

to Luke chapter 3. This is a modified version of what I preached or spoke to the kids at Manchester in chapel last month. And it's something that I felt like God had put upon my heart to bring to the church as well. John the Baptist received a special call from God to begin preaching and baptizing to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. He was, as we all know, the forerunner of our Lord, the one that was predicted by Isaiah the prophet, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord so that all flesh should see and be prepared for the salvation of God when it appeared in the form of his only son. But I need you to see that the times in which he brought the gospel to bear upon men's hearts were extremely wicked. Look with me at Luke 3 at verses 1 through 2. I want you to look at the list of rulers and governors who were administrating when John's ministry started. Listen to the word of God as I read these two verses.

In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip, tetrarch of the region of Aeturia and Trachonitis, and Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene. During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. Look at that list.

These are all men of whom we know very little or nothing but corruption and immorality. So when John began to preach, there was a cruel tyrant ruling in Rome, a weak governor in Judea, and three of Herod the Great's sons ruling the land, while the religious affairs of the country were in the hands of two scheming high priests who were reigning contrary to the word of God. And if the rulers were such as these, what must the people of the time under them have been like? This, therefore, was the state of things when Christ's forerunner received his commission to preach the word of God and to prepare the way for Jesus.

But brothers and sisters, we should never despair about the cause of God's truth, however dark and unfavorable the pathway may seem in this world. We can never judge things merely by outward appearances, can we? We must look by faith and not by sight. Because at the very time when things seem hopeless in the world, God may be planning a mighty working of his Holy Spirit.

And in such an atmosphere, John the Baptist began to proclaim his marvelous ministry to the people. And so before we read the word of God tonight and look at the three things that I want you to see from his message, let's pray and ask God's help. Father, again, unless your spirit comes and intervenes, we do this in vain. Father, pour out your spirit for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ, and may he be lifted high, Father, in the hearts and lives of your people. We ask for Jesus' blessed sake.

Amen. If you'll go with me, first of all, if you'll turn back with me just to Matthew chapter 3, I want to read those first two verses. Matthew chapter 3, verses 1 and 2. And the word of the Lord says, In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, repent For the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And then if you'll turn with me back to Luke 3, starting at verse 3. Luke 3, starting at verse 3.

And he, John, went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 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 path straight. 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 and all flesh shall see the

salvation of God. And 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?

Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. 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. 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.

And the crowds asked him, what then shall we do? And he answered them, whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise. Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? And he said to them, collect no more than you are authorized to do. Soldiers also asked him, and we, what shall we do? And he said to them, do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation and be content with your wages. And as the people were in expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, I baptize you with water.

But he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand. to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So ends the reading of God's Word. May He bless it to our hearts and souls.

There are three things in this passage that I want you to understand tonight from John's message. The first is this. I tried to use the the ends here. One is the necessity of repentance and faith for salvation, the necessity of repentance and faith for salvation and the forgiveness of our sins. Secondly, the need for fruit or fruits in our lives to prove our repentance and our faith. And finally, the nearness of judgment and eternity to encourage us to fear and persevere in the Christian life, the nearness of judgment and eternity to encourage us in the Christian life. So first of all, the first thing I want you to see from John's message tonight is the necessity of repentance and faith for your salvation and for the forgiveness of your sins. We see that in verse 3. Look back there with me in Luke chapter 3.

John went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of what? Of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. If you had to sum up the whole ministry of John the Baptist in one word, what word would you use? The very first word that he came out with, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

You see, John knew that the greatest need that any of us in this room have, and the greatest need that anyone listening to him at the time had, was the need to be made right with God. The need to have our sins forgiven in Jesus' precious blood. And I know we all know that in here, but we must understand this. If we do not understand repentance, we do not understand the Christian life.

