

# NOTES FROM STEVEN DRIVER'S SERMON –15th January 2023 am

## NEW SERIES FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL "God's love for the lowest"

### Part 5 "The reality of repentance".

#### Scripture references from the ESV

**Luke 3:1-20** In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

<sup>7</sup> He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics<sup>[b]</sup> is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

<sup>15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

<sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. <sup>19</sup> But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, <sup>20</sup> added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

The theme for this series in Luke is 'God's love for the lowest'. We come to the realisation of just how low and trapped in sin we are, and how the good news of Jesus brings restoration, so that we can live an eternal life, delighting in our God. We need to understand what repentance

really means in order to truly realise this delight in God for ourselves. To explain it as regret, remorse or just feeling a bit guilty is a very shallow interpretation. Repentance is something that should impact every area of our lives.

Luke tells us that repentance really matters. **“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for<sup>48</sup> the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46-47).** The good news of Jesus begins with the call to repent – it is woven into the very fabric of the Gospel and repentance defines the ministry of John the Baptist. If we follow Jesus, we need to know what that looks like in our lives. There are three things that define repentance and consequently should define our lives as Christians. We need to know these things if we are going to proclaim the gospel to the world around us.

1. **True repentance comes from the word of God (v1-3 above).** Luke set his account at a specific point in history, reminding us just how far Israel had gone away from God at this point. Israel was no longer a mighty nation, with rulers such as David and Solomon, but was ruled by the Romans, with puppet kings and governors. They were so far away from God, that they could not even recognise what a huge distance it was. God had not spoken to his people for over 460 years. God’s silence highlights the depravity and helplessness of his people.

Then the silence was broken as **‘the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness’**. John was

the first true prophet of God since Malachi. The word came to him in the wilderness around the Jordan region, the very place where Israel was brought into the Promised Land from the wilderness through the Jordan river. It was the place

where Israel could be God’s people and he would be their God. The word John had to proclaim was

**‘a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’**

God’s people had a new opportunity to go through the waters of Jordan, to turn away from their depravity and be open to God’s ways once more. It is a baptism for those who want to submit to God and change the direction of their life, anticipating God’s great solution for their biggest problem - sin. It is an anticipatory baptism, waiting for the arrival of Jesus, and preparing the way for him (v4 above)

At the final return of Jesus (v5-6 above), the promise is:

- He will fill the lowly and lift them out of the valley

- He will topple those who lord it over them, like mighty mountains,
- He will straighten the roads of justice and peace, made crooked by sinful humanity
- He will bring justice and peace to the world

Everyone, in those final days, shall see the salvation of God, but not everyone will receive salvation. That is kept for those who have repented and turned to Jesus. Repentance is more than just saying sorry and feeling bad. It is a heart change in response to the word of God.

From the word, we recognise:

- Our desperate need for our sin to be dealt with because it separates us from God
- That Jesus is the solution. God, in his love, provided himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin.
- That Jesus took the punishment we deserve by his death on the cross
- Jesus is now raised to life, sitting at the right hand of the Father as ruler and judge over all.

Repentance is turning to Jesus, submitting to his loving rule, so that when judgement and salvation come, he will call us his own. Without it, we would be lost to our sin and trapped in the valley where injustice and depravity reign.

### **Repentance restores us**

Ask yourself:

- Do I recognise my sin and do I understand that I am trapped by it?
- Do I listen to God's word, and am I captivated by it?
- Do I recognise my need to repent and follow Jesus?

As you look back over your week, do you thank God for Jesus, knowing that without him you are lost because of sin?

### **True repentance comes from the word of God.**

2. **True repentance is the marker of God's people (vv7-14 above).** Crowds of people come to John to be baptised, but for many of them, it's just a rite of passage, so that they have been seen to do the right thing. Nothing actually changes in their life. We see this today, where people want their baby christened, or an older child to be baptised because it is the done thing. The assumption is that it will guarantee entry into heaven.

However, John could see right through these motives (vv7-8 above). He told them clearly that submitting to baptism, or declaring that they were a descendant of Abraham, is not enough to spare them from judgement. It is helpful to be brought up in a household where you learn about the need to submit to God, but that will not save you.

