

True Repentance: God's Highway to the Heart, Part 3

Scripture: Luke 3:15–17

Code: 42-43

When I was young and just learning how to preach, there were a number of preaching models that perhaps I could have followed. The Lord was gracious to lead me to the one that we call expositing the Scripture, which I've done through the years. But there were other models. I suppose the more popular one was: A joke, three points and a poem, and that constitutes a sermon. If I may argue with that, I would argue with it on a lot of fronts. But I am much more concerned that you get one point than that you get three, for example.

I really think that effective preaching communicates one main message. And sometimes if we say too much, you lose the main thrust and I would hope that as I open the Word of God to you, even though we cover passages and we talk about history and we talk about backgrounds and we talk about the language of the text, and all of those kinds of things, that that all moves toward one main point. I'm not concerned that you get three points. I am concerned that you get one. Sometimes where some people could make three points in one sermon, I can only make one point in three months. But I confess to the fact that when I make the point, I hope you remember the point.

I am convinced there is a point to be made in the text of Luke 3. You can open your Bible to Luke 3. Now as a faithful preacher you not only want to make a point but you want to make a point that is out of the Bible. You don't want to invent your message, you simply want to proclaim God's message. So the task of the expositor, the task of the student of the Bible is to extract out of the text of the Bible the point that God is making in any given passage.

The second thing you want to do as a preacher is take that point and put it in the context of your time so that the message is understood, not only as to its truth but as to its significance, not only what is God's message but how does it speak to our time.

In the preaching of John there is really one great point that he is making and it is the point of true repentance. John preached repentance and that's what we have been preaching to you as we have been learning about John. My task has been to determine that the message of John was repentance and repackage that message and give it to you so that you can not only understand it but understand it in the context of our day today.

We live in a time of evangelicalism when repentance is not a popular theme for preachers. There are very few preachers who are known as strong preachers of repentance. And yet repentance is a theme that belongs in the gospel presentation to the degree that we could say one has not preached the biblical gospel if one has not preached repentance. In Acts 17 verse 30 the Bible says, "God commands all men everywhere to repent." God commands all men everywhere to repent. If we are faithful preachers of the message of God, then we must in God's name command all men everywhere to repent. Matthew 9:13 says that Jesus Christ came to call sinners to repentance. Second Peter 3:9, "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Luke 15:7 and 10 indicates that there is joy in heaven over one sinner brought to repentance. And in

Luke 24:47, the Great Commission Jesus gave is that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all people.

Our message is repentance. It is a hard message. It is a harsh message. It confronts sin. It un.masks hypocrisy. It denies superficiality. You cannot preach the true gospel apart from repentance. John came preaching repentance, the Bible says. Jesus came preaching repentance. The apostles preached repentance. Christ commands repentance. He does it at least three times in just Revelation 2 and 3. God saves through repentance. In fact, in Acts 11:18 it calls repentance, "Repentance unto life." There is no spiritual life; there is no eternal life without repentance. In Acts 5:31 it is said Christ is exalted as a Savior to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Now, folks, that's the gospel. And yet you do not hear repentance being preached today. The message is that God will forgive all the sins of the sinner who truly repents. That is the good news. That is what we must preach. But it is not the message today.

As I was thinking about that this week, I...I thought I'll just pick up the latest Christian periodical on my desk, the latest one to arrive and see if there's anything in there about repentance. I picked up the current issue of *Christianity Today*. *Christianity Today* is the best window in compromising evangelicalism that I know of. So I picked it up. And I was looking for something on the gospel, something on repentance. And I was glad when I got into the magazine a little way and I found there was a section entitled, "What is the Good News?" I said, "That's perfect because that's the issue." What is the good news? What is the gospel? What is it that we preach? And the second heading was, "Nine Evangelical Leaders Define the Gospel." I thought, "This is perfect, nine evangelical leaders define the gospel."

