

Three Marks of Repentance

Luke 3:1–22 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION/CONTEXT: Last week we saw from the birth of Jesus until he was 12 years of age. This week, Luke takes a very large step forward in the narrative from that point, some 18 years. At this point Jesus is around 30 years of age. His older cousin John has begun to preach in the wilderness of Judea. Large crowds are making the journey to hear him.

He is calling them to REPENT and be BAPTIZED. Now Baptism, as we have already talked about was a rite of passage for Gentiles who wished to come into the covenant community of Israel. But John, was calling the Jews to be baptized and they were coming by the thousands.

A great move of God is taking place, a spiritual revival of sorts. But as is the case with every genuine work of God, some are there for the wrong reasons and that is eternally dangerous. Perhaps some are coming out of curiosity, others are coming because it's good for business to be associated with something that has the attention of the masses.

John hits pause and speaks to those who are present, but not genuinely repentant.

TEXT: Luke 3:1–22 (ESV)

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.

The early Roman Emperors would adopt whoever was most fit to be their successor. **Augustus** was the adopted son of **Julius Caesar**. As Augustus approached death, **Tiberius** was the least objectionable successor. And while Augustus didn't like him, he nevertheless adopted him as his son. On August 19, of the year 14AD Augustus died a month later Tiberius was made Emperor by the Roman Senate at 54 years of age.

Luke tells us that John's preaching began in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar. If he is reckoning the date from the Death of Augustus that would place John's ministry beginning in **28AD** (give or take a year). ¹

1b. Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea.

Pilate ruled Judea from a.d. 26–36 So we know it was early that his administration. This is the same Pilate that would ultimately preside over the political trial of Jesus, ordering his crucifixion.

1c. and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis,

¹ Robert H. Stein, [Luke](#), vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 127.

Herod Antipas and **Philip the Tetrarch** were both sons of *Herod the Great* by two different women. They will become very important to the story of John as we will see in a couple of weeks.

1d. and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene.

Abilene was a city in TX just West of Dallas. :) It was actually a region in Syria. Why would Luke mention a Syrian governor? Many believe that Luke was from Syria.

2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was the actual high priest at this time. Annas was the previous High Priest and exerted strong influence over the religious life of Israel. Both are called High Priest the way we might call a former President, “Mr. President”. Caiaphas would ultimately preside over the religious trial of Jesus.

2b. the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

Prophets have always been a bit peculiar and John was no exception. I remember growing up I heard that he ate **locust and wild honey**, so I imagined this crazy preacher with cricket legs stuck in his teeth. But those who have visited the Holy Land with us know that this was not the case - the locust bean was similar to a coco-bean, and the honey was date honey. It was common to press the two into a type of energy bar in the region of the Jordan.

We know generally where John was preaching to be Bethany beyond the Jordan. This was a place in the wilderness, but also near the Jordan River at a location deep enough to perform baptisms. [ON MAP, Bethany beyond the Jordan is in Blue]



³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

In those days when a great King would pass through a region. Emmicaries would be sent ahead of him to announce His arrival. To remain in the good graces of the King the roads would be repaired and a great reception would be planned.

Isaiah said, the coming Messiah would be so great a King that entire Mountains would be leveled at His coming. John was announcing the Kings arrival.

Now notice how he preached...

⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

Vipers were highly poisonous snakes. A brood is a nest filled with baby snakes. It was said of the particular viper than when the baby vipers would hatch they would proceed to strike the mother, leading to her death. It was not a compliment to be called a brood of vipers.

John apparently had not read, “***How to Win Friends and Influence People***”. He was not concerned with Political correctness. He said hard things to hard people.

He says...

⁸ ***Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.***

In other words, “change”! Don’t just say you are sorry... change. Prove that it is real for you.

8b. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Don’t think because you are a descendant of Abraham that somehow you can live as you want and avoid the consequences. To us he might say, “don’t tell me you’ve been baptized” If you are living like a snake - it really makes no difference.

As a preacher in Alabama would say it, “You can be baptized so many times that every tadpole in the TN river knows your social security number” but if your life isn’t different you aren’t right with God.

⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Notice the **imminence** of the judgement of God. Even NOW. This isn’t a warning about off in the future when you die. The judgment may fall on you now. Hell is the final judgment - but friend there are many preceding judgements.

Is that not what Paul said in Romans? **Romans 1:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

HOW IS THE WRATH REVEALED?

Romans 1:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

Romans 1:26–27 (ESV)

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Friend - I am telling you. I love this nation but we are currently experiencing the judgement of God. When a flag that symbolizes every form of perversion and sexual immorality is flowing over our capital, flanked by old glory. We are receiving in ourselves the due penalty for their error.



You say, “Judgment may come” Friend it’s already here!

Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

When that which should cause us to cry out in shame is paraded down the streets of our city - Judgment is here. The axe is laid at the root of the tree.... In other words, God doesn’t intended to prune the tree... the axe isn’t laid at the branches...it’s laid at the root. It’s days are over.

The question that came up in the minds of the people and the question that should come up in our minds is this - what is the fruit of repentance we should be bearing?

That is what the crowd was asking in verse 10 -

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “**What then shall we do?**”

John Proceeds to give the 3 areas of life to consider.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever noticed that when you gaze at stars, they tend to disappear when you look directly at them? There is a reason for that. We all have two types of light-sensing cells in our eyes, the rods and the cones. Cones see fine detail and color. Rods see better in dim light. When you look right at something that is small or far away, the image falls on a **part of your retina where there are only cones**. In order to see the star, you must look around the star and see it with your peripheral vision. The same is true of repentance... if you try to see it, you can’t - you have to look at those things around it. Or as John calls it, “the fruit of repentance”.

1. The Fruit of Generosity

¹¹ And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."

A **tunic** was the basic piece of clothing. It was the essential. Other decoration may be worn over the tunic, but a tunic was the **base layer** of clothing.

John said, if you see someone who has no tunic. He lacks the basic necessity of life... and you have TWO Tunics... a repentant person should give him the extra.

Then he says, if you see a person with no food... but you have extra food... you are to share.

You aren't to indiscriminately cut checks to people, but you are to wisely make sure that they have the essential needs of life, food, clothing, shelter.

Keep in mind that **John didn't call of the Roman government to solve the problem** of poverty. He said repentant people can take care of it.

This is the Christian ethic - generosity is not mandated by the government, but it is done from a willing, repentant heart.

You see, I have found that American's are more than willing to legislate the generosity of others.

Alexander Fraser Tyler warned

- Scottish judge, writer and historian. *"A democracy... can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse (which means benefits) from the public treasury."*

In other words, if I can cause the government to TAX others in a way it does not tax me, I can in effect steal from my fellow citizen for my own benefit. That's called stealing.

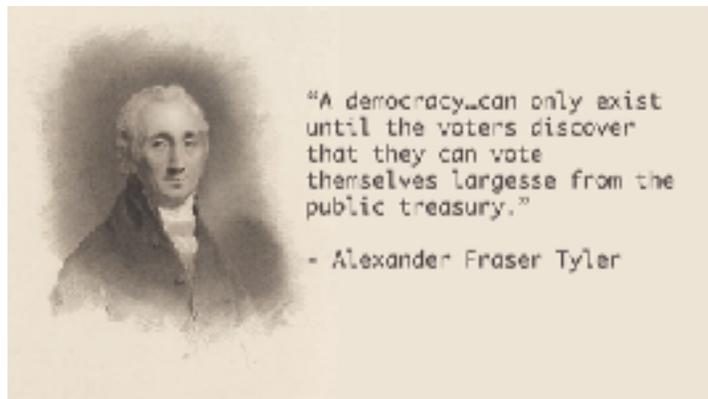


ILLUSTRATION: The Orthodox Jews have a tradition at the end of certain Sabbath Days called the Havdalah Service. It is to mark the transition from a day of worship to a day of work. It's how they invite God to bless the work of the upcoming week.