The only way to be saved is to have God as ruler of your life, living a life of repentance and putting your trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

**True repentance is the marker of God's people and it marks you out by the fruit that it shows.** Repentance is practical – it is a distinct life change. Those who heard John asked **'What shall we do?'**

What does a repentant life look like?

**a) A repentant life is a compassionate life (v11 above).** The fruit of a life of repentance is care for others. John talks of sharing food and clothing as they follow God's way of compassion, as Jesus would demonstrate. If you live a repentant life, you help those in need. This is a call to consider what we do with what we have.

- If you have money, you are called not to hoard it but to share it with those in need
- If you have spare time, you can use it to help the needy. Pastoral care is the responsibility of everyone in the church, not just the Pastor and Elders.

**We are called to both show compassion and share Jesus, because Jesus is the ultimate expression of compassion.**

**b) A repentant life is an honest life (v13 above).** John does not tell the tax collectors to give up their work. He tells them to stay where God has placed them, but to work honestly. This applies whether we are at school, in work or retired.

**To act with honesty in all situations will mark us out as distinctive, living a repentant life as a follower of Jesus.**

**c) A repentant life is a contented life. (v14 above).** The soldiers lived on basic pay but they had power and used their authority to get extra money from people. They were not content with what they had. This is a challenge for us. We live in an affluent society that encourages us to always want more, whether it be a new phone, a better house or car. We want more money so that we can go out and do the things that we think will make us happy, but inevitably we never have enough.

**We are called to be content with what we have.**

We cannot live out a repentant life in our own strength and from our own abilities, hence:

**3. True repentance is only possible with Jesus.** The good news that John proclaimed naturally led people to speculate as to whether he was the Messiah, but John put them straight (v16 above). John always had Christ in mind in his message. He was pointing the way to Jesus.

He had a view of Jesus that meant that he knew his message of repentance was needed to get people ready, and to show that repentance was possible. John was aware that he was unworthy – so unworthy that he was not fit even to untie Jesus’ sandals, a job carried out by a slave and considered to be one of the worst jobs that had to be done. He knew he was not worthy of Jesus in any way.

This is the view that we need to have too. We often put Jesus in a box, trying to make him be what we want

him to be for us. We want him to build up the life we lead, and to be a Jesus we can control. John’s view is of a mighty Jesus, who can control creation with a word.

John knows, too that his baptism is only anticipatory of the real baptism:

**He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (v16b above)**

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is for those who want to truly repent and have their sins forgiven. John’s baptism calls people to something that it is impossible for them to maintain as the history of Israel clearly shows, but the true baptism of repentance that Jesus brings will transform people.

- The Spirit will mark God’s people with a seal, meaning they will be known by God
- Their hearts will be transformed by the Spirit, creating in them a desire to live a repentant life
- The spirit empowers God’s people to live that life. We are not left to do it in our own strength.
- The Spirit is at work within us, moulding us into the likeness of Christ, because, through the Spirit, Christ is in us.

Jesus’ baptism is a more powerful and more efficacious baptism, and it is not a water baptism. Water baptisms are only a picture of what has already happened to a believer. Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a water baptism is meaningless.

**The reality of repentance is that it is empowered by the Spirit and motivated by a better view of who Jesus is.**

This is good news for those who accept the message, but it is not good news for those who reject it, as we see with Herod (vv 19- 20 above). When Herod’s sin was exposed to him, he did not take it kindly. John’s repentant life and his proclamation of the good news, came at a cost. There is a cost for us too, as we live that life, but it will be worth it.

Herod, and all who do not follow Jesus, have had their treasure in full on earth. They get it now, but that will come to an end very soon. John issues two warnings (**vv9,17** above) to show that unrepentant people will be thrown into the fire:

- a) The axe has already cut through most of the tree. Only one last chop is needed to bring it down (**v9**). Do not delay in making a decision. There is no time to lose.
- b) The separating out and burning will be quick and efficient, just like a farmer separating wheat from chaff (**v17**)

This is the very real result of not repenting and submitting to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. However, it is good news, because today you can make a choice to be with Jesus, to be restored and have your heart transformed by him.

**The reality of repentance is life-changing, lifesaving and eternal.**

**All this is because of our loving but mighty ruling Jesus Christ who is worth delighting in and living for.**

Ask yourself:

- Have you truly repented?
- Are you living a repentant life?
- Have you truly submitted to Jesus' rule and reign?