

Turn Around For A Change

Luke 3

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

Pastor Scott on Sunday took us through the very human and utterly historical drama of Luke 3, which marks the ministry of John the Baptist.

Luke was not one of Jesus' original disciples but a medical doctor who became a believer during one of several of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. But Luke also has been lauded as a top-notch historian by Bible scholars — indeed, he penned the vastly detailed Book of Acts. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that chapter 3 of Luke's Gospel account is full of historical detail covering what was happening in Israel and the surrounding world at the time John the Baptist's ministry commenced.

Verses 2 and 3 read that “the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

Pastor Scott told us that John was quite a different character, living life in a very different way. Indeed, the first chapter of Mark's Gospel says he “was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.”

Do you recall Pastor Scott's heartfelt suggestion at this point in his message? If not, it bears repeating: “Maybe you feel like you're in the wilderness in your own life. What does God have for me here?” The wilderness is not an uncommon place for Christians to find themselves. But as Pastor Scott reminded us, the safest place to be is in center of God's will, and if that means you're in a place of struggle or hardship, the Lord loves you and has a very good reason — that you may not know or be able to comprehend right now — for placing you in the wilderness.

Pastor Scott also made sure to draw a distinction between John's baptism and the baptisms we as believers in Jesus celebrate out of obedience and submission. Remember that amid the ministry of John's baptism, Jesus had not yet come upon the scene — and that was kind of the point, as John's baptism was about repentance in order to prepare the people flocking to the Jordan River for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. After Jesus' time on earth was over, having rose from the dead and ascended

into heaven, his disciples and evangelists began baptizing those who accepted Jesus into their hearts as a public sign of their new lives.

But John the Baptist's call for repentance still is crucial for us as believers because repentance is not only part of our initial salvation experience but also our day-to-day lives that follow!

While the idea of repentance might feel negative, even for believers, Pastor Scott emphasized that repentance is an utter POSITIVE for us. It's not a condemnation but an invitation, he said. An invitation to receive God's grace as we agree to change our minds about the direction in which we're going. Clearly such an act isn't just for those who initially become Christians — it's for us as believers TODAY, because even after accepting Christ, we all continue to sin in one way or another and need to continually get back on the right path.

Indeed, repentance for believers in Jesus is a LIFESTYLE rather than an every-now-and-then thing. And you know what that means, don't you? Such a lifestyle requires that we continually examine ourselves — and invite the Lord to shine a light upon our hearts — and continually repent when we get off the path he's set before us. It's also important to know that this repentance lifestyle is directly tied with our SANCTIFICATION on earth — and that our eternal salvation (JUSTIFICATION) already occurred when we accepted Jesus.

Pastor Scott also noted how Luke made sure to point out that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah foretold John the Baptist's ministry hundreds before: "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 shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Wasn't it cool how Pastor Scott explained what Isaiah's imagery meant? That when a king came to a town, folks did a lot of work to prepare. They filled potholes and straightened out roads. They cleaned up their surroundings. And all of that closely relates to the repentance in preparation for Jesus' ministry that John was calling for.

As we know, John's ministry was so powerful that a lot of people thought he might be the Messiah — but John put all that to rest, saying unequivocally that "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. 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." (vv. 16-17) It's a potent message, Pastor

Scott said, signaling that Jesus' baptism is completely different and deeper and eternal — indeed, that accepting Jesus' forgiveness of sins forever cleanses us.

Pastor Scott also noted that the imagery John the Baptist expressed still applies to us today, as the Lord wants us to rid our lives of the “chaff” — the useless things we concern ourselves with and chase after that, in the end, get in the way of our relationship with Christ. In that same vein, Pastor Scott also said that the people's question to John the Baptist — “what shall we do?” — is an important one we also should ask ourselves today.

If you're already a believer today, ask the Lord to show you what you need to repent of — then determine to make repentance a part of your daily life so you can stick close to God's will.

If you're not a Christian today, Jesus invites you to believe in him right here, right now — and then you'll embark upon the most amazing adventure you can imagine.

Don't hold off another second. He's waiting with open arms.