

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 3: 7-14

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Luke Chapter 3 and today we will read verses 7 to 14.

After the last prophet, Malachi, spoke for God, God remained silent for more than 400 years. When the time was fulfilled, God raised up John the Baptist. He is the one prophesied in Isaiah—the voice crying in the wilderness. John understood that his ministry was to prepare the way for the Savior, becoming the forerunner of Christ. He came to prepare people's hearts. His was a ministry of repentance, to let people see the true condition within themselves. Then he proclaimed to the people: "Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth." (Isaiah 40:4) Because, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." (Luke 3:6)

We see that the characteristic of John's ministry was to call people to repentance. Now we continue to look at the way he carried out his ministry.

Verse 7: "Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'"

John's way of preaching was completely without any sugar coating; he pointed out the true condition of people's inner being very directly. Many devout Israelites had been hoping for the Messiah whom God promised—waiting and longing for more than 400 years. Now, in the wilderness, there was a man who spoke stern words according to God's heart. And even so, many people still went out into the wilderness to hear the message of John the Baptist. Yet John very straightforwardly rebuked them as a brood of vipers.

In Matthew's Gospel, it adds that those people were Pharisees and Sadducees. But in the Gospel of Luke, it does not add such a note. Instead, he spoke to all the people who came, saying that they were the brood of vipers. For Luke wanted to prove that Jesus is the perfect Man—He is the last Adam. The first Adam was tempted by the serpent in the Garden of Eden; after he sinned, sin entered the world through one man. Therefore, all of Adam and Eve's descendants are born with sin. And since sin came through the serpent, all these people could be said to be the offspring of the serpent. So John very directly declared that they were the brood of vipers.

But thanks be to the Lord—although they were the brood of vipers, there was still hope in their hearts; they longed for the coming Messiah. Therefore, when these people heard John preaching in the wilderness, they came to him, hoping that John would show them how to escape the wrath that is to come. John preached a message of repentance: if you do not repent today, you cannot escape God's wrath in the future. God, today, is exceedingly gracious and patient toward men; but one day, when the time is fulfilled, God will begin to judge. For God is a consuming fire, and His judgment is severe.

Verse 8a: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance."

Although John's message was a message of repentance, repentance begins first with my own heart recognizing that I am wrong. I am willing to change my way of thinking, willing to change my reasoning, willing to change my thoughts, and willing to acknowledge my mistakes. But John does not stop there. He says, "bear fruits worthy of repentance." It is not only that inwardly I know I am wrong, but also that outwardly, in my conduct, I am willing to produce some fruits—actions—that match the heart of repentance.

Of course, today we know that John's ministry was a ministry of repentance. Repentance alone is not enough. Repentance is a passive acknowledgement that I am wrong. If we desire to actively live a life that shows good works, considering that we as humans are fallen, it is fundamentally impossible for us. Therefore, John's ministry was only a passive ministry of repentance. He was introducing the ministry

of Jesus Christ, who gives life. Jesus Christ gives us a new life—the life of God, eternal life—and only this life can live out the kind of living that God’s people ought to have. John continues to warn them, saying...

Verse 8b: “and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. “

The Israelites began with Abraham. In Genesis chapter 12, God gave up the created race and chose Abraham from among all people to become His chosen lineage. He called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the good land and become the forefather of Israel. The Israelites took pride in Abraham, but John told them, “do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’” In other words: do not rely on your background, do not rely on your heritage, do not rely on your traditions. These do not help you, nor can they help you become a person after God’s own heart.

God never has grandchildren. God wants to raise up those after His own heart from among the people who know Him—His sons. In those days, John said to the crowds who came to hear his message: do not think that because Abraham is your father, you will not face judgment. Just like today, some Christians exalt their denominations— “I am Lutheran,” “I am Calvinist,” “I am Wesleyan,” or “I am Pentecostal, full of spiritual gifts.” If John the Baptist came today, his message might be: Luther was a servant greatly used by God, but exalting Luther will not help you; Calvin was a servant greatly used by God, but exalting Calvin will not help you; or any spiritual giant—though they were vessels used by the Lord—exalting them cannot help you. God can raise up children for them from stones. What matters is your own relationship with God. First, have you repented? Second, have you borne fruits worthy of repentance?