The beginning of the article went on to say that these nine evangelical leaders were either evangelists who spend their whole life preaching the gospel or they were scholars studying the text of the gospel, or they were both evangelist scholars, but they were all evangelists, they were all scholars to some degree. And so they were carefully selected for their erudition and their experience in the gospel.

The article then said that all of them found this to be a tremendous challenge, to give a short statement on the gospel of 250 to 300 words. They said this was a tremendous challenge. I'm not sure why but it was. Though they were self-confessed evangelists and self-confessed scholars they said it was, quote: "A tremendous challenge to give the gospel in 300 words."

I read the nine statements, the nine 300-word statements. In six of the nine there was never the mention of the word "repentance," wasn't mentioned, didn't appear, or any synonym. That was interesting. How can you proclaim the gospel without repentance? You can't. One of them used the word "repentance" and never defined it at all. A second one used the word "repentance" and never defined it at all. A third one used the word "repentance" and said it was a synonym for faith, so turning it from a positive into a neg...a negative into a positive, turning it away from anything to do with sin, and redefining it as something to do with Christ. So essentially with a wrong definition of repentance, seven out of nine never even referred to biblical repentance. The two that mentioned the word gave it no definition whatsoever.

This is really a window on what I call compromising evangelicalism. You can present the gospel

without any understanding whatsoever of repentance, and if you don't feel like it, you don't even need to mention it. What you have today is sort of a gospel of addition. It's the gospel that says, add Jesus to your life, He'll fix your life, He'll make you more comfortable, happier, better, successful, help your marriage, get you to heaven. It's minimalistic. It's superficial; nine articles, 3,000 words without any definition of repentance. And there is the window on contemporary evangelicalism. No confrontation of sin, no concern about shallow belief. Where was...where was just one out of the nine who was a John, huh? Just one, just somebody calling people to repentance; and these are not men-on-the-street interviews, these are evangelists and scholars.

I get the feeling that the prophet John wouldn't be invited to too many conferences if he was around today. Because, you see, he placed repentance in the middle of everything. In fact, he really belabored the point, as I have surely indicated you...to you in the time that it's taking us to get through this passage on his preaching. He preached about repentance because he knew that the preparation for Messiah was repentance; that the way you made a pathway through the wilderness of your heart so that the Messiah could enter in was through repentance. And so he was a preacher of repentance. And when he came he came saying repent.

Now as we have been looking at Luke 3 from verse 4 down to 17, we have been defining the nature and character of repentance. Realizing that there can be such a thing as a shallow or superficial repentance, we want to avoid that as John wanted to avoid that. And we've said a number of times he preached hard truth, he preached a harsh message, he preached a very confrontive message, he preached a very uncomfortable message. He preached a message that ripped the mask off people who thought they were good and even thought they were godly. He dug deep into their hearts to penetrate the true assessment of their real condition before God, which was a condition of utter and comprehensive sinfulness and consequent lostness that led them directly into eternal judgment. He really did unbare the reality of their condition. That kind of preaching today is just really not popular. A lot of sort of soft psychology has invaded the gospel and we think that we can just schmooze people into a relationship with Jesus Christ without ever exposing the reality of what the heart is and the reality of superficial repentance.

A little bit of an ongoing debate going on myself with somebody and I got a letter on my desk this morning regarding this. I... Statistics came out that said the divorce rate among Christians is higher than that among non-Christians. And I said, "I don't believe that." Somebody asked me if I believed that and I said, "No, I don't believe that." So I got a letter saying, "How dare you question our survey?" I don't question your survey. I will respond by saying I don't question your survey, I just question your definition of a Christian. That's the issue. I think the church is filled with people who fit the Christian category in the sense that they're involved in a church and they label themselves that. But the conduct of their life doesn't evidence that they are Christians. It's one thing to say it. It's another thing to be it. And it's back to Matthew 7, "Many will say...and the Lord will say, 'I'm sorry I don't know you.'"

