

The Rebirth of Hope #3

Preparing The Way For God's Presence

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I. Introductory Remarks.

As we are about to begin another new year, I would like to once again speak on the topic of "The Rebirth of Hope". The new year is a good time to refocus our thoughts and energies on realizing the hope that is within us. My prayer is that this coming year would be a rebirth of hope for each one of our lives in which we see the promises of God being fully realized in each of our hearts.

Ephesians 1:17-18 ...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...

The beginning of a new year is a time in which we can set and prepare our hearts for all that God wants to do in our lives during the coming year. In light of this I would like to speak to you from Luke Chapter three. In chapter three we have the ministry of John the Baptist, who encourages the nation of Israel to prepare their hearts for the coming of the Messiah. It is a message of preparation and repentance.

A Saviour had been born who represented the rebirth of hope to the nation of Israel and now their hearts must be prepared to receive their Messiah. John the Baptist was the messenger sent by God to prepare the hearts of the people for this wonderful rebirth of hope. But this hope would not be realized until they personalized it.

Luke 3:4-6 ...as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

As we have talked about throughout our study in the Gospel of John this past year, our hearts must be prepared in humility and contrition before we can be drawn unto Jesus by the Father. Here we find John the Baptist introducing this thought to the people of Israel.

II. The Message of John the Baptist.

Luke 3:3-4 *And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make His paths straight.*

The message of John the Baptist is just as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago. Before Christ can come and fill our lives with His fullness, there must first be a preparation in our hearts. Our hearts must be prepared for the way of the Lord. Therefore let's look to his message and see how God wants our hearts prepared for the rebirth of hope He desires to bring forth in each of our lives.

1. The Condition of the Heart.

John came out of the desert like an old time prophet, boldly announcing God's word and challenging his hearers to a complete change of heart. His words were straight forward.

- **He called them a brood of vipers - Vs. 7.**

Luke 3:7 *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?"*

Using shock treatment he got their attention by calling them a brood of vipers. This helped them to see the condition of their hearts and their need for repentance. Without Christ and what He can do for us we are all a brood of vipers walking in wickedness of our sins.

Notice he didn't use the feel good approach that so many are using in today's world of easy believeism. He made them see their wretchedness. It is important that we understand and see our wretchedness.

Isaiah 64:6 *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

- **He warned them not to trust in their ancestry - Vs. 8.**

Luke 3:8 *"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 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.*

What is John doing? He is tearing away at everything that was secure to them. "We're good Jews." "We obey the commandments." "We're God's chosen people".

He first attacks their sense of righteousness and now he attacks their sense of belonging and who they are in God's sight.

Many Jews expected that in the judgment God would deal very hard with Gentile sinners, but that the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, the friend of God, would be safe.

John denounces this attitude and removes the presumed security. He is stripping away their protective shields so that they can identify with their need for a savior. This allowed them to see the true condition of their hearts.

What kind of protective shields do we have around our hearts that need to be torn away to reveal our true condition before the Lord? Works – stay busy so you don't have time to listen to your heart, loyalty, basic commitment to church family etc., basically a good person.

- **He then evokes the fear of God into their lives.** - Vs. 9.

Luke 3:9 *"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."*

All of this together reveals the conditions of their hearts and produces a conviction of their genuine need before God.

Luke 3:10 *So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"*

This is what it takes to come to genuine repentance in our lives. The Father is looking for those to whom He can draw unto Jesus and this can only happen as a person's heart is properly prepared through brokenness.

2. The Need For Genuine Repentance.

John now hits hard on the theme of repentance that had already been introduced earlier in the passage, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance." This is a theme that Peter picked up on as well, when the Jews came to him on the Day of Pentecost (See Acts 2:36-38), and then again in Acts three.

Acts 3:19 *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*

John goes on to reveal that in every walk of life there are temptations that people give into of which must be repented of.

Vs. 11 - To those who have been blessed with abundance his message was to give. To continue to hoard when there are needs is sin that needs to be repented of.

Vss. 12-13 - To the tax collectors or those who in charge of collecting various fees, his message was to be honest.

Vs. 14 - To soldiers, policemen and those in places of authority, the message was don't intimidate, accuse falsely and be content.

3. John's message was simple.

There must be a change in your hearts -- God is about to act -- Judgment is coming -- And you must have a new life!

Luke 3:3 *And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins...*

- There must be forgiveness first - all have sinned and are vipers.
- There must be baptism next, as a public sign of a choice to run from sin.
- And then there must be a whole new lifestyle--a new life that is lived in harmony with God and with holiness, a new life that breaks completely with sin.

4. John's Other Message.

John had one other message. The Savior-Messiah was coming. The One who would make all this possible was approaching. He would be here soon. Those who had prepared the way would have their hope restored and fulfilled.

Luke 3:16 *John answered, saying to them all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*

And then Jesus did come. He stood in the waters and, by baptism, identified Himself with the people and with the stand for righteousness that this act symbolized.

Luke 3:21-22 *Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the*

Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

III. Concluding Remarks.

What are the special temptations in your sphere of life and influence that you must continually watch out for? God is calling you to repent and turn to Him so that the times of refreshing will come and you will experience a wonderful rebirth of hope that will enable you to begin this new year with a sense of fervency and zeal that will bring you into the fulfillment of all of your hopes and dreams for this coming year. Begin to prepare the way now for the presence of the Lord.