And from John's words, we learn here, that there is a very close connection between repentance and the forgiveness of our sins by God. For John told his hearers that unless they repented of their sins, God would not forgive them. And John said not only should people repent and believe, but also that those who change their ways should make a public declaration of that change by being baptized in the River Jordan As the commentator Strauss explains it, this involved, repentance involved a declaration of the renunciation of sin on the part of man so that

there would be a declaration of the pardon of that sin on the part of God. Man had to renounce his sin if God was to forgive that sin. In other words, when we confess our sins and renounce them and turn from them, God promises to pardon us of our sins.

What does 1 John 1, 9 promise us? If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to do what? To forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So I'd asked this question to us this night and Mac preached a beautiful sermon on repentance from Zephaniah about a little over a month ago.

But I want to ask this question, what does it actually mean to repent? In the simplest terms, it means to turn away from the sins in your life that you commit and struggle with, to stop committing them, to give them up, and to turn to God in faith for your salvation. This is what Reformers mean when they speak of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance, simply defined, is a change of heart, a change of mind and a change of will and direction spiritually. If you'll permit me to use this illustration that I use with the kids at Manchester, we might say that all of us in our sins, apart from Christ, were driving towards the city of sin and destruction. But if we are Christians in this room tonight, something happened in us, causing us to switch lanes, as it were, and to begin driving in the completely opposite direction toward the city of God. This is what repentance is. It is a turning in heart, mind, and will that results in a complete change of direction, a 180-degree spiritual turn, if you will.

And John says very clearly that this change must occur within us if God is to forgive us of our sins. For all of us, without exception, as Romans says, we have all sinned and are guilty before God, falling far short of His glory. There is no one, no not one, who is righteous according to the eyes of God and the standard of His law. All of us, without exception, have broken God's law time without number in thought, word, and deed. and we must repent and be converted if we are to be saved.

You see, repentance and forgiveness go together like, if you can let me use this example, it's not a great one, but repentance and forgiveness go together like hard work and a corner office. Just as you will never achieve that big corner office in your company unless you work hard for it, there's also no forgiveness of your sins unless there's also true repentance in your heart. But lest you think that I am saying that we are forgiven of our sins because of what we do, I want to be clear about something here. And hear me when I say this, no amount or quantity of repentance on your part or my part can or ever will make atonement for our sins. and justify us in the sight of God.

Only the blood of Christ that we sang about earlier, only the blood of Christ, the scriptures tell us, and nothing else can wash you white as snow in the Lord's sight. God accounts us righteous before him only for the sake of Jesus Christ and his righteousness. What he did for us in his life of perfect obedience under the law of God that we never could have obeyed on our own, and in his death on the cross to pay the eternal penalty of our sins that we could never have paid, or if we did, we would be utterly cast into hell. God accounts us righteous, never for our own works or deservings.

And yet, at the same time, we must remember that as John makes abundantly clear here, without repentance and faith, no soul will or ever can be saved. But you might ask the question, how do we know if we have truly repented and believed? And that question leads us to the second point. And the second thing I want you to see tonight from John's message is that you can know that your repentance and faith are real if they are accompanied by what the

Bible calls fruits or works in your life. Do those things save us? Absolutely not. But they are the proof that God has worked faith and repentance in our hearts.

And we see this clearly in John's response to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came out to him. Matthew makes it very clear in his account that when John says these words, he is specifically calling out the Pharisees and Sadducees. And look what he says to them when they come out. He said, look at verse seven, he said, therefore, to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him.

You brood of vipers." Wow. John specifically calls the Pharisees and Sadducees who came out to be baptized by him a brood of vipers, a severe term comparing these religious leaders to successive spawns of serpents coming forth alive from the body of their dom or mother. It's a very gross picture here.

And notice that this harsh designation comes in direct contrast and is held side by side with the title children of Abraham, the true children of God. And it seems to refer to the fact that these religious leaders had another father whom Jesus would later name to them in John 8, where he specifically and unequivocally told them that you are of your father, the devil. And we must understand why John is using such blistering language for these religious leaders.

And it was because they regarded John's baptism as simply an outward ceremony that they felt would ensure their admission into the messianic kingdom. These people were trying to avoid the duty of real heart repentance by means of an outward sign, baptism. And not only that, by the fact that they claim to be the literal descendants of Abraham, which they were by blood. This, on their part, was their form of easy believism.

