

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

¹⁵Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John^a, as to whether he was the Christ^b, ¹⁶John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I^c, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals^d; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire^e. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in

^a 3:15 **while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John.** Luke is telling this past story in the present tense like we might say, “So I’m standing there and this guy walks up to me and says...” Here the people “are waiting” and “are reasoning.” This phrase “state of expectation” is always used in the New Testament of people waiting for something or someone (Luke 1:21; 7:19; 8:40; 12:46; Acts 3:5; 10:24; 27:33; 28:6). The people may have done the math from Daniel’s prophetic calendar and seen that something big was about to happen.

^b 3:15 **as to whether he was the Christ.** *Could this be Messiah?* they wondered. The apostle John’s gospel says that the religious leaders, presumably the Sanhedrin, sent messengers to John the Baptist to officially ask him if he was Messiah or another prophet God said would come. John the apostle records a little bit more of this exchange:

This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ. “They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.” Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them saying, “I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” John 1:19-27

^c 3:16 **As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I.** John had water at his disposal, but Jesus had more. This story is one of contrasts. Luke contrasts Herod and John, but John contrasts himself and Jesus.

^d 3:16 **I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals.** The leather strap of a sandal would have been untied by a servant washing feet. Humble John saw himself as less than worthy of such a task. John the apostle recorded these words of John the Baptist:

John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3:27-30

^e 3:16 **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** John and Jesus spoke complementary words about this baptism of the Holy Spirit. John distinguished both his baptism and his authority from that of Jesus. Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit would engulf those who identified with Messiah:

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Acts 1:4-5

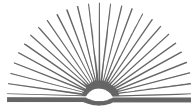
The baptism of the Holy Spirit is spoken of in Acts 1:5, 11:15-16; and 1 Corinthians 12:13. This baptism unites us to the Body of Christ, but it is invisible and many profess to follow Christ who do not have the Spirit.

The Gospel of Luke
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn^a; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire^b.”

¹⁸So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people^c. ¹⁹But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife^d, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done^e, ²⁰Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison^{f,g}.

That is why the baptism of fire is necessary. The baptism of fire could be a reference to the fire that appeared over the disciples on Pentecost (Acts 2:3) or to the trials that would come on those who followed Jesus. More likely, John is talking about the fire of judgment that will burn away the “chaff” in the visible church.

^a 3:17 **His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn.** A winnowing fork (or fan) is used to throw grain into the air to separate it from the chaff. John's metaphor illustrates the radical difference between the saved and the lost.

^b 3:17 **but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.** The adjective translated “unquenchable” is *asbestos*. Whatever we make of that word, there is something more than annihilation pictured here. John is calling to the people's minds the prophecy of Malachi about the distinction between the saved and the lost:

So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. Malachi 3:18-4:1

^c 3:18 **So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.** The gospel is good news. Some might wonder how it can be good news to warn people that they might suffer eternal punishment, but know one can believe the gospel without the knowledge of deserved sin and judgment.

^d 3:19 **when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife.** Herod Antipas had taken his young niece Herodias from his half-brother Philip, by whom Herodias had a daughter named Salome. While there may have been an attraction between the two, marrying a descendant of the Hasmonean kings would have been politically expedient for Antipas.

^e 3:19 **and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done.** John's mission to point people to Messiah was not about politics or he would have primarily gone after Herod's policies. Messiah came to rule men's hearts so John alerted them to their sin.

^f 3:20 **Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.** In addition to adultery, incest and a resume of other sins, Herod eventually ordered the death of an innocent man.

^g 3:15-20 What characterized John's ministry? John humbly pointed others to Jesus, confronted their sin and endured the fallout from telling the truth. Because the people of God are called to serve, we would do well to imitate the ministry of the man of whom Jesus said, “among those born of women there is no one greater than John” (Luke 7:28). Here is the way you serve like John did:

1. You continually rehearse the source of anything good in your life. It is not false humility to tell people that you are doing much better than you deserve to be doing. You deserve the full vent of God's wrath. Until you come to terms with that, the death of Jesus will mean little. Paul asked, “What do you have that you did not receive?” James said that everything good comes down from the Father of Lights.
2. You stay in your place. God hates self-promotion. It is good to step out and trust God to work great things through us but it is not good to think you deserve applause for it.

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3. You speak God's truth boldly. John would have been labeled "judgmental" in our culture, but he did not speak on his own authority. God's word pronounced a judgment on the immoral and John was only the messenger.
 4. You expect trouble. This does not mean you have to be negative and you should certainly not feel sorry for yourself when people oppose God's word. It means that you should not go into shock when people mock you or worse for standing for your convictions.

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