Well John preached repentance and he was concerned about false repentance. He was concerned about shallowness. He was concerned about superficiality. And so he preached strongly and sometimes even harshly and very confrontingly because it was necessary to repel the shallow repentance if possible. Even with all of John's hard preaching it became clear that there were many shallow repenters who came out to see him and to hear him and even to be baptized. We know that because when believers in Jerusalem gathered together after Jesus ascended into heaven, there were only 120 of them. And during the ministry of John the whole of Judea and Jerusalem was

going out to listen to him and to be baptized. So even when you preach the truth and you preach it as it should be preached, there will be shallow conversions, there will be shallow repentance. How much more of that there will be when there is no repentance at all being preached and there is no confrontation of sin at all. And you have so much of that going on in evangelicalism today that people are affirming something and then labeling themselves as Christians, who in fact are shallow repenters who do not have a saving relationship with God. When you ask them about their life, you should expect to have them conducting themselves in a manner not dissimilar from non-Christians because that in fact is what they are.

So, John marks out six features of true repenters. We've gone through them. Number one, true repenters reflect on personal sin. And that is in the analogy of verse 5, every ravine being filled up. Remember I told you it's kind of like the low, base, deep things, the ugly, hidden sins of life being brought up. You're going to have to deal with those. And then the mountains and the hills being brought down. The lofty sins of pride and self-exaltation and self-righteousness need to be brought down. And the devious crooked things, the scheming things need to be straightened out. And the clutter and the things that make the pathway difficult and impassable need to be dealt with, all the remaining iniquities that clutter up life. You've got to deal with sin deeply. That's the first point: Reflect on personal sin, its height, its depth, its breadth, its length. True repenters do that. They come to grips with their personal sin even to the point where John is saying to these Jews, you have to consider as if you were a Gentile, you're no better off than a Gentile, you're outside the covenant, you're outside salvation and so you need to come and repent and acknowledge that you're no better than an outcast which will be demonstrated outwardly when you go through what was proselyte baptism, a kind of baptism that Gentiles went through when they wanted to enter into the people of Judaism and become a part of their religion. So they reflect on personal sin.

Secondly, they recognize divine wrath. You...in order to preach repentance you have to have people do an honest inventory of the...the depth and height and length and breadth of their own personal sin, and secondly, you have to tell them, at the end of verse 7, about the wrath to come. You cannot preach the true gospel without discussing hell. I can't remember, and I don't want to say for certain, but I don't think the word "hell" was mentioned in any of those nine presentations. But people who are going to truly repent are stimulated to repent typically today because somehow Jesus will make life more comfortable rather than the truth of the matter, life might get far more uncomfortable as you try to live for God in an ungodly world. But one thing will be true: Life is going to be very comfortable when you die because you're going to be in heaven, not hell.

John preached the wrath to come. He preached eternal wrath. He preached eternal hell. Where is that on today's list of sermon subjects?

Thirdly, true repenters reject religious ritual. John saying in verse 7, "You brood of snakes," you know, you're just the same snakes, the sons of the original snake, Satan, you're just vipers, like snakes scrambling before a brush fire to get to the water so they don't get burned. You don't want your nature changed. You just think that if you can get to the water you'll...you'll evade the fire." Well, whoever warned you about that? Not me, is the implication. You've got to reject the ritual. You're not going to be ready for Messiah, you're not going to be accepted in God's kingdom because you're baptized. It's not something that ritual accomplishes.

So you have to do an inventory on personal sin. You have to understand coming wrath. You have to reject religious ritual. Fourthly, true repenters must renounce ancestry as any means of salvation.

The Jewish people were prone to say, as verse 8 indicates, "We have Abraham for our father. I mean, you know, John, we're certainly God's children, we're in the Kingdom, we are the offspring of Abraham." Well that's good. Abraham gave you two things: One, he gave you a sin nature. So Abraham passed down sin to you. Second thing Abraham passed down to you is privilege, privilege. And the privilege is there but you'll never get that privilege as long as sin is unforgiven. So being a child of Abraham gives you privilege but privilege that is only yours through repentance. And if you don't repent — listen to this — privilege then turns to become a worse eternal fate, right? Because you've had more privilege, you therefore will have greater judgment. So you have to reject any salvation from your family, from Abraham, from your lineage, from your parents.