You see, the Jews back then thought that just because they were descended by blood from the great believer Abraham, that they were automatically believers themselves and were safe from the wrath to come and from the Messiah's judgment. In the same way, beloved, We must be careful to avoid that type of thinking, that thinking that conjectures that just because you have been baptized in a church, that just because you are the child of someone who is a believer, that just because you come from a family of believers, that you are automatically a believer yourself. For God, John tells them here, could raise up children of Abraham from the very stones on which they were standing.

Thus the Bible tells us over and over, and John is telling his hearers here, and this is the point of this, that there must be real evidence or fruit in your life, in your heart, that proves or authenticates that your faith and repentance are real. So John here exposes the uselessness of a repentance that does not demonstrate real, tangible fruit in one's life. So I ask the question again, as I did about repentance, what do I mean by fruits? Well, this passage tells us here, the fruits worthy of repentance that John mentions here in this passage are those acts of justice, equity, and humanity which John delineates for us in verses 10 through 14. Look there with me. When the crowds asked him, what must they do? He specifically shows what this type of true repentance and fruit would look like practically in the people's everyday lives. Look at those verses. For example, those who had plenty of material things in this life, he says, whether that was food or clothes, were to share with those who did not and refuse to be stingy with what God had given them. as the people back then tended to be.

In the same way, those who were tax collectors were to stop taking more than they were supposed to gather from the people, as many of them tended to do back then. The soldiers, in turn, were to stop extorting money from people through threats and false accusations, as they tended to do back then, and so forth and so forth.

You see, in other words, John defined the fruit or evidence of repentance as making a clean break from those sins which particularly and especially applied to them. Those sins that they were inclined to commit in their specific lives and positions. Hunter spoke about the fact that we are all placed in specific positions and levels of responsibility in this world. These people were committing sins in their specific lives and positions, and they were to replace them with acts of kindness, fairness, and mercy towards those around them. That, John says, was how they would know that their repentance and faith were real.

So let's apply that way of thinking to ourselves. And when I think about this in my own life, it humbles me greatly. But what are the particular corruptions and sins with which you struggle and commit on a regular basis? We all have them, don't we, if we are honest with ourselves? Those things that you and I especially struggle with, those things that we find hard to stay away from that offend God, as well as those good things that we should be doing that we don't practice in our lives.

This includes sins of omission as well as commission. And I love what the Westminster Confession of Faith in Chapter 15, Section 5 says about this when it says this, men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins particularly. Did you hear that? It is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins particularly.

And if we are really earnest about true repentance, which we must be, we have to examine our own lives with specificity, not asking God to forgive us of our sins just in general, but naming our sins one by one before the throne of grace. We must think about, beloved, how we use our callings, our positions, our privileges, to either help or hurt in this life, to either sin or pursue righteousness. We must get before God and ask, who am I really? What are my callings? What are the particular temptations of my calling? What sins am I drawn toward, given who I am and my station in life?

And then identifying those things, we must repent of those particular sins, particularly. For beloved, as I said earlier, if we do not understand real repentance, we do not accurately understand the Christian life. Martin Luther wisely offered this thought as one of his 95 theses when he said this, when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, repent, he willed that the entire life of believers is to be one of repentance. Did you hear that? The entire life of believers is to be one of repentance. Beloved, repentance is not something you engage in once for all when you become a believer in Christ. Rather, in the Christian journey, we enter into a life of repentance, a lifetime of ever turning away from our sins and turning toward Christ in holiness, righteousness, and sanctification. as we move toward our true home in the celestial city.

You know, I'm often asked this when I go to the gym. I have a lot of gym buddies in here. I got Betty and Bill and other people in here. But somebody asked me this a couple of weeks ago. And somebody said, what do you think is the most important thing in being healthy? If you had to just name one thing.