Here's what they do: They prepare a large saucer and put a cup in the center of it. Then they pour wine into the cup until it overflows into the saucer. The idea is - Lord if you will bless us to meet the needs in our family - we will give the excess to meet the needs of others. The trick to it is - you have to get with God and decide how big your family's cup is going to be.

How do we know we have repented? How do we know that we are not living for this world, but for the world to come? Generosity.

If we had nothing more than your bank account to examine in order to determine whether or not you had legitimately repented of your sin, how would you fair?

If you were charged with being follower of Jesus Christ - would there be enough evidence at the bank to convict you?

Generosity...

2. The Fruit of Integrity

¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."

Tax collectors were Jews who had been hired by Rome to exact taxes from the citizens of Israel. That in itself was frowned upon, but the real issue was that these men worked on commission. They received a percentage of the taxes they collected. Therefore, ***they were incentivized to abuse their office.***

They were notoriously dishonest. Their testimony was not allowed in the courts of Israel. They were often mentioned in the same breath as prostitutes and pimps.

Some of these Tax Collectors desired to be right with God. So they too came for baptism. What shall we do? They asked John. What would genuine repentance look like in our lives? ***John did not say - stop working for the government.***

You see the biblical position was never that of the ***anarchist***. Human government was ordained by God.

Paul said it this way in Romans 13:3–4 (ESV)

³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval.

⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

So tax collectors, you don't have to quit your job, just perform it with integrity.

Jesus even called Matthew, a Tax Collector to be his disciple

Probably the most familiar story of a Tax Collector being converted was that of **Zacchaeus in Luke 19.**

You know the story - Zacchaeus climbed up in a sycamore tree to see Jesus. Jesus said come down for I'm going to your house today. Well that is where the song ends, but not the story -

Luke 19:7–10 (ESV)

⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

So the crowd was concerned - Jesus is befriending a tax collector.

⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, **"Today salvation has come to this house..."**

NOW - How do we know Zacchaeus repented? He bore the fruit of integrity! He made things right.

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago I read an add that had been taken out in the classified section of a local paper in Nairobi, Kenya. The add says it all -

I, Allan Harangui, Alias Waniek Harangui, of P.O. Box 40380, Nairobi, have dedicated services to the Lord Jesus Christ. I must put right all my wrongs. If I owe you any debt or damage personally or any of the companies I have been directing I will make it right. Please contact me or my advocates J.K. Kibicho and Company Advocates, P.O. Box 73137, Nairobi for a settlement. No amount will be disputed. God and His Son Jesus Christ Be Glorified.

If we had nothing more than your business dealings to examine in order to determine whether or not you had legitimately repented of your sin, how would you fair?

If you were charged with being follower of Jesus Christ - would there be enough evidence at work place to convict you?

Generosity, Integrity...

3. The Fruit of Contentment

¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?"

These soldiers may have been romans. Perhaps they were going out to the wilderness to investigate why thousands were coming out to hear John. Rome was always concerned with any unrest or uprising that may be brewing.

But, it is more likely that they were Jews that had been appointed by Rome to guard and assist the tax collectors.

14b. And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

One of the great evidences that a person is truly saved is that they no longer live for the accumulation of more stuff. They are content with what they have. **How is your contentment?**

What if, God hit pause on your financial progress?

- What if you never drove vehicle any newer or nicer than the one you drive now? You ok with that? Well, let's suppose He did not hit pause on the progress of others, but suppose they all upgraded. You still ok?

You see, I have found that it's not really that people want more, it that's they want MORE THAN OTHERS.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Back in 2002 Julie and I sensed that the time was coming for us to move from Evangelism into the Pastoral ministry. I would have to sell our home and move two states away. As the time drew near to put the house on the market, my father began to pay large sums of money to fix things that needed fixing. We had a long driveway, he paid to have new blacktop put down. He had the roof replaced. Several big ticket items.

I thought, wow, how generous. What I didn't know was that he intended to buy the house. He wasn't investing in my property, he was investing in his soon to be property.

Well friends - one of the ways you can know that you intend to live for eternity in Heaven is that you put your treasure there now.