**The Gospel of Luke**

**Lesson 6** Luke 3:1-22 John—the Forerunner!

**Questions:**

1. What important truth did you learn from the lecture, and how does it apply to your life?
2. Scan Wiersbe chapter 3 and read pages 45-48
   1. How was the baptism performed by John the Baptist different from Christian baptism today? Who refused to listen to John’s message and baptism? Why?
   2. What was the assignment given by God to John the Baptist?

Luke, with a true historian’s approach, dates the ministry of John the Baptist with secular history. He places the emphasis upon John’s message of repentance as the condition for the coming of the Messiah. From the Mosaic system of washing in water, which was a common custom of immersion in that day, John baptized those who came to him as merely a preparation (a moral reformation) for the coming of Christ. Christ would baptize by the Holy Spirit—a real transformation…

This chapter contains a great deal of detail; Luke is a stickler for accuracy. Six characters are identified in this verse which allow us to date the time. Caesar Augustus was emperor when the Lord Jesus Christ was born, but when John began his ministry Tiberius Caesar was emperor. Secular history, which must supply us with the details, tells us that Tiberius was brilliant but brutal. He was clever but cunning. He was inhuman and profane. He attempted to master the world. Next the names of the puppet rulers are given.

Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. Why were there two high priests? Two high priests reveals the power of Rome over the religion of Jerusalem in that day. Annas was the power behind the throne, but Caiaphas was the one Rome put out in front.

The normal experience for John would have been to serve in the temple as his father had. He should have been a leader in the temple, but he despised it. Instead, he went into the wilderness and renounced his priesthood. He did not wish to serve in a corrupt system, and so he became a prophet. That is the picture: John was a priest, and he became   
a prophet…

He was a priest, a prophet, and a preacher. He was a priest by birth because he was   
the son of Zacharias, but he was called by God to be a prophet.[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. Read Luke 3:1-6. The Voice of One Calling in the Desert!
2. Why do you think Luke provides so much historical information?
3. What was the main message that John the Baptist and Jesus preached (Matt. 3:1-2; Mark 1:14-15)?

* Define *repentance*.
* From the following verses, give different aspects of repentance:

Isaiah 30:15

Ezekiel 18:30-31

Luke 13:3

Acts 20:21

Romans 2:4

2 Corinthians 7:10

2 Peter 3:9

* Why do you think most churches never preach “Repent and turn to God?”

The word “repentance” or “repent” is used in the writings of Paul to the Romans, the Corinthians, and to Timothy, and by the writer to the Hebrews as well as by Peter. It occurs ten times in the book of Revelation of John. In all of the New Testament it appears more than fifty times. Hebrews lists it as an elementary doctrine of Christ, a foundation. How serious then is the condition of the professing church where repentance is missing from its elementary evangelism or church growth? —J. Edwin Orr[[2]](#endnote-2)

* What is the result of a man who truly repents (Isaiah 6:5; Luke 23:40-41; Isaiah 64:6; Acts 3:19-20; 2 Cor. 6:8-10)?

Quotes concerning repentance:[[3]](#endnote-3)

“Man is born with his face turned away from God. When he truly repents, he is turned right around toward God; he leaves his old life.”—D.L. Moody

“One of the first things for which we have to pray is a true insight into our condition.”  
—Olive Wyon

“No man ever enters heaven until he is first convinced that he deserves hell.”  
—John Everett

“Does the ‘repent and believe the gospel’ imply that the sinner must do two things to be saved, and not one only? The exhortation is really only one requirement. The instruction, ‘Leave London and go to Los Angeles,’ sounds like a two-fold request, but it really is only one; it is impossible to go to Los Angeles without leaving London.”—J. Edwin Orr[[4]](#endnote-4)

1. Dr. Luke quotes Isaiah in verses 4-6. Explain what these phrases mean to you:

* A voice of one calling in the desert
* Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him
* Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth
* And all mankind will see God’s salvation

This prophecy reflects the widespread custom that when an eminent ruler was about to visit a city, the citizens would construct a smooth, broad road so he could enter the city with due pomp and dignity. A modern equivalent is the *Champs Elysees* in Paris, first used with great effect by Napoleon and his armies. But Isaiah’s vision was far grander. The highway was not simply a grand entrance to a city, but a great thoroughfare through a mountainous wilderness. He saw mountains flattened and valleys filled in so that a broad superhighway could be made ready for the Messiah-King.