So, true repenters renounce religious ritual and family ancestry. And they realize it's a personal matter between them and God. They do personal inventory on their sin. They recognize eternal wrath, eternal hell. And then, fifthly, as we saw last time, they reveal spiritual transformation. True repenters, listen to this, according to 2 Timothy 2:25, God grants repentance. According to Acts 11:18, God grants repentance. And when God is working the work of repentance in the heart, that is a work connected with regeneration, new birth, conversion, so that change is taking place. In the words of Ezekiel 36:27, it is God's Spirit being put into someone with the effect that they begin to keep His ordinances, to keep His commandments so that when someone is genuinely repenting, God is regenerating that person so there is manifest evidence of a changed life. So that's why he says to them in verse 8, "Bring forth the fruits that are in keeping," or that are fit, or that go along, "with repentance."

I mean, there... You can't just say, "We repent." Let's see the evidence of it in a changed life. Is it, Acts 11:18, repentance unto life? And that means divine life, spiritual life, the life of God which is eternal. Can we see the evidence of it? Somebody says, "Well, I repent." Let me see your life. Let me see your life, John says. And when we see their life, what do we look for? Well, you could say we look for love for God. But how do you see that? You know, how do you... If you're going to look at somebody and say, how do I know they love God? That's hard to know because that's something that goes on inside. We can all sing the songs, you know, about loving God. We sung the hymns this morning and I'm sure as all of us sung them there were varying degrees of worship going on in our hearts and we don't know that. I stand next to people, hear people behind me, in front of me, around me like you do and they're singing the song but I can't measure that love in their heart, I can't see that love toward God.

So when the people say to John, "What kind of fruit is God looking for?" John picks out some things that are very visible, very visible. He says in verse 10, Luke does, the multitudes were asking John and they were saying: What do we do? Okay, what kind of fruit are you looking for? How do we manifest that our repentance is real? How do we give evidence of this real repentance? What do we do? And he would answer, which means this was a customary thing repeatedly as day in and day out these questions came up, and he would say to them, well if you had two tunics," two inner garments, you can only wear one at a time, give one to somebody who doesn't have one. And if you have food, then give food to somebody who doesn't have any. The bottom line here is we can't see your love for God which evidences a changed life, but we will be able to see your love for man.

Now there are only two great commandments that sum up the whole law of God. "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." The love that you have for God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, that's hard to measure because your heart, your mind, your soul, your strength are all inner things. But loving your neighbor the way you love

yourself, you don't love yourself with an inner love. You don't sit there and say, "Oh, I love myself, I love myself." That's not inside. You're not meditating, looking off and just contemplating how you love yourself. You love yourself in a tangible way. You love yourself by acts upon yourself that satisfy yourself, right? You don't have to be taught to love yourself, you love yourself. You got up this morning and you loved yourself in the mirror for a while and you loved yourself at the breakfast table for a while and you loved yourself, you know, by putting on your proper clothes and you took care of yourself. And that's what you do. You love yourself by the attention you give to yourself. And you made sure you were clothed. You weren't really concerned about folks in India this morning, you were concerned about you. You weren't concerned about people who might not have something to eat. You were just there, loving yourself. So loving yourself is a very visible thing. We all do that. And to a degree it's okay. I mean, God made us to love ourselves. That's part of self-preservation and that's part of why you can come out in public and we can endure it. This goes with life. We understand it, and God understands it, and I think it's fine.

But that's what he's saying. Loving God is very hard to measure. I can't see that. Over the long haul I might be able to see patterns of your life, but I can look at your life and know whether you love your neighbor. And so that's what he's saying. I can tell whether God's changed your life because if He's changed your life you're going to love people as you love yourself. So if you have two tunics, it's fine for you to have one and somebody else to have what you have equally. And if you have enough food, you're going to have some for you and some for somebody else.

