvation of all peoples, of Gentiles
 - i. Luke 2:29-32 "my eyes have seen your salvation, which is prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel."
 - ii. Acts 28:28 – "let it be known to you that this salvation has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen"
- b. Bear fruit in line with such heart transformation
 - i. All the "commands" in John's response to the question of v10 are not to be taken as absolute *particular* commands, as if these three things are the sum total of repentant actions, but rather as types of works which evident a repentant humble heart
 1. Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God
 - ii. This heart humility will be evidenced (fruit comes from the heart/nature of the tree) by works that are consistent with the works of God
 1. Wealthy: Generosity with compassion
 2. Fiscally Powerful: Integrity in your work according to truth and justice
 3. Physically Powerful: Contentment, mercy, grace according to trust in the LORD
 4. Each of these groups was Jewish, not Roman, most likely
- c. Trees produce fruit consistent with their "hearts"
 - i. If a tree doesn't produce the right fruit, it is cut down
 1. Thus, the axe lies at the root of the tree
 2. You can't glue figs on a brier and call it a fig tree
 - ii. There is a time coming when God will uproot the wrong type of trees and will plant in its place the right type of tree
 1. What are the type uprooted?
 - a. Selfish, proud, self-dependent, self-centered, self-reliant, unrighteous
 2. What are the type that are planted?
 - a. God-centered, God-glorifying, humble, dependent, self-powerless, servants of righteousness

It is important, lastly, to note that John's message of repentance was not complete, but rather pointed to its completion by the Christ. Thus, his baptism is inadequate (hence the need for John's disciples in Ephesus to be baptized in Jesus' name), but there is one coming who is adequate and in whom you can place your trust. John baptized with water as a sign of repentance, but the Coming One would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with purifying/proving fire, being much greater than John and the hope for the repentant heart as the One who could truly save from God's wrath and transform the sons of the serpent into the sons of God.

Jesus is Ultimate Hope for the Humble

Repentance is humility – an absolute mistrust of oneself and complete reliance upon the goodness, the power, the strength, and the works of Christ for all things

God's wrath is against sin, and thus those who know that they are sinners look for salvation, completely rescue from the sin within and the wrath without. It is in Jesus Christ that we find such rescue. The rescue of a loving God who saves us from His own holy wrath; the One whom, by His beloved Son's death on the cross, justly

pays down our sin-debt against Himself; the One whom, by His Son's resurrection of life, transfers us from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have all the privileges and responsibilities as citizens of Heaven; the One whom, by His grace, has adopted us as His own, giving us the full inheritance of sonship and the privileges and responsibilities of being in the very family of the God full of all excellencies. He knits the repentant to Himself and thus blesses them with the sum total of all good things: His very Holy Spirit.

Luke shows us, as he will continue to do, that humility is the hallmark of those who belong to Christ. So, if you want to come near to God in Christ, the forerunner is repentance. Humility is the defining mark of God-fearers, of the faithful, of the God-possessed. Bear fruit in keeping with this humble repentance, thinking less of yourself and more of God. See His mercy in its fullness, His glorious and unfathomable grace and power towards those who believe. When you lay your power down, your rights down, and your glory down before the Holy One of God, you find in His Son the sum of all power is for you and His sacrifice and His rule is ever-sufficient for the humbled sinner.

Fear not, little flock. Your father is God and He delights to give to you His kingdom. (Luke 12:32)