The point we must not miss is this: the great highway John was building was one of repentance. The Baptist was saying, “Mend not your roads, but your lives.” To put it in terms of American geography, repentance removes the obstacles, flattens the Sierras, and fills in Death Valley in our lives, so that Christ has full access. Repentance invites the fullness of God. In fact, when God’s people live repentantly, it also opens the way for the world to know him. Note again the final line of Isaiah’s words: “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (v. 6v; cf. 2:30-32).[[5]](#endnote-5)

1. Read Luke 3:7-14. A Warning to the Unrepentant!

These words from John the Baptist are dire in their prediction of the destiny of those who refuse to repent and turn to God in trust and obedience. John is warning the multitudes of the great final judgment. The ax was already at the root of the trees. Judgment is coming. The question for all of us is this: do our lives reveal the fruit of repentance? Is there real evidence that you belong to Christ? If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Have you truly been born again (John 3)?

The most unwelcome message, even today, is the voice of the prophet. The world will not receive a man who contradicts its philosophy of life. If you want to be popular, and this is also true of preachers, you have to sing in unison with the crowd. God have mercy on the pulpit that is nothing in the world but the sounding board for what the congregation is saying. The world does not want to hear the voice of God, especially when that voice speaks of judgment. John’s message was very strong.[[6]](#endnote-6)

1. The wrath of God! In verse 7, John says to the crowds which included many of the Pharisees and Sadducees (the religious leaders of Israel), “Who warned you to flee from the wrath of God?” From the following verses, share what you learn about God’s wrath:

Nahum 1:2, cf. Romans 5:10

Zephaniah 1:14-15

John 3:36

Romans 1:18; 2:5; 5:9

1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9

Revelation 19:15

1. The final judgment! In verse 9, John says, “The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit, will be cut down and thrown into   
   the fire.” Explain what this verse means to you (see also Luke 13:3-5; 20:45-47;   
   Matt. 13:37-43; 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15).
2. What does it mean to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” or to produce “good fruit”? (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:22-26; Col. 3:12-14)
3. Read Luke 3:15-20! More warnings from a great prophet!
4. What was the difference between John’s baptism and the baptism that Jesus offered?
5. In verse 17, John warns, “His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

The reasonable character of the explanation, according to which the baptism with fire includes a reference to the final judgment, is also evident from verse 17, which likewise refers to that great day: “His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clear his threshing floor.” The underlying figure is that of a threshing floor where winnowing is taking place. Such a floor is either natural or artificial. If the former, it is the surface of a flat rock on top of a hill, exposed to the wind. If the latter, it is a similarly exposed area, about thirty to fifty feet in diameter, which had been prepared by clearing the soil of stones, wetting it down, and then packing it hard and smooth, causing it to slope slightly upward along the rim, and surrounding it with a border of stones to keep the grain inside. First, the sheaves of grain (barley or wheat) that have been spread out in this area are threshed by oxen pulling a sled the bottom of which is studded with stones whereby the kernels of grain are separated from the stalks. The chaff (whatever remains of the kernels’ hard coat, dust, dirt, small pieces of straw) is, however, still clinging to the kernels. Now the winnowing, to which verse 17 refers, begins. Bunch by bunch the threshed grain is tossed into the air by means of a shovel equipped with two or more prongs; the afternoon breeze, generally sweeping in from the Mediterranean from May through September, blows away the chaff. The heavier grain kernels fall straight down upon the threshing floor. Thus, grain and chaff are separated. The work of winnowing does not stop until the threshing floor has been thoroughly cleared.[[7]](#endnote-7)

* Using Matthew 25:31-46, to what is John referring in verse 17?
* From verse 18, what message did John preach? Should this have been encouraging after the message of verse 17?
* What often happens to a true prophet of God according to verses 19-20? Do you believe we need more men like John the Baptist today? If yes, why (John 3:19-21; and 8:32)?
* What is the greatest truth you have learned in this lesson?

1. J. Vernon McGee, THRU THE BIBLE COMMENTARY SERIES: LUKE, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 51-52. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Robert J. Morgan, Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), 664. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Martin H. Manser, The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 316. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Robert J. Morgan, Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), 662. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 112. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Vernon McGee, THRU THE BIBLE COMMENTARY SERIES: LUKE, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991),53. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978),211. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)