

## The Message of John (Luke 3:7-18)

John the Baptist's message – a message for all ages – is essentially the same message as the prophets of old: turn your lives around, because our God and our Savior is coming. Israel's wait is over, and so John prepares the people to meet their Messiah. However, repentance is more than just a change of attitude. It must be expressed through action. The people are to greet their coming King with transformed lives.

So, John preached about **seven** things. **First**, John talked about condemnation. Let me make note of **two** things. **One**, he preached the truth about men, what they were and had become. They were “vipers.” They had already allowed themselves to become poisoned and were now poisonous to others. They were sick and doomed, and they were biting others, making them sick and dooming them. **Two**, he preached the wrath to come, which we heard in **verses 8 and 17**. We can also find this in **John 3:36**, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”

**Second**, John preached repentance. Note that a man must first repent, then bear fruit. And the fruit must be worthy (deserving), consistent with repentance—fruit that shows a changed heart and a turning away from sin. We can find this in **Luke 13:3**, “I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish.”

**Third**, John preached against pride. Many of the people believed they were acceptable to God simply because they were Jews, that is, because they were children of Abraham and of godly forefathers. Many felt acceptable to God because they had undergone a religious ritual—that of circumcision. They felt the righteousness of their fathers had saved them. How they lived mattered little. They were saved because they were special—special enough to be acceptable to God. One quick thought: most people are prideful. They feel they are special enough to be acceptable to God, that God would never reject them. They feel acceptable because they have godly parents, have been baptized, are not “too” bad, are good enough, are blessed with so much, are somewhat religious, are members of a church, and are regular

worshippers. We find this in Scripture in **Proverbs 30:12**, “Those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth.”

**Fourth**, John preached about ***judgment***. Let me make note of several things. **First**, God is the Divine Woodman who cuts down the trees. **Second**, the axe is already lying at the roots of the trees (verse 9). **Third**, the trees are ***not yet*** cutdown, but all men are warned. **Fourth**, there are many trees: some lofty (the proud), some stately (the leaders), some diseased, some bearing good fruit, some bearing bad fruit, and some bearing no fruit at all. And **fifth**, all trees that do ***not*** bear good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire. Which is what we can find in **Hebrews 6:8**, “But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

**Fifth**, John preached about ***social justice***. John stirred people. The people wanted to know how repentance would affect their lives, just what a changed life would mean. What kind of fruit should they bear? John

answered in the most practical terms. **First**, the average citizen was to love and care enough to share his material goods with those who were in need. John mentioned clothing and food, the basic necessities of life. But note: the giving was to be sacrificial. The *giver* was to give all but one coat and half a meal. The giver was to love and care so much that he would be gripped with mercy and unselfishness. He would give what he had. Such fruit would be evidence of repentance, of a life truly changed, of a man who was truly seeking God to forgive his sins.

John's **second** answer in practical terms was that the despised tax collectors were to love and care enough to stop exerting their authority and cheating people. Tax collectors in Jesus' day were literally despised because they represented the Roman government and levied more taxes than necessary, pocketing the excess. A tax collector who wanted God to forgive his sins had to change his life, becoming a man of justice and equitableness. He had to love and care for others enough to treat them fairly, respectfully, and justly.

And a **third** answer from John was that the soldiers were to be respectful and loving, truthful, and honest, contented, and responsible. Note the **three** specific charges to soldiers. **First**, they were not to extort money. The word extort means to shake violently, agitate, and terrify. The thought is that some extorted money by terrifying people. Roman soldiers were, of course, posted to protect the interests of Rome. It was common for soldiers to allow illegal things to go on for a bribe. The **second** specific charge to soldiers was that they were to accuse no man falsely. If a man did not pay a bribe, he was falsely accused by the soldier. And the **third** charge was that they were to be content with their pay or wages. Dissatisfaction and grumbling over their pay or wages was a common complaint of soldiers.

A soldier was to change his life completely: to respect and love people, be truthful and honest, contented, and responsible. Note that John's message demanded a changed life. What then were the fruits that demonstrated one was truly repenting and seeking forgiveness of sins? Very practically, "the fruit of

*righteousness*” as pointed out in **verse 8**. Which is what we can find in the familiar **Galatians 5:22-23**, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

**Sixth**, John preached about the **Messiah’s coming**. And when he preached about the Messiah’s coming, he stressed **three** points in particular. The **first** point was that the Messiah was “more worthy” and “more powerful” than he. By “more worthy,” John was saying he was not “worth” the rank of a slave before Christ. Slaves were the ones who loosed the sandals and washed the feet of guests. He was as *nothing* before the Lord. What an attitude of humility! By “more powerful,” John was saying that Jesus was mightier in both person—as above—and in work.

The **second** point John was making was the Messiah’s baptism. Jesus will baptize with the Spirit and fire, or in other words, with the purifying, refining Spirit (verse 16). John’s baptism cleansed the outside, but Jesus’ baptism will cleanse the heart.

The **third** point John was making was related to the Messiah's judgment. Note these **four** points from **verse 17**. **1<sup>st</sup>**, the winnowing fork is the Messiahs' power to pick up both the wheat and the chaff. **2<sup>nd</sup>**, the threshing floor is the earth which will be purged or cleansed of all chaff. **3<sup>rd</sup>**, The wheat represents believers who truly repent and bring forth fruit. They will be gathered into his barn—his kingdom or the new heavens and earth. And **4<sup>th</sup>**, the chaff represents those who only profess, who are counterfeit wheat. They lie on the floor or earth with the wheat, but they are not wheat. They shall be burned with unquenchable fire. Unquenchable fire cannot be quenched, snuffed out, or extinguished. The idea is that the fire is everlasting, burning on and on and never ending.

**Seventh**, John preached about other things. Note the word exhorted in **verse 18**. It means to admonish, urge, beseech, and entreat. John pierced the ears and the hearts of the people; he pressed and pressed upon the people their need to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Which is what we can find in **Joel 2:12-13**, "Even now,

declares the Lord, return home with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”

What are the **lessons** we can learn from this Scripture reading?

In today’s reading, John spells out what repentance looks like: when peoples’ hearts and minds are changed, their actions changed, too. So, that involves not just acknowledging our sins, but actively changing our behavior and living a life that reflects our commitment to God by sharing with those in need, acting justly, and refraining from exploiting others; essentially, “fruits worthy of repentance” as seen through tangible actions in our daily lives, regardless of our social status or occupation.



Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, help me to know the call of your kingdom on my heart and may my life reflect the Good News of the Kingdom to which you have called me. Give us the opportunity to repent afresh, before judgment is total and final on our nation. Fill us with the type of expectation that trusts God enough that we can acknowledge our sin, repent with honesty, and act with justice. We ask this in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**