

1-9-22

Sermon- Take Me To The River TODAY!

Scripture- Luke 3:7-22, CTW Psalm 29

Hymns- 20, 455, 298

Theme- It is the beginning of a new year, so now, and not later, is the time to begin a different way of life. And what makes this call so urgent? It is this one, undeniable fact: Christ is on his way.

I. The People who bring God's Word to the people have a difficult job. It's not the years of study before entering the ministry. It's not the many hours spent writing sermons. It's not even getting over the fear of public speaking.

A. Bringing God's Word is difficult because of what that Word means. It's a serious Word. It's a Word of great consequence. A minister has the privilege of bringing Christ's Word of salvation—but that very same message is also a word of judgment.

In the Bible, those two always go together: salvation and judgment. Because **if** I tell you today that eternal salvation is available through faith in Jesus Christ, **then the opposite is also true:** those who don't believe, miss out on this gift, and they fall under God's fearful wrath.

Even if we don't say it explicitly every Sunday, that's always the implication. Not accepting this gospel means there's no life or redemption—there's only death and condemnation.

For if the text has been read clearly, if the text has been explained properly, **if Christ crucified has been preached,** then the minister's words must be received for what they actually are: **the Word of the living God.**

And among many there is the reaction of faith—thanks be to the LORD! But among others, there might be a stubborn rejection

and a proud unbelief. Some even choose not to hear the Word on Sunday—and “staying away” is also a kind of reaction to God’s Word.

B. In the end, however, the one who brings the Word knows it’s not his own Word. It’s God’s Word. And that also means that God will take care of the results. Through the faithful preaching of the Word, God will work all the change that’s needed.

These are the same truths that John the Baptist held onto as he brought God’s Word, so long ago. Also for him, as a “minister,” it wasn’t easy.

John preached Christ to all those who would listen, urgently calling them to repentance and faith. But even as he did, he saw some who turned away. And he knew that some others didn’t care.

But this was God’s Word—a word of salvation and judgment—so he would continue to bring it boldly.

That’s our theme, for Today: If John preaches: “Repent, for Christ is on his way”, we must 1.) Notice the Urgency of the Time; 2.) Sense the Complacency of the People; and 3.) See the Results of this Repenting

II. The Urgency of the Time:

A. Something big is about to happen in the gospel of Luke. How do we know? We know it from the way he begins chapter 3. He tells us that it was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, that Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, that Annas and Caiaphas were high priests in Jerusalem, and so forth.

Luke the historian is signaling to us that we’ve made another jump on the timeline: from when Jesus was twelve, to when John the Baptist begins his ministry—somewhere between AD 27 and 29.

Something big is about to happen, and happen it does in verse 2, **“The word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.”** This is exactly the language used to describe the ministry of the Old Testament prophets: “The word of God came...”

And when the word of God comes, those who are its messengers have no choice but to speak.

So it was that John went into the region of the Jordan, “preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (v 3). Now, when we hear “baptism,” we might picture a nice baptismal font, an infant presented by their parents, and that solemn ceremony of sprinkled water. We’re very used to the idea of baptism. But for John to come baptizing was new and shocking.

But while people had heard of various forms of “baptism,” John’s ministry and message were very different. For he stood on the banks of the Jordan River and called on everyone to come down into those waters. Baptism was for all, for everyone who saw the need to change their ways!

And what makes this call so urgent? **It was this one, undeniable fact: the promised Messiah is on his way.** He was coming and was going to deal with human transgression. He was going to take away God’s punishment and make possible a new relationship with the LORD.

John was saying to the gathered crowds: “When He comes, He will bring salvation with Him. But before He gets here, you’ve got something to do. You need to confess your sins, and you need to amend your lives. Before He gets here, you need to repent.”

B. That’s the unchanging, two-fold call that always accompanies the preaching of the gospel. We hear the Word of salvation, and we have to believe. We have to accept it with a heart of faith and trust. But we must also repent! What does that mean? This “repentance,” according to the Bible,

is literally “a change of mind.” It means we change our minds about ourselves. We change our minds about our sin. We change our minds about God.

Not just in an intellectual sense, but in a deeply spiritual sense.

Repentance is coming to understand (through the Spirit) just how lowly we are, how helpless we are, how sinful we are. At the same time, it’s perceiving that God is our only hope.

Repentance is coming to understand that it’s only because of the Lord’s great mercies that we are not consumed. That’s the beginning of new life; that’s the first taste of the sweetness of salvation.

II. Sense the Complacency of the People:

A. This was the message brought by John the Baptist in all urgency. And John attracted a lot of people with these words. It was refreshing, compared to the legalistic ramblings of the Pharisees.

Lots of people came, but John knew not everyone was really sincere about starting over. “He said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘Brood of vipers!’” (v 7). No one could miss the point of these words.

In the Old Testament, vipers represented the enemies of God, because a viper is deceitful, and dangerous, and full of poison.

There’s something else about vipers: they know when danger is near, and they’ll come slithering out to make a quick escape. That’s exactly what brought some running to John.

They could sense that the time was urgent; they could feel the heat being turned up. So they figured they should get some “coverage:” get baptized and be on their way.

B. But John sees right through their deceit: “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (v 7). For baptism can’t be treated like a “Get out of Jail Free” card: it

couldn't back then, and it still can't today. It's not something that we can file away, "just in case" we run into trouble. "Got my baptism—I'm home free, safe and sound!"

No, our baptism must be taken seriously. If we've received it, then our lives must also change. We'll speak of that truth some more, a bit later.

But first we remember: Whenever salvation is near, judgment is close behind. That beautiful opportunity you once had, can become a terrible tragedy if you don't respond in time, and in the right manner.

Those gospel words that we heard every Sunday, that baptism we once received, these might be the very things that testify against us.

C. It's been said that a preacher's job has two parts, "To comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable." To the guilty and to the hurting, the Word of God must give rich consolation. And to the lukewarm and the lax, the Word must give stern admonition. This is precisely what John the Baptist would do.

For many who came to him were still assuming that they were pretty good people. After all, they were God's chosen ones! They were part of the nation of Israel, card-carrying members of the covenant. Their salvation was practically guaranteed, wasn't it?

So as John stood there, going on about repentance, they quietly asked themselves, "Do we really need to repent, like he's saying? Do we really need to prepare ourselves so much for the coming Messiah? We're the covenant people, after all."

But John's a perceptive prophet. He knows what his audience is like, and he cuts short any presumption: "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'" (v 8). This was just the ticket, some thought. They had their status as the children of

Abraham: good pedigree, a well-established place, a sure inheritance.

But we need to understand that God can secure his honor and can accomplish his purpose well enough without us. Just as John says to the Jews, "I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (v 8).

D. If God can create the whole world out of nothing, if He can create a nation out of two old and barren people like Abraham and Sarah, then surely God can create for himself a people who will give Him love and obedience. Out of the most unlikely people, God can raise up his church.

That's a humbling truth. And a warning word. If there won't be faith in those covenant promises, and obedience to those covenant obligations, then God can move on. In the years after John the Baptist, this is in fact what God did. Many of the Jews wouldn't accept the promised Messiah. They rejected Him, even killed Him. And in response, God sent the gospel to the Gentiles, even to all nations. "From these stones," He would raise up children for Abraham!

We are those stones. We've been graciously included, invited to take our place in God's family. But there's still no room for presumption. There's still no room for complacency. If God took the gospel away from the Jews, He can take it away from us as well. If God applied the covenant curse to them, it can be applied to us as well. From us He is seeking faith. From us He is seeking the fruits of faith.

III. Finally We Are To Be Aware of the results of this repenting: After calling them, after warning them, after baptizing them, John had another question for those gathered at the Jordan. And that question was this:

A. What would they look like, after receiving the baptism of repentance? They were dripping wet, sure. They might've gone on their way, smiling and laughing.

But then what? Have they understood what baptism is all about? Have they recognized what's at stake? John insists that if we've really turned to God, if we've really repented of our sins, then our life is going to look dramatically different than before.

That's the force of his words in **verse 8**, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." John is not interested and God is not interested in outward ritual, in and of itself. Baptism has value, but what comes next? Will you show your gratitude for the full remission of sins? Will you show that you're a servant of the Lord?

In the first place, this repentance will affect our relationship with God. Because if we know ourselves to be forgiven, **we will love God. We will thank God. We will worship God.** The deeper our sense of forgiveness, the greater will be our desire for transformation, that desire to become like God in all we do.

B. And then our repentance will also affect our relationship with others. It's that aspect which receives the emphasis in our text. The reality of being saved must shape how we treat the people around us.

We treat them with grace. We treat them with mercy. The forgiven person becomes a forgiving person. The delivered person becomes a delivering person.

This comes across in John's answers to the people. For in the next verse, we hear them asking, "What shall we do then?" (**v 10**). They have understood his main point. So they seek application.

What are these fruits they must bear? What are the results of this repenting? And this is what John tells them: "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (**v 11**). That's always the character of true repentance: Putting your money where your mouth is. Walking the talk. Living it out.

And this will mean different things for every different person. We hear of just two specific examples in our chapter. The tax collectors who came to be baptized asked what they should do. John tells them to collect only what is required, nothing more.

Some soldiers came, and they asked, "What shall we do?"

John tells them not to take advantage of people. "If you've repented," he says, "then these are just some of the real and concrete changes you'll make."

C. And the very same question should be asked by each one of us. "What shall we do?" It's to be asked by the repentant believers **"How will I bring forth these fruits of repentance? How will I demonstrate my true response to the gospel?"**

And this is answered in very basic and practical ways. For everyone is situated in a place where he can show his faith and obedience to God, where he can show mercy and love to his neighbor. This life is **constantly** full of opportunities and moments for manifesting the change that's come over us.

For if we've repented from our sins, there **SHOULD** be a difference that is wide-reaching and long-lasting. No more are we complacent in outward religion. No more are we content to tolerate this or that sin. But we are determined to bear fruit without ceasing, for the glory of the God who saved us.

As we end, let us not forget John's warning: "Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And let us not ignore his admonition: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance!" The passage ends in **verse 22**, with God pronouncing His pleasure in His Son. "You bring Me Great Joy!

Does He say that about you? Let us Pray that is So! Amen?