Verse 9: “And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

The time is already very near, and the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Do not deceive yourself. Do not think you can hide behind certain great spiritual men and be saved through them. There is only one simple source of salvation—Jesus Christ. Repent and believe in your heart, and bear good fruit in your daily living. If it is not so, “every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

One day, Christ will return and bring judgment. For unbelievers, that judgment is very simple—it depends on whether you believe and whether you have within you God’s eternal, uncreated life. For Christians, it is also simple: after receiving life and being baptized, is your living worthy of the grace you have received? The judgment of Christians concerns whether or not they are overcomers. The judgment of unbelievers is far more severe—it concerns whether you are saved at all, and whether your future will be in the New Jerusalem or in the lake of fire.

Verse 10: “So the people asked him, saying, ‘What shall we do then?’”

A good message is one that speaks to the depths of a person’s heart, making your heart feel as if it has been pierced. The next and very direct question that follows is: What then should we do?

Verse 11: “He answered and said to them, ‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.’”

John’s first answer was that you must have love toward others. What you have, you should share with those who do not have.

Verse 12-13: “Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what is appointed for you.’”

At that time, the tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes for the Roman government. They often oppressed their own people and extorted them by overcharging taxes. Therefore, these men were frequently despised and hated by the Jews. John’s answer was also very simple: Besides the appointed amount, do not collect more; do all things according to the principle of righteousness.

Verse 14: “Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, ‘And what shall we do?’ So he said to them, ‘Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.’”

At that time, the Roman government allowed the tetrarchs or those in the Jewish temple to possess a certain degree of weapons. These soldiers relied on the power they held, often oppressing ordinary civilians, seizing others’ property for themselves. John said to them, Do not use violence toward people, do not extort from anyone, and be content with your wages; do not be greedy—learn to be content.

So in response to their question, “What shall we do?” John spoke very simply: First, you must love others—what you have in abundance, share with others; second, whatever you do, follow the principle of fairness and righteousness; third, be content with what you possess.

John’s message is still very useful to us today. Although John’s message was not complete—he was only the forerunner paving the way for Jesus Christ— he faithfully fulfilled his ministry. He sternly pointed out the true condition deep within people’s hearts, and he also told people what they ought to do, even though at that time people had no ability to do it.

John's ministry was only a ministry of repentance; Jesus Christ came and brought down the ministry of life— giving people life, so that we may live out a life that matches God's holy nature. What John spoke about—bearing fruit—focused on external actions or behaviors; but for New Testament believers, after we are saved, Paul tells us that we must bear the fruit of the Spirit.

What is the fruit of the Spirit? In Galatians 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." This fruit is singular, therefore the fruit of the Spirit is one, and within that one fruit are included nine different virtues: Love, joy, peace speak of our relationship with God, beginning from love. Longsuffering, kindness, goodness describe outward qualities expressed toward others, in longsuffering, kindness, and goodness we obtain our hope. The third group: faithfulness, gentleness, self-control— Faithfulness speaks of our relationship with God, receiving and maintaining everything by faith. Gentleness is our attitude toward others, self-control is our attitude toward ourselves; and this group is headed by faith. These nine different virtues are actually included in love, hope, and faith; and these three correspond from afar to the three things John spoke about.

Today in the church, we very often love to preach messages of love, messages of acceptance. For fear of offending others, we try our best to create a pleasant atmosphere so that people will come into the church. This is certainly good, but if we only speak of love without the ministry of John that brings people to repentance, many who are moved by messages of love and come in may not have truly repented. This often causes the church to be filled with those who have not genuinely repented and believed. Although John's ministry is not complete, it is still absolutely necessary in today's church. When we preach the gospel, lead people to know and believe in the Lord, first, we must help them understand their own condition. A person must truly repent before he can receive the grace God has prepared for us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for giving us a heart of repentance, allowing us to clearly see our true condition. In every matter, help us understand our real situation and be willing to truly repent before You in that matter,

so that Your grace may overflow there and become the supply to our life. Bless my life today, in the precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen!