

Let's Be Clear!



SERMON NOTES JANUARY 12, 2025

Scripture: Luke 3:15-17; 21-22

LUKE 3:15-17; 21-22 (NRSV)

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

God's saving activity in Jesus Christ is an invitation to all to embrace God's purpose and experience life transforming grace!

I. A CRISIS OF DECISION?

- A. John the baptizer figures heavily in all four Gospels as the person who announces what God is doing during the people, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3)", calling the people of God to be ready for what new thing God was doing!
- B. In all of the Gospel accounts John's message is one of repentance (turning from sin and self towards God) but Luke is specific in that John's call is "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". John's message brings a moment of truth to all who hear, asking the question, "What must I do?"
- C. John's appearance and message is both exciting and disturbing to the people and Luke tells that "The people were filled with expectation and questioning...concerning whether John might be the anticipated Messiah."
- D. Luke wants his readers to know that while John is a prophet and an important voice that he is secondary to the one who is to come and has John quickly answering their thoughts by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire!" All of John's words attest to the fact that he is subordinate to the one to come!
- E. We know from Luke's telling that the "one" is indeed Jesus! His ministry will be characterized by bringing the judgment of which John has warned, and by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit!!

II. A DAY OF RECKONING!

- A. John wants his hearers to know that God is not pleased by the lack of social responsibility, the injustices and inequities in society, and the rampant greed of the people in power (a message that aptly applies to today!) and that God is acting to bring accountability! Jesus is the agent of this accountability and judgment!

- B. The image of the farmer throwing the wheat in the air to separate it from the chaff was a powerful image to his hearers about how God would confront and measure the people. Everyone would have understood the combustible nature of "chaff" and how those identified as not being acceptable would "burn with unquenchable fire."
- C. Many persons did come to John to receive his baptism (though Luke does not mention the actual act of baptizing by John) and his message caused quite a conflagration as King Herod himself was "convicted" by John's preaching, and had him thrown into prison.
- D. Luke reports that this happened before Jesus came to be baptized, but this is not to dispute that John baptized Jesus, only to tell how John's message caused such response and reaction!
- E. With little fanfare Luke then tells that Jesus came like so many others and was baptized (though Luke doesn't tell us where). But Luke wants his hearers to understand that Jesus was not in need of repentance and forgiveness, only that this was Jesus' destiny and an "epiphany" or proclamation of God's Christ to the world!

III. AN AFFIRMATION OF GREATNESS!!

- A. Luke's telling of what happens next is loaded with understanding of who Jesus is and what will be the nature and character of his ministry.
- B. Jesus is praying after his baptism (a reoccurring theme throughout Luke's Gospel) as something almost beyond description happens! "The heavens are opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.'"
- C. Luke's description of these events identifies Jesus as "the one" and let's his readers know that the Holy Spirit was upon Jesus and would empower his ministry. The message delivered by the voice from heaven calls attention to Jesus' sovereignty and service as the voice echoes the words from Psalm 2:7 used at the coronation of Israel's King as a son of God and Isaiah 42:1 a description of the suffering servant of God.
- D. Luke tells that these things are only perceived by Jesus (unlike the other Gospels where it is almost a public affirmation) and comes as confirmation to him of his identity and mission. He wants his readers to know and embrace this as Good News! As Fred Craddock says, "When repentance and forgiveness are available, judgment is good news...the primary aim is to save the wheat and not to burn the chaff!"

How are you practicing repentance and ready for God's coming in Jesus?

Are you praying and seeking God's power to live and serve faithfully?