And so I invariably answer this way, it is a lifestyle of consistency, a lifestyle of consistency in working out, eating right, and getting enough sleep at night. These are not things you do for a short time like a fad diet or an exercise routine just for a while and then put them away when you make a little progress or achieve a certain level that you are pleased with.

In the same way, a lifetime of repentance is the Christian life. For brothers and sisters, we will always, will we not, be battling our corrupt flesh and the world and the devil as sinners this side of heaven. We will always at some point be falling down in regard to these three things, hopefully less so as we grow in the Christian life, but yet still stumbling and sinning and lipping our way to heaven.

As J.C. Ryle comments, as long as we are in the body, We are constantly seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of evil. It is about us, within us, and around us on every side. Do you ever feel that way? That you are constantly being bombarded by it. And Ryle says, and we must be entreating him who alone can preserve us to be continually delivering us from its power. John is saying this then. Be honest with yourself. Identify those specific things in your life that offend God.

Turn away from them and then turn to God in faith for the ability to practice those things that are good and righteous in their place. Even those fruits of the Spirit that the Bible lists for us in Galatians 5, those things that are diametrically opposed to the flesh and the life of sin. You know them, don't you? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, all the ways that we rightly relate to and love God and others. And so I have to ask us this night, do you see those fruits in an increasing measure in your own life day after day? Are you striving to practice those things more and more in place of the sins that you have left behind.

For hear me when I say this, it is worthless and hypocritical to say with our lips that we believe and have faith in God if we are not at the same time actively attempting to mortify those things in our lives that dishonor Him and break His law, and then in their place to practice those things which God says are good and true and right. It always makes me fear when I read those words in Romans 2, I don't know if you've gotten to them yet in your study, but you who say you should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who tell the people around you not to steal, do you steal? You who tell people not to murder, do you hate people in your heart?

We must know what is in our hearts, beloved, and we must, by God's grace and the power of his spirit, Seek to mortify those things and replace them with what pleases him. However, know this. If you have truly repented of your sins in your heart and turn to Christ in faith, then God promises that he has truly forgiven you and he will enable you by the Holy Spirit who now lives in you by the power of the spirit that raised Christ from the dead to enable you to do what is pleasing in his sight more and more as you become more like the Savior. I want you to be encouraged by that. But quickly, the third and final thing I want you to see today or tonight from John's message is the reason why we should repent and believe in the Lord Jesus and demonstrate fruit in our lives.

And John says that is because of the nearness of judgment and eternity. You know, just as most of us will never leave the safety of our homes in the middle of the night unless we know the house is on fire and our lives are in mortal danger if we do not get out. So most of us by nature will never take any of these words of John seriously and practice them in our hearts unless we have a really good reason or motive for doing so. And I want to tell you that here in this passage John gives us not just one but two Great reasons for doing these things.

The first one is because of the approaching judgment. And secondly, that of eternity, which both go hand in hand. But look at the approaching judgment. Look at verses 16 and 17 of Luke chapter 3 right here. The impending nature of judgment we see in these verses. Look what he says here.

The Lord Jesus' winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. John speaks here of an awful separation that will occur at the last day when Jesus returns again to judge the earth. On that momentous day, The unerring judgment of the King of kings and the Lord of lords will at last divide the wheat from the chaff and the righteous from the unrighteous and he will divide them forevermore. Jesus confirms this truth later when telling, do you remember the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 about the final judgment in which Christ will place the sheep, his true people on his right and the goats, those who are not his true servants on his left. The goats, he says, will go away into eternal punishment, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, while the righteous will go away into eternal life, into the kingdom prepared for his own people before the foundation of the world.

So I want you to see that it is no light matter whether we repent and believe or not in this life, for that will determine where we spend eternity. And that brings us to the second reason that he brings up here. the nearness of eternity, that resulting companion of the judgment of God. You see, the judgment will result in one of two places where all people will spend eternity. And beloved, we must believe and know that there is a hell as well as a heaven.

There is everlasting punishment for the wicked as well as everlasting life for the godly. Too often, So many churches and speakers that I hear, and I'm not talking about here. Too many churches and speakers that I hear talk only of the love and mercy of our God without remembering sufficiently His justice and holiness. For God must punish sin because of His holy nature, and He will never just sweep it under the rug.