And if you happen to be a tax collector, they come along in verse 12 and they say, "Okay, what do we do?" And what he says to them is just love people by...by...people by never taking more than what is authorized for you to take. Jesus never argued with taxes. Jesus never argued with the right for the government to take taxes. In fact, He even said, "Render to Caesar whatever is Caesar's and to God's whatever is God's." Jesus Himself paid His own taxes and told the disciples to do the same. In Romans 13 the powers that be are ordained of God, pay your tribute, pay your custom, pay your tax. Jesus didn't argue with that. But what He did say was do not ever take more than is authorized. Treat your brothers honestly and justly. That's an expression of love.

And if you're a soldier...the soldiers came, "What do we do?" Again, more expressions of love toward your neighbor. Don't ever take money from anyone by force. Don't you ever extort. "Shakedown" is the literal verb here. Use your power and your force to get money out of people, or falsely accuse people, trumped up charges, lying witnesses, etc., etc. The very thing they did to Jesus at His trials. And be content with your wages. It's your discontent with your wages that makes you take your force and your power and use people for your own aggrandizement.

So again, he's saying, if there's a change here, real repentance is going on, it's going to show up in the attitude you have toward others. And, of course, Jesus particularly condemned the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders, because they would devour widows' houses, they were cruel, they were brutal. They bound heavy burdens on people, never helped them carry them. They put their legalistic rules all over people and made life miserable. They did the very opposite of showing love to people.

So if there is true repentance there is going to be a deep and honest evaluation of one's sinfulness. There is going to be a recognition of divine wrath. There is going to be a rejection of any religious ritual, whatever that ritual might be as a means of salvation. And there is going to be a renunciation of any confidence of salvation in family ancestry or heritage. And there is going to be in a true repentance the revelation of a real transformation that shows up in an unselfish act of love, or an

unselfish life of love toward others.

Now all of that is true, but it's one step short of what is necessary. One final point: True repenters receive the true Messiah. And now we turn from the five things that are looking at sin and the means of salvation and we turn to the One who alone can save, Jesus Christ. And let's look at verse 15.

"Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John as to whether he might be the Christ, John answered and said to them all, 'As for me, I baptize you with water. But one is coming who is mightier than I and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn. But He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'"

Now at first glance, again you see the harshness of John, you see the hard truth that John preaches and maybe you don't see anything else. But what you really have here is a very significant attestation to the fact that the coming One, the Messiah, the Christ, is in fact God. This is a great statement on John's part that the Messiah is God. And that is plenty of reason why John is not the Christ because the Christ can do things that John cannot do. John can baptize with water. Frankly, so can I. And so could you. But John cannot baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. That is supernatural. And that terminology comes from the Old Testament and has deep meaning in the minds of the Jewish hearers. And we'll get more into that next time.

In that same magazine that I was reading there was a dialogue going on there with a gentleman, a theologian who was a part of a committee that wrote a statement on salvation, a very accurate statement, a very good statement on salvation which, I believe, they're referring to the statement which I agreed with and actually signed. But the editors of the magazine said to this man, we see the statement, we read the statement but there's been some criticism of the statement because in this statement it says no one can be saved unless they have, first of all, an intellectual understanding of the content of the gospel. That is to understand Jesus Christ, who He is and what He did. Then the question came, "Don't you think that's too narrow? Don't you think that excludes some people? And haven't you been criticized by the narrowness of that statement which is that you can't be saved unless you understand the person and work of Jesus Christ?"

Now that's where modern evangelicalism is. They think if you have to believe in Christ to be saved, that's too narrow. But it's not. Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other (what?) name," than the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, as in that context. No matter what kind of repentance a person makes, there will be no salvation unless there is trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So that's the capstone on John's preaching. He preaches repentance, repentance, repentance, but he then turns them toward Messiah.

