

Introduction

- The Christmas Day kidney stone - not what I planned. I know my problem... BUT not a sense of urgency to change.
- Beginning of a new year - always a good time to evaluate areas of your life that need to change.
- You know areas of your life that need change: healthy habits, financial habits, etc.... Spiritual habits.
- Why do we have a hard time changing? Lack of discipline, enjoy your unhealthy habits, sins way too much, no accountability or unwilling to have accountability, etc.
- Many of us need change in our walk with the Lord... We need to let go of sin, pursue holiness, grow in intimacy, etc. Year after year goes by... We know we need change, but it doesn't seem to happen.
- How can we experience change in our walk with the Lord this year? John the Baptist's story shows us two truths that can help us experience change.

Take a hard look at yourself.

- Luke is a historian. Wants us to know that John's ministry took place at a real time in a real place. Note the names. At some point, most of the names mentioned would be confronted with the Gospel. Tiberius was emperor when Paul appealed to Caesar. Jesus taken to Herod Agrippa before his death. Pontius Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas also at crucifixion.
- John began ministry in the years of Tiberius... Luke locates the rulers (vs. 1-2). However, John, wandering the wilderness in the vicinity of the

Jordan River preparing the way for a king who is far more powerful and certainly far more loving and gracious than the emperor of Rome.

- Luke wants us to know that John is the fulfilment of [Isaiah 40](#). [Isaiah 1-39](#) - judgment. [Isaiah 40-66](#) - hope. John announcing that One is coming who is going to straighten out everything.
- Come out to the wilderness and get ready for this ONE who is coming! Repent and be baptized in the Jordan!
- Wilderness - the place where the nation of Israel began to form its identity after they came out of Egypt. God forming them - made a covenant - gave them Law yet they constantly resisted. A lot of ways - the wilderness a place of failure.
- The Jordan River - the place where the people crossed into the promised land for the first time on dry ground ([Joshua 3](#)). Crossed into the land to become a kingdom - a kingdom that would be a blessing to the nations.
- BUT... kings who failed to keep the eyes of the nation on God.
- John: "The Messiah is coming... The true King is here..."
- It was time to start over - come back to the place where they began and start over.
- Be baptized - ritual washings common in Israel - MIKVAHS - common for people to wash before entering the temple to be ritually pure. Or, a washing when someone proselyted from another faith to Judaism.
- John's baptism different - a baptism of repentance.
- John not concerned with ritual purity - but with real purity - with hearts being right before the King. The Israelites had bathed in the ritual waters but they had not repented.
- "Come, start again." John preparing people to start again with the true King who will build His Kingdom according to His will.
- Baptism of repentance - The people needed repentance.
- Repentance = to change the way you think - a change of mind that leads to a change of action - "produce fruit consistent with repentance."

- John's message: vs. 7 - "Brood of vipers..." Like snakes trying to slither away from a fire... People coming to the wilderness to hear John's message trying to escape from the judgment that John is preaching. But, they're still snakes. They don't want judgment but they also don't want to do what's necessary: repent - change direction. If they want to escape judgment, they need to change. Need works consistent with repentance.
- Can't rely on their spiritual heritage to escape judgment of God. (vs. 8) Can't depend on the fact that they are of the lineage of Abraham to save them. God can make anyone into children of Abraham.
- Judgment coming for everyone who does not produce fruit consistent with repentance.
- vs. 10 - question of the crowd, "What do we do?" John's answer: live lives that are OTHER focused. (Greatest commands: Love God and love others... A repentant life is a life with focus on God and His Kingdom - a life focused on God and His Kingdom is other focused.)
- vs. 15 - The questioning - "Is this the Messiah?" John's response: "I'm not worthy to tie his sandals." John knows his role - Luke's focus in first 2 chapters - birth of 2 boys - one is far more significant than the other. John knows who's more significant.
- John preparing the way for the One who will baptize with the Spirit - (Luke writes about Pentecost in [Acts 2](#)) - Through faith - we are baptized into Christ - AND Christ in us - empowered by Christ to live for His glory. John could not baptize with the Spirit. It's the baptism with the Spirit that matters because only Jesus can change us.
- Baptize with fire. vs. 17 - judgment. How you respond to the Messiah will determine what you will be baptized into - embrace the Messiah and be baptized with the Spirit. Rejected and be baptized into eternal judgment.
- vs. 18 - this message of repentance and judgment = good news. An opportunity for people to start over and live for the true King.
- vs. 19 - this message rejected by Herod and would eventually cost John his life.
- **You will bear fruit.** Fruit of you? Selfishness, indifference to the things of God, bitterness when things don't go your way, unforgiving heart

when someone hurts you, etc. Or, fruit of repentance? Fruit of repentance not perfect walk with Jesus but a sanctified walk with Jesus. You see progress. You see change. More loving, more patient, more sensitive to the Spirit's work. Over the past year, have you seen growth? Fruit of you? Or, the fruit of repentance?