As Peter says in 1 Peter 4.18, again, that Mack preached on earlier, if the righteous is scarcely saved, What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

And look at verse 7 of Luke 3. We see John speaking of a wrath to come. And in verse 9 of an axe that is laid not just to the base but to the root of every tree. An axe that will cut down every tree that does not bear good fruit so that it will be thrown into the everlasting fire. Brothers and sisters, John is not afraid to speak just like the rest of the Bible and Jesus do about the reality of the danger of hell. John and Jesus both affirm the existence of an eternal place where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies. A place of everlasting torment whose inhabitants are shut out from the presence of God and from his love forevermore.

And please understand, I do not take pleasure and speaking on such a subject. And people often take great offense at those who do, but I would be doing none of us any service by shying away from a topic that the Bible affirms and continually warns us about. To be silent on the subject of hell merely encourages people to persevere in their sins and to think either that hell is a delusion or that people certainly will never be sent there ultimately by a loving and compassionate God. Yet brothers and sisters, that is the lie of the devil.

For as John says, there will be a reckoning at the end of time. And at this point in your life, I have to ask to what eternal place are you heading? These truths should cause us not only to fear, but also to persevere in the things of the Lord while it is still daytime before the night comes. But finally, I want to end this way because I want us to take heart. For beloved John the Baptist not only speaks about the judgment, he speaks about the eternal safety of all true believers who have repented and have put their faith in Jesus.

Look again at verse 17. He speaks of the winnowing fork in the Lord Jesus's hand. And if you're familiar with that, where the farmer puts the winnowing fork down and throws the product up into the air so that the wind blows the chaff away and gets rid of what is unwanted and the good part falls back down. Jesus will clear his threshing floor at the end of time. Not only will he burn up the chaff and dispose of it, referring to those who refuse to repent and believe, but he will also gather his wheat, his true committed people, into the barn of everlasting life.

And I bring this out at the end here, because even the best of believers need much encouragement in this life. For y'all, we are yet in the body, are we not? We live in a wicked world, as we have said, tempted by the devil, our own sinful flesh, and the world constantly. Wayne, I loved what you said this morning when you said David fought the enemies, not only that were without, but he was fighting that enemy within. We need to be reminded because we get worn down and discouraged along the way often on the way to heaven.

We need to be reminded and encouraged over and over that Jesus the author and finisher of our faith will never leave nor forsake those who turn to him by faith. For those who love him he will guide them safely through this life and at last to eternal glory and he will hide them in the day of wrath. just as he did Noah and his family during the floods of destruction. Christian, our best things are yet to come. Be encouraged by that.

God has laid up in heaven for his true people such things as pass our understanding. You know the verse from 1 Corinthians 2, 9. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. Do you believe that? God's plans and blessings for those who repent and love him and others are beyond comprehension. And heaven, heaven will ultimately make amends for all we suffer for him in this life. So as I end, I ask you this, do you know him? Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you repented then truly and believed on the only one who gives eternal life?

If you have never repented and believed on the Savior, today he calls you to himself. Paul says, Behold, now is the favorable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. He will never turn away anyone who comes to him by faith. If you have repented and believed on him, I want you to be encouraged this evening by the words of John and the Lord Jesus that you are eternally secure. in his mighty embrace.

Let's pray. Father God Almighty, I ask with all my heart that by the power of your spirit that raised Christ from the dead, you would work true repentance and faith in the hearts of your people. And doing so, Lord God, you would cause us to leave our sins and to practice those things more and more that please and delight heaven above. Lord, may this world know that you are real by the way that we love each other and love them. And so, Father, I pray that you would make us salt and light in this world. Father, for any in this room who know you not, draw them to yourself and work real, true repentance in their hearts and lives. Give them faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can save them and make them a new creation, fit to do his will now. And we will give you all the praise and the glory forevermore and evermore through Jesus, our King, we pray, amen.