

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

⁷So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him^a, “You brood of vipers^b, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come^c? ⁸“Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance^d, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to

^a 3:7 **he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him.** Baptism, like our church architecture, liturgies, teaching styles and communion, has its roots in the practices of the people of God before Christ. There is a good deal of biblical and historic support that the baptism of John and the baptism Jesus commanded were the same as the ceremonial washings the ancients practiced in obedience to biblical commands. In others words, baptism predates John and Jesus.

The *mikveh*, or gathering of waters, is the place for ritual bathing. Several *mikva'ot* dating back to the first century and earlier have been found peppering the landscape around Temple Mount. This demonstrates among other things that finding water to baptize 3000 people in Jerusalem was not an impossible undertaking. Baptism was the way Jews prepared for service or identified with a teacher. The Essenes, who lived in the area of the Jordan where John baptized, were known for their insistence on regular washings.

So John washed repentant disciples in a *mikveh* in the Jordan. The message of John was one that resonated with the people, so they flocked into the wilderness to become his disciples. ^b 3:7 **You brood of vipers.** This is not the kind of greeting you would normally expect a speaker to give to people who traveled many miles just to hear him talk. But John’s mission was not to get people to like him. This is the first of a number of John’s recorded metaphors (brood of vipers, axe at the root of the tree, clearing the threshing floor).

A “brood” is offspring or fruit. Jesus twice used the same phrase of the religious leaders (Matthew 12:34; 23:33). These people were not sons of Abraham but sons of snakes.

^c 3:7 **who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?** How could anyone answer that question and why did John ask it? Remember when God asked Adam, “Who told you that you were naked?”? The lesson is that if you know it exists you should run from it.

The theme of God’s wrath is seen throughout the Scriptures. Paul announced it when he preached on Mars Hill:

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. Acts 17:30-31

The word translated “wrath” here is used in the New Testament primarily of God’s anger toward sin and occasionally of man’s unrighteous anger.

But when he 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?’ (Matt. 3:7)

After looking around at them with **anger**, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (Mark 3:5)

So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the **wrath** to come?’ (Luke 3:7)

Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and **wrath** to this people (Luke 21:23)

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the **wrath** of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

The Gospel of Luke
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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For the **wrath** of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (Romans 1:18)

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of **wrath** and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (Romans 2:5)

but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **wrath** and indignation. (Romans 2:8)

But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts **wrath** is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) (Romans 3:5)

for the Law brings about **wrath**, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. (Romans 4:15)

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the **wrath** of God through Him. (Romans 5:9)

What if God, although willing to demonstrate His **wrath** and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of **wrath** prepared for destruction? (Romans 9:22)

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the **wrath** of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord. (Romans 12:19)

for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings **wrath** on the one who practices evil. (Romans 13:4)

Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of **wrath**, but also for conscience' sake. (Romans 13:5)

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of **wrath**, even as the rest. (Ephesians 2:3)

Let all bitterness and **wrath** and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Ephesians 4:31)

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the **wrath** of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:6)

For it is because of these things that the **wrath** of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, (Colossians 3:6)

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, **wrath**, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. (Colossians 3:8)

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the **wrath** to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But **wrath** has come upon them to the utmost. (1 Thessalonians 2:16)

For God has not destined us for **wrath**, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

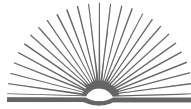
Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without **wrath** and dissension. (1 Timothy 2:8)

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you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham^a.⁹ “Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire^b.”

AS I SWORE IN MY **WRATH**, ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’ (Hebrews 3:11)

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘AS I SWORE IN MY **WRATH**, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Hebrews 4:3)

This you know, my beloved brethren But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to **anger**; (James 1:19)

for the **anger** of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (James 1:20)

and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the **wrath** of the Lamb’ (Revelation 6:16)

for the great day of their **wrath** has come, and who is able to stand? (Revelation 6:17)

And the nations were enraged, and Your **wrath** came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth. (Revelation 11:18)

he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His **anger**; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (Revelation 14:10)

The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce **wrath**. (Revelation 16:19)

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce **wrath** of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 19:15)

^d 3:8 **Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance.** John is contrasting the fruits of vipers with the fruits of repentance. The visible church has always and will always contain those who are outwardly religious but still unsaved. Jesus taught this in the parable of the wheat and tares. It is as difficult to distinguish genuine believers from counterfeit believers as it is to distinguish real wheat from counterfeit wheat. We are not always sharp enough to discern the difference until we see the fruit.