Let's look at verse 15. "While the people were in a state of expectation. . ." Now I have to stop there for a minute. There was...there was just general expectation that went on all the time because, I mean, they've been waiting and waiting for the Messiah for centuries, waiting for the promises of God to Moses about the prophet who would come, the promises of God way back in the Garden, the one who would be the seed of the woman, who would bruise the serpent's head. They've been waiting for a long time for the promise that God made to Abraham to be fulfilled in the seed who would be the Redeemer; the promise to David in the King who would come and establish His kingdom all throughout the earth. So there was a sort of expectation just built in the fabric of their

religion. But that's not what it's really addressing here. There was a level of expectation that had been heightened by the ministry of John. John came as the herald. He came, saying that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 40. He was the voice crying in the wilderness. And everybody was going out to hear him, all Jerusalem and Judea, and they were literally having their expectation heightened because John was preaching.

And by the way, according to Matthew 11:3 and Luke 7, I think it's verse 20. It's in the section from verses 18 to 20. Messiah is called the expected one, the expected one. Messiah and expectation in some ways were synonymous. They were waiting for, if you will, the coming one. That's another way to translate it. But I think in the NAS in those two verses, Matthew 11:3 and I think it's Luke 7:20, He is called the expected one. So they were eagerly waiting the expected one.

And it was very natural, I think, for them to wonder as it says in verse 15, in their hearts about John as to whether he might be the Messiah who is synonymous with the coming one, or the expected one. By the way, in verse 16 Messiah is referred to as the coming one. It says, "but one is coming," or literally the coming one, the expected one.

Was John the expected one? Could it be that he is the expected one? Now let me fill in the blank here. John never claimed that, never. John never did. In fact, right here in verse 16 he says He is mightier than I, the one who is coming, the coming one, the expected one is mightier than I and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals. We are on two different levels. I am not even worthy to climb up and be the lowest slave imaginable rendering the humblest duty in His behalf. We are in two different worlds He is so superior to me. John never claimed to be the Messiah. You need to understand that, never.

In fact in the gospel of John it says I think in unmistakable terms, "There came a man," verse 6, "sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness that he might bear witness of the light," who is Christ, "that all might believe through him." Verse 8, "He was not the light but came that he might bear witness of the light." He was not the Messiah. He knew it. Everybody knew it, really. Luke 20 verse 6 says, "All men perceived that John was a prophet." He was a prophet. There was no doubt about that because he did what a prophet does. What does a prophet do? A prophet preaches sin, repentance, forgiveness, judgment, salvation. That's what prophets do. John did it. John perfectly fulfilled the mission of a prophet. And, of course, of all the prophets who had ever lived he was the greatest. Matthew 11:11 says of all the people who had lived he was the greatest up until his time. His message of repentance and forgiveness and judgment and salvation and blessing and kingdom, both sides, made everybody know that he was a prophet. And all men, Luke 20 verse 6, perceived that John was a prophet.

But it was natural to wonder at the beginning whether or not he might in fact be more than a prophet. But he wasn't more than a prophet and he knew it. That's why in John...John's gospel, chapter 3 verses 30 and 31, John the Baptist, the prophet said, "Jesus must increase and I must (what?) decrease." I'm not even worthy to untie His sandals. That was the worst... That was the lowliest of the lowest of the low duties. In fact it was said by some that it was such a dirty thing to do that it should only be done by a Gentile. I'm not even worthy to do that. I can't even climb up to do the dirtiest job in His behalf, that's how separated we are.

So, John answered and said to them in verse 16, "As for me, I baptize you with water." That's all I can do, folks. I can just dunk you here in the Jordan, that's all I can do. "But the coming One, the

expected One who is mightier than I..." Boy, there's a great statement. He's in another category. He is in another category all together. "When He comes, and by the way, I'm not fit to untie the thong of His sandal, He will baptize you not with water, but with (what?) the Holy Spirit and fire." This is a completely different paradigm, now we're into the supernatural. John says I can dunk you in the water of the Jordan River, what I cannot do is immerse you into the Holy Spirit, nor can I immerse you into eternal judgment, that belongs to the divine category, right? So what he's saying here is I am a man, He's not. They associated the Holy Spirit and the giving of the Holy Spirit with God. Why? Ezekiel 36, God says, "Under New Covenant terms I bring you New Covenant forgiveness and wash away your sins, I'll put My Spirit in you." They associated that with the work of Almighty God. They also associated the fiery judgment of final retribution with Almighty God.