- **The fruit you bear will reveal what you are depending on.** Depending on religious background? (That's who John is preaching against.) Depending on your own righteousness? Depending on your own self-sufficiency? Depending on your stuff? Or, depending on the love and grace of God to rescue from your sin and give you real life?

Take a necessary look at Jesus.

- Last time we saw Jesus he was a twelve-year old boy in the temple speaking with the religious leaders of the day. Now, He's in the wilderness! Jesus is in the place where Israel had failed - the place where John called the people back to start again.
- Jesus has come to make the path straight! He has come to the wilderness to rescue His people and lead them into His eternal Kingdom!
- Luke doesn't give us all the details other Gospel writers give. Matthew tells us that at first John objected to Jesus' request to be baptized ([Matt. 1:14](#)).
- Jesus baptized in the Jordan. Why? Jesus is perfect - nothing to repent of. Why does He need to be baptized?
 - **Validates the ministry of John.** Jesus approves of John's message.
 - **A preview of what's to come** – [Romans 6](#) – a picture of His death and resurrection. He has come to do a substitutionary work for us.
 - **To show us that He's one of us.** He identifies Himself with fallen humanity. He wasn't guilty, but He placed Himself among the guilty – ultimately, taking the guilt of all people. We needed a Savior who was one of us – who could live the life God wanted us to live on our behalf because of our inability to do so.

- **To show us that He's God** – heavens open up, Spirit descends on Christ and God speaks: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." At the baptism of Jesus – all three persons of the Trinity. A reminder of [Genesis 1](#) – the Father Speaks, the Spirit hovers the waters, [Gen. 1:26](#), "Let us make man..." [Col. 1:16](#), "For by him all things were created..." The Trinity together at the beginning, and now, a new beginning. The Trinity present at new beginning. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus making a new creation. If Jesus was just man He could not bear our sins because He would be a sinner. He could not defeat death. He could not rise from the dead. Once again in Luke's Gospel we see Jesus for who He is.
- Jesus = Son of God - significant - Israel thought of themselves as sons and daughters of God - but they were terrible sons and daughters of God. Jesus is the Son of God who God the Father is pleased with - who will do what Israel could not do.
- The point of John's ministry: Look at Jesus. Now, at the baptism of Jesus - the Father says - "Look at my Son! He's the One!" The significance of His glorious birth announced by angels. NOW - The significance of His Sonship announced by the Father.
- Good news for you: if you are baptized into Christ - united with Him - then what the Father says about the Son, He says about you: "You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased."
- God is pleased with you not based on what you have done but because of what the God-man has done for you. If you are a Christ follower, on your best days, God is pleased with you, and on your worst days, God is still pleased with you.
 - But, I feel so guilty. You're not!
 - But, I feel so unworthy. You are, but doesn't matter! He has made you worthy!
 - But, I feel so insignificant. You are made in His image, loved and saved by Him, and empowered by His Spirit.
- This passage is a call to start over - to take a hard, honest look at yourself and take a necessary look at Jesus.

- Not a follower of Jesus: start today with Jesus - believe that He died and rose again for you. Turn from your sin and turn to Him by faith.
- If you are a believer:
- **Make today and every day a day of reorientation.** You are secure in Christ, but you are easily swayed. What is your life oriented around right now? For you, believer, today is a day of repentance - turning back to the God who loves you. AND - it's constant. Constantly reorienting our lives around the things of God not something we do well but necessary.
 - What sinful attitudes need to change?
 - What sinful words have you said that you need to repent of?
 - Who have you hurt that you need to
- **Make today and every day a day of awareness.** Slow to change because we're quick to forget God's love for us and His amazing grace. Slow to change and quick to forget because we listen to the voice of others and the voice of this world far more easily than the voice of God. In 2023, what Christ-centered habits do you need to grow in that will help you stay aware of God's love? Discipleship group? Daily prayer? Reading?
- **Make today and every day a day of dependency.** Jesus has come to baptize you with His Spirit. You cannot change without the Spirit of God. Every day, ask the Spirit for help. Every day, lean not on your own strength but lean on His strength. The Spirit uses His church to help you grow in Him. Be humble enough this morning to admit that you need help.