A verbal expression of repentance means nothing without the works that demonstrate it. This is really no different than the teaching of James on faith and works. Genuine faith and repentance do not originate with sinners but with God. That is why they produce a different lifestyle.

Salvation is not only about future salvation. A question we should answer is this: *Did Jesus’ death actually do anything?* If it did more than “put the ball in our court,” real change will happen when we turn to Him for salvation.

^a 3:8 **do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.** Of course Jesus was speaking with hyperbole to prove a point. He was arguing against the racial pride that made some Hebrews think they were right with God because they were physical descendants of Abraham. Jesus told a similar crowd to do the works of Abraham (John 8:39). The family resemblance is what tells the story.

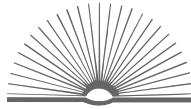
^b 3:9 **the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** John is warning of imminent judgment. There is an urgency for the sinner who claims one thing and lives another. This is a disturbing statement if your tree is not producing the fruit of repentance.

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¹⁰And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do^a?” ¹¹And he would answer and say to them^b, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise^c.” ¹²And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do^d?” ¹³And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to^e.” ¹⁴Some soldiers were questioning him^f, saying, “And what about us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages^g.”^h

^a 3:10 **the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?”** This is similar to the question the crowds later asked Peter at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:37). Some of the people honestly wanted to know what kind of changes would happen if they responded to John’s message.

^b 3:11 **And he would answer and say to them.** This awkward translation is important. This was not a one-time discussion with John. It happened all the time because sinners are the same wherever you go.

^c 3:11 **The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.** This is not an indictment on those who have two tunics but on those who hoard wealth. Repentant people share.

^d 3:12 **some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?”** There is enough written about Rome’s tax collectors to understand their reputation for theft.

^e 3:13 **Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.** He did not tell them to stop collecting taxes. He told them to stop being dishonest in their collection.

^f 3:14 **Some soldiers were questioning him.** John’s message was God’s message which means that it cut across every racial, political, social and economic boundaries. Even Roman soldiers needed to hear the call for all men everywhere to repent. Jesus died to redeem people from every tribe, tongue and nation.

^g 3:14 **Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.** This was the command for soldiers, who evidently had a reputation for extortion, inaccurate judgment and discontent. John did not tell them to quit their jobs. He called them to leave the lifestyle so many soldiers lived.

^h 3:7-14 You will disappoint and offend others—perhaps even hurt them. Most of us have been taught to properly apologize. John is calling for more than words of regret. Repentance is a lifestyle and it can be demonstrated. Some sinners argue that God sees the heart and then proceed to tell us how good their heart is. But your wife cannot see your heart. Your employer cannot see your heart. Your friends cannot see your heart. The church cannot see your heart. John is talking about demonstrating repentance on a human level. How do you prove you are “sorry enough to change”?

1. You fear the wrath which you deserve. It is not popular to give lost people a vision of eternal hell. There could be a number of reasons for that. Maybe one is that we have not given it much thought ourselves.
2. You confess that there is nothing good in you to avert that wrath. Having a good heritage or outwardly participating in church activity (even a sinner’s prayer) does not impress God.
3. You humble yourself before the one against whom you have sinned. This means that the person you sinned against—God or your friend—has the right to tell you what the fruit of repentance will be.
4. You change. You look at the sins to which you are prone and you turn the other way. If you are easily angered, you run toward self-restraint and contentment. If you tend to covet what others have, you run toward thankfulness for what God has given you. What this all comes down to is our inability to change apart from resting in grace. That is why repentance is a lifestyle for Christians.

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