What John is saying is, with me you're dealing with a man who is a prophet. With Him you're dealing with God who dispenses the Holy Spirit to those who repent and eternal judgment to those who don't. That is a completely different category. I...I'm like John. I really don't like it when people say Jesus was a great teacher, or Jesus was a prophet. I mentioned some months ago to you that I was listening to some of these candidates talking and this endless dialogue that these guys are in and somebody said to George W. Bush, "Who is the most influential person in your life?" And he said Jesus. And one of the other candidates said, "I don't think that people when asked that question should answer by naming a philosopher." Well Jesus is not a philosopher. Jesus is God. No philosopher can baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And John, who is miles ahead of philosophers as a prophet who spoke the truth of God had limitations. He could preach the truth and he could baptize in water, but that's where it ended. That's where it ended.

Jesus is the One John's pointing to. The coming One, the Messiah, who by the way is even referred to as the coming One in Isaiah 40. You remember back when we read the opening ten verses, some of which is quoted in verses 4, 5 and 6 that I pointed it out to you that God is called the coming One, that when Messiah comes it will be God who is coming. So the coming One, borrowed from Isaiah 40, God when He comes in the form of the Messiah is mightier than I. Yes, He's a mightier preacher of righteousness than I. He's a mightier preacher of repentance than I. But more than that, He's so far beyond me that I'm not even worthy to do the humblest task in His behalf. He's so far beyond me that it's inconceivable because He will immerse you in the Holy Spirit, or He will immerse you in fire. And I don't have the power to do that.

John is saying I can't save you, nor can I damn you. I can't give you the Holy Spirit, nor can I bring you to eternal punishment. That's way beyond me. We have now catapulted out of the human realm and we're into the realm of God. So the Messiah who is coming is none other than God. And He will do what no prophet, no man, even the greatest man who ever lived up until his time, could even begin to think to do. For anybody to imagine they could dispense the Holy Spirit or eternal judgment would be to have arrived at a level of lunacy and blasphemy beyond which one cannot go. Nobody can do that but God. He is asserting the deity of Jesus Christ. You're dealing with the coming One who is none other than God as promised in Isaiah 40.

Now what does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire? Next Sunday I'm going to tell you and I'm going to tell you in the Jewish context. And see, this is part of great preaching, you have to preach the blessing side and you have to preach the cursing. You have to preach the wondrous realities of what it means to be immersed with the Spirit and the horrifying reality of what it means to be immersed in judgment. And that, John said, only the Messiah, as God could do. And we'll look into that in some depth next time. Boy! That went quickly.

So, I didn't give you a joke, three points and a poem. But I hope you're getting the main point. I don't care about three points, I care about one point, that true repentance demands trust in the true Messiah, apart from whom there is no salvation. That's why John is introducing Him to them. Join me in prayer.

The Word strikes us seemingly always, Father, with its tremendous power and its clarity. And we're reminded that You have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, the educated, and the erudite and you have wonderfully revealed these things to babes. There are not many of us that are noble, and there are not many of us that are mighty. We are the humble and the lowly of life, but these profound and eternal truths we understand, the world does not. And all of this by mercy and grace to us as sinners, that we, in believing, might be saved. We thank You that You have granted to us true repentance and from that transformed lives and with that You have immersed us into Your Spirit and in Him the guarantee of eternal life with all of its endless blessing. We thank You for that. We pray for those who are yet under the sentence of fire, who are yet under the sentence of eternal hell, who will...who will perish in a never-dying, never-ending suffering because they have rejected the only Savior. Oh, God, may You be gracious to them and save them for Your glory, even today, we pray. Amen.

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