

April 24, 2022

“John Warn’s Israel”

Luke 3:7-14

It’s been three weeks since we were in Luke’s Gospel account, so I’m going to read the first six verses of chapter 3, as a refresher of where we left off.

Read Luke 3:1-6... The setting for Luke’s account, is after 400 years of silence between God and Israel. God had set apart the Hebrews as His chosen people, to worship Him; but the Priests and religious leaders had turned that relationship into one of rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, and law keeping.

But the truth is (**Romans 3:20**), “no one will be justified in God’s sight by keeping the Law,” (**3:23**), “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,” (**6:23**), “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The only hope for the Jewish people (really, for all people) was that the coming Messiah [Savior, God’s Son] would make everything right. He would forgive their sins and restore their relationship with God; because, although (**Hebrews 9:22**), “According to the Law... ..all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness,” (**9:28**), “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him,” for (**10:4-5**), “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins,”(**10:10**), “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,”(**10:14**), “For by one offering [one sacrifice] He [Jesus Christ] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified [saved],” (**10:17-18**), “And their sins and their lawless deeds [God says] I will remember no more, ‘Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin,” because (**1John 5:7**), “the blood of Jesus [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Read Luke 3:7-9... John didn’t waste anytime softening the message he had come to give, “You brood of vipers,” “bear fruits in keeping with repentance,” “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Wow! 400 years of silence is broken! John warns that those who do not do what is right in the eyes of God will be thrown into the fires of hell.

Those who came out to see John were well aware of what the prophets had written, that the day of the Lord would be a time of judgement upon those who reject God’s Salvation (**Isaiah 2:12; 13:6; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5**); in fact, three times it is called, “the day of vengeance” (**Isaiah 34:8; 61:2; 63:4**), for it will be a time “when all the inhabitants of the land [earth] will tremble.”

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We learn from Matthew that the religious leaders were most likely leading the crowds who were coming to see John (**Matthew 3:7**), “But when he [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

John calls the religious leaders a “brood of vipers,” because they belong to their father, the devil. Speaking to the religious leaders (**John 8:44**) Jesus said to them, “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.”

Revelation 20:2 calls him, “the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan,” (cf. **Genesis 3:1-5, 13-15; 2Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 12:9**).

The religious leaders who come out to John were hypocrites, (Gk. hypokrisis, hoop-ok’-ree-sees, meaning “play actors”), for although they make a big show of coming out to John, supposedly for a ‘baptism of repentance,’ they had no intention of repenting or changing their deluded belief that they were somehow right with God because they were descendants of Abraham, and they were very religious: keeping the Sabbath, celebrating the yearly feasts, praying out loud for all to hear their eloquent use of words, giving to the poor in public, then cheating God of what is His (**2Timothy 3:5**), “holding to a form of godliness, but denying its power.”

I want to share with you a quote from John MacArthur’s Commentary on Luke (Volume 1, pg. 217), where he captures this conflictual relationship between John the baptizer and the religious leaders at the Jordan River, very nicely: “Did they think they could escape the inferno of God’s wrath by slithering into the Jordan River like snakes fleeing a brush fire?” Clearly these guys were a brood of snakes!

God hates hypocrites, those who live out lies as if they are truth, those who flaunt a works-oriented religion. Speaking of Israel God says (**Isaiah 29:13**), “This people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote” [mechanically, mindlessly, habitual repetition].

In **Luke 3:8**, John exposes the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, and anyone who may be following in their spiritual footsteps; for their false penitence is clear to John, who challenges them to do the works of God that display true repentance (**John 6:28-29**), Therefore [the people] said to [Jesus], “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

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Genuine repentance is accompanied by belief in God’s Son for the forgiveness of sin, and all those who have received salvation will demonstrate a changed life that seeks to do what pleases God (**Ephesians 2:10**), “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

The Jews main hope for salvation was that they were descendants of Abraham. **John 8:31-33**, “So Jesus was saying, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, You will become free?’” **36**, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” **39a**, “They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’” **43-44a**, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil.”

The Jews believed they were saved as a nation, through the promises God made to Abraham; but salvation is received one person at a time; not by a family or by a nation (**Romans 10:13**), “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord [for the forgiveness of sins] will be saved.” **17**, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

In **Luke 3:8b**, John tells the Jews that God could make children for Abraham out of rocks if He wanted to, but the truth is, every Christian becomes a child of God and a descendant of Abraham, by faith, by believing in God’s Son, Jesus Christ (**Galatians 3:26, 28-29**), “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.”

Those who trust in their own goodness, or ethnic heritage, or religious practices to save them, are on the broad road that leads to hell. Jesus commands us to get off the broad road of unbelief (**Matthew 7:13-14**), “Enter through the narrow gate [Christ]; for the gate is wide and the way is broad [religious belief and practice] that leads to destruction [hell], and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

The reason there are only a “few” is that prideful and arrogant people reject Christ, they aren’t seeking forgiveness, so they aren’t looking for a Savior.

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In **Luke 3:9**, John’s warning to repent and demonstrate genuine belief leading to salvation, is premised with a graphic image meant to get the attention of the people. Jesus uses this same metaphor in **Matthew 7:19**, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

More people will be damned to hell by religion, then by anything else

John is saying that every tree [person] that does not bear good fruit [i.e., demonstrate a changed life], will be thrown into the lake of fire (**Matthew 25:41**), “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels,” (**Revelation 20:15**), “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Read Luke 3:10-14... Some of those in the crowd are taken back by John’s warning and strong image of destruction; so they ask him what they need to do to avoid such a fiery end, i.e., how do they show they have true repentance.

In **verse 11**, John provides simple general instruction: if you have more than what you need, you should share it with those who have none, whether it is food or clothing or any other basic necessities, give freely to those in need.

In **verses 12-13**, some tax collectors, coming to be baptized, ask John what they should do to demonstrate true repentance. John told them to treat the people fairly, justly, and not to extort money for taxes the people are not required to pay, i.e., don’t do what is unlawful, do what is right.

In **verse 14**, soldiers who are there begin to ask John what they should do, how should they treat others. Note: We don’t know if these are Roman soldiers under the authority of Pilate the Governor, or personal soldiers of Herod Antipas, the Ruler of Judea, or perhaps temple guards or soldiers who serve the Chief Priests.

John tells them not to use their authority to intimidate or extort money from the people, perhaps by making false accusations against someone, expecting to be paid off, so that they will not arrest them. John tells them to be satisfied with their own wages and to treat people justly.

John’s instruction seems simple, in fact, it is representative of the Golden Rule, “treat others the way you want them to treat you.” Jesus taught (**Matthew 7:12**), “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets. ” It is also recorded in the Book of James (**James 2:8**), “If, you are fulfilling the royal law [the kings law] according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

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This teaching comes from the Greatest Commandment (**Matthew 22:36-40**), “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. ‘This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ‘On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Romans 13:10, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

John warns that apart from repentance that leads to salvation, no one will escape the coming judgement of God; true repentance always demonstrates a life that is no longer characterized by sin and self-interest, but instead, by love for God and for others, a life of good works that are pleasing to God.

1Thessalonians 5:15-18, “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Pastor Mike

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